



G. H. S. BUSHNELL

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GEOFFREY HEXT SUTHERLAND BUSHNELL

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GEOFFREY HEXT SUTHERLAND BUSHNELL was born on 31 May 1903, the son of the Revd. G. D. S. Bushnell and Mildred Mary (née Earle). He came of a line of Church of England parsons long settled in Berkshire. Throughout his life he combined the qualities, not invariably found together, of being English, Christian, and a gentleman. His sunny disposition and charity, his firm grasp on reality in assessing scholarship or judging persons, his ease in the despatch of business, and above all his consideration for others, even when disapproving of their views, sprang from an assured sense of values. Although careful to avoid overt condemnation—‘Oh, he’s one of that lot’ was about his verbal limit—he drew his own conclusions and knew precisely how much reliance to place on the views of those he was in a position to assess.

Like a true Englishman Bushnell, while thoroughly individual and on occasion even idiosyncratic, was not afraid to follow conventional courses. He attended a leading public school in his own county and remained a loyal Old Wellingtonian for the rest of his life. On going up to Downing College, Cambridge, he opted for the Natural Science Tripos with an emphasis on geology in order to equip himself for a career with an oil company. So far from being in revolt from his seniors he profited greatly from extracurricular association with two of them in particular. Ralph Griffin (1854–1941), who became Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1921 on retiring as Registrar of Designs and Trademarks, recruited Bushnell along with other undergraduates to help in salvaging and rearranging the remarkable collection of monumental brass-rubbings housed in the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. This experience deepened and enriched the interest in church furnishings and their architectural setting which he had acquired from his upbringing. The special interest in brasses and the closely associated study of heraldry thus acquired while officially engaged with the austerities of the Natural Science Tripos permanently enriched Bushnell’s life. When as it turned out he spent the second part of his professional life as Curator of the Museum housing the collection

it gave him special pleasure to safeguard this particular component of the collections in the face of intense competition for space. Brasses and heraldry were by no means the only interests acquired on the side during his undergraduate days. The same Museum, close by Geology as it happened, also housed an outstanding collection of New World antiquities, and its Curator Louis Clarke had an exceptional interest in this branch of archaeology. The mimicking and stories of Louis Clarke that formed part of Geoffrey Bushnell's permanent repertoire were only one sign of the impression he made on the young undergraduate. A more tangible result was that when Bushnell found himself posted to Ecuador as an oil geologist he took the chance of laying the foundations of what was to prove a second career by engaging in the local archaeology.

At a time when the academic study of archaeology was still in its infancy and archaeological posts were few and far between Bushnell was wisely advised to make his way as a geologist and reserve archaeology, for the time being at least, as a leisure occupation. As it turned out he was to spend the period 1926–38 in Ecuador working as an oil geologist in the service of Anglo-Ecuadorian Oilfields Ltd., the first ten years as a bachelor. Archaeology provided an ideal leisure outlet. The quality of the field-work and excavation which he lavished on the Santa Elena peninsula of the Guayas coast of southern Ecuador carried out during his period with the Oil Company was such that in due course it was to provide a bridge to a career in archaeology. But first came the war. As might be expected Bushnell responded in the most direct way by joining the army. From the Lincolnshire Regiment which he joined in 1940 he was soon transferred to the Royal Engineers in which he served from 1941 to 1946 and rose to the rank of major.

On demobilization Bushnell decided to take the opportunity of making a clean break by settling down in Cambridge—he had married Patricia Ruck while still serving in Ecuador—and working up his Santa Elena material in satisfaction of the requirements of the Ph.D. degree. His decision to embark on a new career and pursue archaeology for a living instead of merely as a hobby was matched as things turned out by the needs of the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Cambridge where his archaeological interests had been so strongly aroused and directed as an undergraduate by Ralph Griffin and Louis Clarke. Bushnell took up the post of Assistant Curator in 1947 and was the natural successor to Dr T. T.

Paterson as Curator when the latter resigned in the following year to take up an appointment in a different field away from Cambridge.

