

# Brian Benjamin Shefton

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1985

by

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BRIAN SHEFTON

Brian Shefton was a highly regarded classical archaeologist whose wide-ranging contributions to his discipline were internationally recognised. He spent most of his academic career at Newcastle University in the north-east of England, but was a truly international scholar as well as an inveterate traveller, devoting a great deal of his time to research trips and attendance at academic conferences. He retained a remarkable commitment to his academic work throughout his life, continuing to be an active and engaged scholar long after his retirement in 1984.

Brian Benjamin Shefton was born Bruno Benjamin Scheftelowitz on 11 August 1919 in Cologne, Germany. He was the younger son of Isidor Isaac Sheftelowitz, Professor of Indo-Iranian Philology at the University of Cologne and a rabbi, and his wife, Friedericke (Frieda), née Kohn. His education began at the Apostelgymnasium, a school linked to the Roman Catholic Apostelkirche in Cologne. However, in the summer of 1933 the Scheftelowitz family were compelled to move to Britain to escape Nazi oppression. The family first settled in Ramsgate where Isidor Scheftelowitz secured a teaching position at Montefiore College, while Bruno became a pupil at St Lawrence College. In the summer of 1934, they moved to Oxford where Isidor had been invited to lecture on Zoroastrianism to the Faculty Board of Oriental Languages and Literature. Much of that period involved lengthy commuting between Ramsgate and Oxford, which precipitated Isidor Sheftelowitz's kidney condition. After Isidor's death from kidney failure in December 1934 the family remained in Oxford and Bruno, who had been enrolled at Magdalen College School, went on to read classics at Oriel College in 1938.

During his time at Oxford, Bruno became drawn towards the study of Greek archaeology and attended classes given by Paul Jacobsthal and (Sir) John Beazley, both of whom were to become major influences on his subsequent academic work. He recalled that he was inspired to study Greek archaeology by an encounter in the British Museum with a red-figure volute krater by the Altamura painter that depicted a Gigantomachy.<sup>1</sup> This led him to seek out Beazley and ask to be admitted to his special course on Greek archaeology, despite missing the official date for enrolment. Beazley was persuaded to admit him, obtaining permission for Bruno to take his special subject, and at the same time took him on as a personal pupil, initiating a relationship that was to continue until Beazley's death.

Bruno's studies were interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1939, he helped to pack up the Greek vases in the Ashmolean Museum, and in the summer of 1940 he was interned, alongside many other refugees from Europe, on the Isle of Man.<sup>2</sup> His internment, a period about which he never talked with his immediate

<sup>1</sup> Vicky Donaldson interview with Brian Shefton for her PhD research.

<sup>2</sup> There has been some doubt about Shefton's internment, but his daughter Penny has drawn attention to a number of family papers that refer to this.

family, was relatively short-lived and after his release he enlisted in the British army in October 1940. He carried out his training at a Pioneer Corps centre in Ilfracombe, Devon, alongside other German and Austrian nationals. After training, he initially served in 249 (Alien) Company Pioneer Corps and was involved in camp construction in Scotland. In November 1944, he transferred to the Royal Army Education Corps. At some point in his military career, he decided to anglicise his name to Brian Benjamin Shefton. Once the war was over, he resumed his studies at Oxford and graduated with a First Class degree in 1947.

After Oxford, Shefton was elected to a School Studentship by the British School at Athens in 1947. Subsequently, he held the Derby Scholarship from Oxford, and was awarded a Bishop Fraser Scholarship from Oriel College. These awards allowed him to spend three years in Greece and Turkey. This extended period immersed in the archaeology of the region led to a number of publications and had a deep impact on much of his ensuing work. He became involved in various different projects, including the British School's excavations at Old Smyrna where he assisted Richard V. Nicholls (a future Keeper of the Fitzwilliam Museum), in particular with understanding the site's fortifications. He also became involved in the excavations of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in the Athenian Agora, working on some of the pottery finds. He helped identify, for example, some Clazomenian pottery and added some fragments to a krater attributed to the Kleophrades painter. He also produced a detailed study of a louterion from the Agora later published in *Hesperia*.<sup>3</sup> A further area of interest was the pottery from Perachora, excavated by Humfry Payne for the British School at Athens before the war. He wrote a chapter on the imported pottery found at Perachora in one of the publications produced for the site.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he carried out research on the dedication of Kallimachos from the Epigraphic Museum in Athens, which led to an article and short postscript in the *Annual of the British School at Athens*.<sup>5</sup>

