

Obituary

GRAHAM RITCHIE MA, MBA, PhD, FSA, FSAScot
1942–2005

James Neil Graham Ritchie entered the world, as he left it, in Edinburgh, and the city always held a very special place in both his intellectual and physical affection. His father, William, was a Classical scholar of commanding presence, well over six foot in height; his mother, Ada, a diminutive lady of great vitality, who taught Scottish country dancing. It was in this good Scots tilth that Graham's linguistic abilities and historical sensitivity took root. A home-bred familiarity with Caesar and Tacitus, combined with a deep love of Scotland, accompanied him to the University of Edinburgh in October 1960 to read English with 'Archaeology 1' as an outside subject, taught with characteristic idiosyncrasy, *brio* and challenge by Charles Thomas with contributions by Mary-Jane Mountain and Stuart Piggott. I can still sense the excitement that 'flared off' from that

course and Graham had clearly felt the same – for that was the end of his degree in English! In 1962 he opted for Interhonours Fine Art (David Talbot-Rice in the driving seat), History (with Geoffrey Barrow batting for medieval Scotland) and, of course, Archaeology, with Stuart Piggott leading from the front in every aspect of European and Near Eastern prehistory from Byblos to Bylany and from Varna to Vix. Exciting times – and then in the magical fourth year a whole intact period to carry out the work of a 'Dissertation'. Graham, with his excellent French, chose to examine 'Early Metallurgy in Languedoc' – a choice no doubt fuelled by familiarity with the enthusiast Piggott and the propagandist Caesar.

With the Edinburgh Honours degree came six weeks' fieldwork per year in order to obtain the crucial DP (*Duly Performed*) certificate. Graham worked with Charles Thomas at Gwithian during the last seasons there and on Ardwall Island off the coast of Galloway and at Wayland's Smithy, with Piggott and Atkinson, and in these locations he learnt the tools of his trade. Graduating with an excellent 2:1 degree, Graham proceeded to doctoral research on the whole range of 'Celtic' (how times have changed!) defensive armour in Iron Age Europe. Helmets, shields, and body armour became the preoccupation of his life for a period and it was at this time that I met him first. I remember with gratitude his welcome to the Departmental 'Research Room' and his interest in my own distantly related researches into Bronze Age archery. Indeed Graham was always esteemed for the encouragement, thoughtfulness and kindness he was willing to extend to colleagues and, particularly, to younger members of the profession. His PhD was ultimately published (in a tightly compressed form – an admirable example set, but not often followed) in the three times reprinted little *Shire* volume 'Celtic Warriors', dedicated to Stuart Piggott and undertaken with the 'textual' input of his father.

In 1965 Anna Bachelier arrived in Edinburgh from Cardiff, where she had been taught by Richard Atkinson and Leslie Alcock, in order to 'expand her horizons' and to undertake PhD research on the settlement enclosures of Iron Age Britain. Before long Graham and she became friends, and



Figure 1. Excavation in progress at Balbirnie stone circle, Fife, in 1970, showing the cairn, and feature excavation on the old ground surface. The closely observed excavator is Anna Ritchie. Crown Copyright: RCAHMS.



Figure 2. Graham Ritchie at work with RCAHMS.

to good effect, as they were married in 1968. Following the resignation of Dick Feachem, Graham joined the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and was immediately allocated to the ongoing survey of Argyll. It was always inherent in Graham's character to wish to describe and order things meticulously – his hobbies and other interests demonstrate this. And rightly so: the recording, description and classification of artefacts, whether movable or immovable, remains at the heart of archaeology, despite the impression readily gained from some current writers, teachers and, indeed, practitioners, that this is a 'plinth-job', 'done and dusted', ready now for the 'foundation layer' of the breeze blocks (or 'wheeze-blocks' as Graham's occasionally wicked sense of humour would have had it) of 'interpretation'.

Graham enhanced the objectives of scrupulous survey by initiating and driving through a series of small-scale excavations designed to explain the development of monuments that surface survey had found 'complex' or unclassifiable: Achnacreebeag and Dalineun Chambered Cairns; Balnabraid and Strontoillier Cairns, Balbirnie Stone Circle, Fife, Stenness in Orkney: vital links in chains of evidence to be developed subsequently by Gordon Barclay, Roger Mercer, Colin Renfrew, Colin Richards and others.

In 1988 the RCAHMS had been subject, with its counterparts in England and Wales, to a major

public review that pointed inexorably to a new, far more pragmatic programme of survey, and a more interactive relationship with the public. Graham was immediately placed at the head of a new, empirically, yet strategically directed survey team formed to address the predicament of vast tracts of afforestable land at that time under huge threat from perverse 'tax break' developments. Under his leadership this team achieved great things and, more importantly perhaps, in hindsight, introduced and sustained new methodological approaches. It was at this point in 1990 that I became Graham's colleague, as the new Secretary of the RCAHMS, and, immediately found in him a man responsive to the hour. Graham understood most things about archaeology but the one thing he could (and would) not understand was why other people should fall below his ideal of enthusiasm and exhilaration, generated by the sheer excitement of the subject that he felt himself. In 1991 I asked him to be Deputy Curator of the National Monuments Record of Scotland in order to develop that ideal. It was a model not at first universally accepted, but Graham worked to establish a seed bed which by 1997 had shown the first shoots of its subsequent development as the most pioneering, outward-looking and extensive Heritage Information Service in Europe. In 1995 Graham was appointed RCAHMS Head of Archaeology, a post from which he retired in 1998.

Graham moved into a retirement that only intensified his contribution. In 1999 he was elected President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, serving until 2002 in a consolidating presidency much needed at that time. Graham's lecturing – learned, clever, beautifully illustrated (and always spiced with his own puckish humour) – earned him widespread admiration and led to extensive demands from a range of audiences that, via a fleet of cruise ships, took him all over the Atlantic facade – both east and west. His summative and edited *Archaeology of Argyll*, which appeared in 1997, was part of his 'access it and enjoy it' ideal. Other volumes were co-authored with Anna, the first in 1972. Graham had other projects in view, such as an index of Celtic helmets and their sources, and the proper indexing of a collection of Flemish prints inherited from past colleagues and now (typical of Graham) placed in the public domain in the RCAHMS collection. And a delightful piece for Derek Simpson's *Festschrift, From Sickles to Circles* (2004), brought his total of published papers and books to just short of a century. He had embarked upon 'A Companion Guide to Scottish Archaeology'

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while enjoying a number of other interests, revelling in travel, photography, philately and devoting great care to his garden.

Graham died quite suddenly at home on 27th April 2005. His wife Anna, and their children,

Matthew (now working for CADW in Wales) and Elspeth, bear the sharp end of a loss that affects us all.

ROGER MERCER