Bushnell had now found the ideal post for his talents and interests and the university was fortunate to enjoy his services as Curator from 1948 to his retirement in 1970. Bushnell discharged his functions without fuss and, let it be said, with the minimum of encouragement from the University. As Curator he pursued a conservative line. He fully accepted the need to shift the main emphasis from a museological to a more overtly academic role. Although the University Department of Archaeology and Anthropology had grown out of the Museum, teaching and research developed at such a rate and on such a scale that from the point of view of the University the Museum had come (and rightly come) to be regarded as subsidiary to academic purposes. This did not mean in Bushnell's view that the Museum should be dismantled or even trimmed to a minimal display attuned to the capacity of casual visitors. On the contrary the fact that it was to provide an ambience and a stimulus to students and academic staff concerned with the cultures of all periods and all peoples only fired the Curator's zeal in still further enriching and diversifying the collections, material embodiments after all of the peoples ancient and modern from all parts of the world with which teaching and research in Archaeology and Anthropology were and are directly concerned. Bushnell's genial personality and his ready understanding of the sometimes conflicting needs of teaching officers, research students, undergraduates, and not least the assistant staff who serviced the Museum ensured that the institution functioned with a minimum of friction at a time when its resources, particularly in respect of space, were becoming increasingly inadequate. He preferred to run his institution on informal lines allowing necessary compromises to be made without the ponderous apparatus of committees that so often institutionalize ill-will and invariably squander time properly funded for research and the transmission of knowledge.

Another reason for Bushnell's success as Curator was the range and diversity of his interests. Although he had specialist knowledge of certain parts of the collections, notably those relating to New World archaeology and the collection of English monumental brass-rubbings on which he had worked as an undergraduate, he shared Louis Clarke's ability to range widely

over the contents of the museum while greatly excelling him in disciplined scholarship. Although concentrating on his official charge Bushnell found a public outlet for his antiquarian leanings in his work for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society and on an ampler stage in taking part in the meetings and councils of the Society of Antiquaries of London of which he had become a Fellow in 1934 and served as a Vice-President between 1961 and 1965. In a more specialized field his interest in the liturgy of the Church of England as well as his feeling for monuments and his wide ecclesiological knowledge made him an invaluable, conscientious, and eagerly sought after member of public bodies concerned with church buildings. He served from 1955 on the Cathedrals Advisory Committee and from 1964 as a Trustee of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust. At a personal level his devotion to the Church of England was expressed in his service as churchwarden and server at St. Benet's and it not infrequently happened that he appeared in the Museum wearing his cassock.

As a scholar Bushnell's main contributions lay in the field of New World archaeology. His first important publication and the only substantial one dealing with his own primary research described his work in Ecuador, *The Archaeology of the Santa Elena Peninsula in South-west Ecuador* issued as Occasional Paper No. 1 of the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Cambridge in 1951. Evidence of the quality of this work is that its findings were taken over by Gordon Willey in his standard work *An Introduction to American Archaeology. Volume II. South America* (pp. 268 f.) published twenty years later. After taking on the Museum Bushnell was unable to resume field-work. His main service to learning was to assimilate and mediate advances in New World archaeology as a whole both to the learned and the lay public on either side of the Atlantic. Given that he was always able to calibrate the reports published by others in terms both of his own experience in the field and of his intimate knowledge of the material, some of it housed in his own museum, it was to some extent an advantage that he was able to assess new findings with more detachment than most of those engaged on narrower fronts. His own personality and the fact that he was not a direct competitor made it comparatively simple to maintain close personal contact with workers in the field through correspondence, through attending Congresses of Americanists, and above all by receiving a stream of distinguished Americanists at Cambridge. This, together with his facility in Spanish, his

zeal in mastering the learned literature, and his basic fairness and clarity of mind meant that he was able to gain an increasingly central place in this whole field of study. His views, whether expressed orally, in correspondence or in printed reviews, carried a weight belied by his personal modesty.