During his time at the British School, Shefton travelled extensively in Greece despite the dangers of making journeys in a country that was in the midst of a civil war. He was allegedly the first student after the Second World War to walk from Olympia to the temple of Apollo at Bassai. He remembered frequently hearing the

<sup>3</sup> B. B. Shefton, 'Herakles and Theseus on a red-figured louterion', *Hesperia*, 31 (1962), 330–68.

<sup>4</sup> See B. B. Shefton, 'Other non-Corinthian vases', in A. A. A. Blakeway, T. J. Dunbabin and H. G. G. Payne (eds.), *Perachora: the Sanctuaries of Hera Akraia and Limenia: Excavations of the British School of Archaeology at Athens, 1930–1933. 2: Pottery, Ivories, Scarabs and other Objects from the Votive Deposit of Hera Limenia* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 368–88.

<sup>5</sup> B. B. Shefton, 'The dedication of Callimachus (IG 12 609)', *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 45 (1950), 140–64; B. B. Shefton, 'The dedication of Callimachus. A postscript', *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 47 (1952), 278.

sounds of gunfire in the mountains during this expedition, as well as being fearful of the fierce wild dogs that inhabited this part of Greece, although neither was enough to put him off his goal of visiting the temple. On another occasion, he managed to persuade the Greek navy to give him a lift so that he could visit the monasteries on Mount Athos. This enthusiasm for travel, as well as a determination to overcome any difficulties to get to where he wanted to go, was to remain a prominent feature of his life right up until his final years.

On his return to Britain in 1950, Shefton was appointed as a lecturer in classics at the University College of the South West of England in Exeter. Here he worked on Greek material in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter and on other material in the University's collection. He also published an important attribution study of three Laconian pot-painters.<sup>6</sup>

In 1955, Shefton moved to Newcastle upon Tyne to take up a post as a lecturer in ancient history at King's College, which was to become the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1963. Here he was encouraged by the vice-chancellor, Charles Bosanquet, to create a small collection of classical antiquities to support the teaching of Greek archaeology.<sup>7</sup> Bosanquet, son of the British archaeologist Robert Carr Bosanquet and born in Athens during his father's directorship of the British School, wanted to build up Greek archaeology in Newcastle; Roman archaeology was already well established. Starting from a small initial grant of £25, Shefton developed the collection and, through a combination of support from Newcastle University, the National Art Collections Fund and bequests and gifts from external benefactors, on his retirement in 1984 it consisted of nearly one thousand objects. He was tireless in his work to set up and ensure a secure future for the collection and rightly considered it one of his finest achievements. Indeed, he often stressed the fact that the collection was as much a research resource as one for teaching, and he was frequently drawn to objects that he thought had research potential. He became a familiar figure in the salerooms of London as he sought out pieces, operating across the worlds of academia and the art market in ways that subsequent university archaeologists would not be able to do. Auction houses, such as Sotheby's, as well as private collectors, including George Ortiz, came to rely on his opinion about many objects that came onto the market. At times his enthusiasm got the better of him, such as the occasion, at a Sotheby's auction, when he had to be told that he was bidding against himself. It was not only through the salerooms that he managed to add to the collection. He also relied on the support

<sup>6</sup>B. B. Shefton, 'Three Laconian vase-painters', *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 49 (1954), 299–310.

<sup>7</sup>J. Boardman, A. Parkin and S. Waite (eds.), *On the Fascination of Objects: Greek and Etruscan Art in the Shefton Collection* (Oxford and Philadelphia, PA, 2016) provides an overview of the collection, as well as some more detailed studies of specific objects.

of a number of benefactors who gave or loaned material. The most significant of these was Lionel Jacobson, a prominent Newcastle businessman, who was the chairman of the clothing firm Burton. He also received backing from many other individuals and funding bodies such as the London Hellenic Society and Tyne Tees Television. Perhaps the most remarkable acquisition came from the collection of Dr Leo Mildenberg in Switzerland.<sup>8</sup> Shefton had noticed the similarity between half a terracotta lion's head in Newcastle and a similar half from the Mildenberg collection. They were both halves of a terracotta water spout from the site of San Biagio close to the Greek colony of Metapontum in southern Italy. The fact that these were two halves of the same object was confirmed in 1981 when a cast of the break in the Mildenberg fragment was taken and matched with the Newcastle half. Mildenberg generously bequeathed his half of the lion's head to Newcastle and it arrived, amidst much publicity, in 2004.

Over the years, the collection moved around the university campus. An initial display of Greek material was put on in the University's Hatton Gallery, where Shefton, in association with Ralph Holland, an art history lecturer at Newcastle and collector in his own right, organised an exhibition in 1956. By the 1960s, the collection had relocated to a more permanent home, alongside the Classics Department, in the Percy Building, where it was called the Greek Museum. In the 1990s, when Classics moved into the Armstrong Building, the collection travelled with it. A museum space was created in an area that had formerly been chemistry laboratories, and in 1994 this was named the Shefton Museum of Greek Art and Archaeology to honour Shefton's outstanding contribution to classical archaeology at Newcastle University. More recently, the collection was transferred to the Great North Museum: Hancock as part of a major development which saw Newcastle University concentrate its archaeology collections into a refurbished Hancock Museum. The Hancock was traditionally a natural history museum, but a £26 million redevelopment saw natural science collections displayed alongside archaeology and ethnography. In 2010, to mark Shefton's ninetieth year, the Greek Gallery in the Great North Museum: Hancock was renamed the Shefton Gallery of Greek and Etruscan Archaeology.

Alongside the collection of artefacts, Shefton was keen to develop Newcastle University's library into a first-class research centre for Greek and Etruscan archaeology. He applied himself to acquiring books for the University library with the same energy and enthusiasm that he devoted to the acquisition of archaeological material, often bringing volumes back from his travels. The University library was persuaded to support his book buying and eventually a distinct Shefton section was created to

<sup>8</sup> B. B. Shefton, 'A Greek lionhead in Newcastle and Zurich', *Antiquity*, 59 (1985), 42–4.



house the results. He conceived of the library as a vital adjunct to the Greek and Etruscan archaeology collection, enhancing its usefulness as a research resource.

During his time at Newcastle University, Shefton's energies were mainly taken up with developing, consolidating and promoting the archaeology collection, as well as with teaching. He surveyed a selection of what in his view were some of the most interesting pieces from the collection in *Archaeological Reports*, a survey that provides an insight into the thinking behind certain acquisitions.<sup>9</sup> In the 1970s, he also set up a team of job creation placements and volunteers to assist with the conservation, display and documentation of the collection. A product of this period was the publication in 1978 of a booklet entitled *Greek Arms and Armour*, which highlighted one particular strength of the collection.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, despite all this collection-based activity, Shefton still managed to be actively engaged with research.

Over the course of his time in Newcastle, the University recognised Shefton's important contribution to his discipline, promoting him to Senior Lecturer in 1960, Reader in 1974 and ultimately to a personal Chair in Greek Archaeology in 1979. After a long and distinguished career at Newcastle, Shefton's retirement from his teaching post in 1984 opened up a whole new chapter in his life. He saw retirement as an opportunity to turn his attention wholeheartedly towards research and would publish a number of scholarly articles, many of which highlighted his interest in the distribution of Greek and Etruscan material culture in Iron Age Europe.<sup>11</sup> These articles made use of his remarkable knowledge of museum collections throughout the world, bringing together diverse strands of evidence to inform his arguments. At the same time, he maintained a strong commitment to attending conferences and delivering lectures in the UK and abroad. He continued to be an effective lecturer into his nineties. Tony Spawforth recalled a lecture delivered at the British Museum when Shefton was ninety, where he stood throughout, despite his hip problems, and spoke without notes.<sup>12</sup> His depth of knowledge and interest for his subject were never more apparent than when he spoke in front of an audience.