Although he gave much time to assimilating and critically evaluating the specialist literature, Bushnell felt an evident need to share his findings. Although he distinguished clearly in his own mind between learned publication and popular expositions at varying levels, his instinct, whatever audience he had in mind, was to express his meaning as clearly as he knew in language of current use. He was a consistent enemy of jargon, pretension, and fashionable approaches that he judged ephemeral. His manner as an expositor was only another sign of his respect for others. When he published he did so to share, not to corral information for specialists within the barrier of esoteric language. He was equally ready to pen learned reviews or perform on television but it seems likely that he achieved his widest influence at the intermediate level of straightforward exposition. His volume on *Peru* published in 1956 and in a new and revised edition in 1963 as the first and among the very best of the successful *Ancient Peoples & Places* series edited by Glyn Daniel for Thames & Hudson still retains its value as an easily assimilated but critical and judicious account of one of the most interesting territories of the ancient world. Bushnell found time to publish two further volumes, which while making no pretensions to furthering knowledge managed nevertheless to further appreciation of Amerindian artefacts largely through well-chosen illustrations, namely his *Ancient American Pottery*, written in partnership with Adrian Digby, and *The First Americans. The Pre-Columbian Civilizations*, which appeared respectively from Faber & Faber in 1955 and from Thames & Hudson in 1968.

Although personally modest and self-effacing, Geoffrey Bushnell deeply appreciated the recognition that came his way. In Cambridge he particularly valued his election to a fellowship at Corpus Christi College in 1963 and in that capacity took particular pride in showing off the silver which the college had been ingenious enough to preserve through the Civil War and the Commonwealth. His work in devising lectures on New World Archaeology in the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology and the increasingly wide recognition of his scholarship in this field accorded on either side of the Atlantic

led in 1966 to his appointment as *ad hominem* Reader in New World Archaeology at Cambridge. His election in 1970, the year of his retirement, to a Fellowship of the British Academy set a seal on the formal recognition of his scholarly work. What he valued as much as anything was the personal esteem in which he was held by those on either side of the Atlantic who worked in the field of New World archaeology. Apart from his correspondence he received a steady stream of American colleagues and it was a particular joy to him when the doyen of Maya scholars, J. E. S. (later Sir Eric) Thompson, retired to England after long service with the Carnegie Institution to pursue his scholarly work near Cambridge. Bushnell's standing in the Americas was reflected among other ways in his invitation to attend the opening in 1964 of the fabulous National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. His nomination as Comendador al Mérito of Ecuador in 1971 was an exceptional recognition for a foreign scholar.

If Bushnell had one cause for regret it was that, despite representations, the University failed to make permanent provision for the maintenance of teaching and research in New World Archaeology by establishing a lectureship in this field. The wealth of its collections, the fact that Cambridge was the alma mater of the great pioneer of Maya archaeology, A. P. Maudslay, casts of whose moulds of stelae dominated the main hall of Museum, Louis Clarke's active interest, and above all the foundation of basic teaching laid by Bushnell himself were all secondary to the central fact that archaeology as practised in the New World had developed concepts, and a body of theory and practice, directly relevant to the future of archaeology in general. Bushnell found some consolation in the fact that British concern is still active. The British Museum continues to maintain its interest through the Department of Ethnography. It was a particular satisfaction to see his former pupil Dr Warwick Bray pursuing research in the field, notably in Ecuador, as well as supervising research and providing teaching as Reader in New World Archaeology in London University's Institute of Archaeology. Another to come under his influence at Cambridge was Norman Hammond who from his teaching post in the United States has carried forward the work of Maudslay and Thompson in the Maya field, notably in his excavations at Labaantún, Belize.

Although he had to take insulin for his diabetes and pay close attention to his diet, Bushnell lived a full social life, shared

in the good fellowship of Corpus high table, and enjoyed dining out. He was a congenial member of the Cocked Hat Club of the Society of Antiquaries and a faithful attender of the Academy's annual dinner. He did not smoke, but enjoyed his snuff and made effective play with his snuff-box on public occasions. Geoffrey Bushnell owed many years of happy companionship to his wife, who watched over him devotedly during his months of decline. They had four sons, all of whom were present at the funeral service held at St. Benet's.

GRAHAME CLARK