Shefton's academic career was distinguished by his almost limitless curiosity and broad range of interests. One of his major undertakings was the translation and, to a large extent, rewriting of Arias and Hirmer's *A History of Greek Vase Painting*.<sup>13</sup> Another notable achievement was the publication of a monograph on Rhodian

<sup>9</sup>B. B. Shefton, 'The Greek Museum, University of Newcastle upon Tyne', *Archaeological Reports*, 16 (1969–1970), 52–62.

<sup>10</sup>P. Foster, *Greek Arms and Armour* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1978).

<sup>11</sup>A select bibliography of his publications up to 2004 can be found in K. Lomas (ed.), *Greek Identity in the Western Mediterranean: Papers in Honour of Brian Shefton* (Leiden, 2004), pp. xx–xxii.

<sup>12</sup>A. J. S. Spawforth, 'Introduction', in Boardman, Parkin and Waite, *On the Fascination of Objects*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>P. E. Arias, M. Hirmer and B. B. Shefton, *A History of Greek Vase Painting* (London, 1962).

Bronze oinochoai.<sup>14</sup> These two publications highlight a shift that took place in his research focus as he moved from mainly producing studies of painted pottery towards an interest in the metalwork of the Greeks and Etruscans. His early career was largely devoted to Greek vase studies, where his approach was often informed by his studies with Beazley, but he soon moved beyond this, in particular with research on bronze vessels and the archaeology and art of the western Mediterranean. Here his debt to Paul Jacobsthal is more apparent, as they shared an interest in Greek and Etruscan imports into Iron Age Europe.

His vase studies, exemplified by the English edition of *A History of Greek Vase Painting*, covered the traditional fields of iconography but were by no means confined to the usual Attic repertory. He worked on Laconian vase-painters, on shapes, and characteristically on vases which, from their form and decoration, held information about the non-Greek too. This concern for the interaction of the Greek and the non-Greek encompassed the influence of Persian metal shapes, as well as the range of influence of Greek shapes and patterns (the ‘Castulo cups’, Etruscans and ‘eye-cups’) and techniques. Sculpture was by no means ignored, with his studies both technical and iconographic.

Evidence for the traffic in pottery led Shefton into studies of trade in general over the whole Mediterranean, especially to the west and in Europe, to the north of the Alps, but also to the east in the Achaemenid Persian period, notably on homeland Phoenician sites. Increasingly, he became as much at home with the non-Greek as the Greek. His study of bronze vessels took him into research on Central European products and the Celts. All this represented a wider range of interests than was common in a classical archaeologist of the post-war years, and much remains relevant to modern studies by scholars who share his diverse interests but, possibly, not his depth of understanding of a wide variety of subjects. His publications are notable for their documentation, footnotes often outweighing text.

Shefton’s academic achievements were marked by a number of honours and important fellowships. He was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1980 and Fellow of the British Academy in 1985. The British Academy awarded him their Kenyon Medal in 1999, in a ceremony at Newcastle University that took place during a conference in his honour.<sup>15</sup> He held various significant fellowships, including Leverhulme, Getty at Malibu, Balsdon at the British School at Rome and British Academy with the Israel Academy, while the early 1980s saw him spend a fruitful

<sup>14</sup> B. B. Shefton, *Die ‘Rhodischen’ Bronzekannen*. Marburger Studien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, vol. 2 (Mainz, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> Lomas, *Greek Identity in the Western Mediterranean*.



period in Vienna. He was especially gratified by the honorary doctorate awarded by his father's former university, Cologne, in 1989.

Despite his continual travelling from 1955 onwards, Shefton was firmly based in Newcastle. In 1960 he married Jutta Ebel, a Swedish national, and they set up home in the Jesmond area of the city, where they brought up their daughter Penny, who was born in 1963. Jutta Shefton, a translator, played an important part in Shefton's career, supporting his academic work, particularly through her knowledge of several European languages and her skill as a typist. She was instrumental, for example, in the publication of *A History of Greek Vase Painting*, typing up the final manuscript on the kitchen table of the family home. She also provided Shefton with a stable home environment to which he could return after his numerous trips abroad. Shefton was a well-known figure in Jesmond and a keen member of the residents' association. At the same time, he took an active part in the life of Newcastle's small Jewish community.

Shefton's was a larger-than-life personality and most people who met him would not forget the encounter. His curiosity was insatiable. In a library, he would discover what each student was working on, discuss it with them, giving and receiving in equal measure. His camera was a major instrument of recording and research, used freely in libraries, museums, irrespective of any regulations, and even during lectures, where he could often be seen photographing the screen to capture the speaker's slides. The end result was a massive archive of negatives, which sat alongside his equally impressive personal library and paper archive. In fact, his home became so full of books and papers that he had to build an extension to accommodate the ever-increasing mass of material.

Brian Shefton was a truly international scholar, building up wide-ranging networks of contacts throughout Europe, North America and beyond. These networks informed a great deal of his research, which relied on an intimate knowledge of archaeology collections and their curators in many countries. His ability as a linguist meant he could work effectively in several European languages and this was another means by which he created fruitful associations with international colleagues. He also made frequent use of the telephone to keep in touch with his numerous contacts throughout the world and was an enthusiastic convert to email and other digital technologies when they came along.<sup>16</sup> He could also be very persuasive and often managed to get people to go out of their way to help him. For instance, in the last years of his life

<sup>16</sup> Shefton's daughter Penny recalled numerous late-night phone conversations with various luminaries of classical archaeology, including Elke Böhr, Konrad Schauenberg, Jean-Jacques Maffre and Dietrich von Bothmer. In fact, she felt he spent most of his research life living abroad whether he was physically in the UK or not.

when he found walking difficult, he convinced an Athenian bus driver to divert significantly from his bus route to drop him at the main entrance of his hotel.

He was one of the first Western scholars to visit Albania, during the dictatorship of the early 1970s, and had numerous other adventures, including a brush with the authorities in Marshal Tito's Yugoslavia where he spent some time locked in the back of a police van. This commitment to overseas travel is illustrated by his attendance at a conference in Basel on Greek pottery north of Etruria in October 2011, just three months before he died.<sup>17</sup> By this time, his mobility was severely impaired and he was reliant on two walking sticks to get about. Nevertheless, he travelled on his own from Newcastle to Edinburgh, where he caught a flight to Cologne. After spending some time in Cologne he then took a train to Basel to attend the conference. This was typical of Shefton, who refused to let any physical problems derail his plans and who would resolutely refuse any help when it was offered. He frequently pointed out that if he started to accept help he would become reliant on it, and this would curtail his ability to travel and participate in the academic world that meant so much to him.

Sir John Burn, Professor of Clinical Genetics at Newcastle University, provided one of the best estimations of Shefton's career when investing him with an honorary fellowship in 2005: 'When it comes to the stuff of which a university is made, there's nothing like a steady, predictable member of staff and Brian Shefton was and is nothing like a steady, predictable member of staff. Rather he is the stuff of what great academic institutions are built: imaginative, bold and irrepressible.'<sup>18</sup>

### *Acknowledgements*

This memoir of Brian Shefton has greatly benefited from several accounts of his life produced by other scholars, not least David Gill's entry 'Shefton, Brian Benjamin (1919–2012)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/104851>, accessed 14 March 2018) and his chapter 'Brian Shefton: classical archaeologist' in S. Crawford, K. Ulmshneider and J. Elsner (eds.), *Ark of Civilization: Refugee Scholars and Oxford University 1930–1945* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 151–60. The introduction to K. Lomas (ed.), *Greek Identity in the Western Mediterranean: Papers in Honour of Brian Shefton* (Leiden, 2004) has provided further useful content. The memoir has also drawn on personal reminiscences of Brian Shefton from colleagues and friends, particularly Tony Spawforth and Sally Waite, as well as his daughter Penny.

<sup>17</sup>S. Bonomi and M. A. Guggisberg (eds.), *Griechische Keramik nördlich von Etrurien: Mediterrane Importe und archäologischer Kontext* (Wiesbaden, 2015). This volume of conference proceedings was dedicated to Shefton in recognition of his valuable contribution to the study of Greek and Etruscan imports into northern Europe.

<sup>18</sup>Sir John Burn, quoted in *The Times*, 1 March 2012, 47.

*Note on the authors:* Sir John Boardman is Lincoln Professor Emeritus of Classical Archaeology and Art, University of Oxford; he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1969. Andrew Parkin is Keeper of Archaeology at the Great North Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne.

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