



SIR MORTIMER WHEELER, C.H., C.I.E., M.C., F.R.S.

## ROBERT ERIC MORTIMER WHEELER

1890–1976

**I**N a simple direct sense, archaeology is a science that must be lived, must be “seasoned with humanity”. Dead archaeology is the driest dust that blows.’ These words express one of the mainsprings of Mortimer Wheeler’s tireless life. He passionately believed that any young recruit joining the archaeological colours should do so partly for the sake of adventure, and he thought little of those tarnished by the driest dust that blows. This was one of the reasons why his own great contributions to knowledge were made almost entirely through excavations, through excavations carefully selected in order to provide knowledge where it was most needed. Through enterprise and adventure and uniting yourself imaginatively with the peoples whose relics you were discovering, archaeology could be lived.

Imagination was another of the mainsprings of Wheeler’s being. ‘Reasoned imagination’; ‘an informed and informing imagination’; ‘a controlled imagination’—the phrases occur again and again, as often as he proclaimed his ideals of what man in general and archaeologists in particular should be. There is no doubt that the ability to visualize the likely intentions or compulsions of the people whose remains he was exploring accounted for his brilliance as a tactician in knowing just where to dig and as a strategist in choosing his sites. But far more than that, was not controlled imagination at the root of the greatest of his gifts, his power of forward planning against all eventualities, the power that brought him his successes not only in archaeology but in his remarkable military career and in his truly extraordinary exercises in galvanizing feeble institutions and creating new ones?

Indeed, imaginative forward planning (wars apart) controlled his whole career. There are few men whose steps through public life, whose choice of jobs and undertakings, owed so little to chance. This is true in spite of the fact that for the greater part of his eighty-five-year journey through this world he was driven by a demonic energy—likened by Sir Max Mallowan in his Memorial address to the ‘Seven Devils’.

To these underlying forces in Mortimer Wheeler’s life, one more has to be added: his power of command. It is right to put it

last, for while adventurousness, imagination, and energy were probably innate and certainly showed themselves early, command developed more slowly and as the product of the deeper qualities. Yet without it, without the sometimes ruthless ability (to quote Sir Max again) by which he 'enlisted the help of lesser mortals and compelled them to bow in his path', he could not have filled the role of Hero that so many of us have assigned to him.

Robert Eric Mortimer Wheeler was born in Glasgow in the year 1890. At that time his father, Mortimer Wheeler, was working for Blackie's *Encyclopaedia*, but before long he moved as a journalist to Edinburgh where his elder daughter Amy was born, and then on to join the staff of the *Yorkshire Daily Observer*. The family was now completed by the arrival of a second daughter, Betty. Mortimer Wheeler was the son of a Bristol tea merchant, a very good-looking man said to have had a diffident manner. He had been an outstanding classical student at Edinburgh and had passed through a phase of Baptist piety to militant free-thinking. For a time he moved in an intellectual circle, including, it should be noticed, Carlow Martin, later director of the Royal Scottish Museum. He himself was quite without ambition, finding happiness in an enjoyment of all the arts and, in his younger days at least, of nature and country pastimes.

Wheeler's mother came from a partly academic background, being the niece and ward of Thomas Spencer Baynes, a Shakespearean scholar at St. Andrews and an occasional welcome visitor in the Wheeler household. She was herself well educated, and taught her children at home until they were seven or eight years old.

All memories, including his own, suggest that Mortimer Wheeler's close relationship with his father was of lasting importance. As soon as the romantically pretty little boy could contrive to keep up with him, his father took him for walks on the surrounding moors that are the boon of all Bradfordians. They studied wild life, but more significantly were always on the look out for antiquities: cup-marked stones, Anglo-Saxon crosses, flints, potsherds, tumuli—anything that came their way. As Wheeler was to recall, 'in these impressionable years the insidious poisons of archaeology were already entering my system'.

His father also taught the young Wheeler to shoot and fish in a purely non-county style that included occasional excursions with a poacher and the enforcement of a rule that the boy must eat everything he killed. Enjoyment in using his skills with rod

and gun remained with Wheeler all his life and through all his travels. It brought almost the only sporting relaxation to a man who despised and avoided all organized games.

These out-of-door pleasures learnt from his father were of more than superficial importance in shaping the man. Of more importance still must have been mental companionship with a parent who always spoke and read to him as though he were adult and shared with him his love of the classics, English literature, and, perhaps above all and unexpectedly, his dreams of adventure and the deeds of men of action. There can be little doubt that growing up with these dreams and imaginary heroes helped to inspire Wheeler as a man of action. Immediately, however, living so much in the adult world of his father's mind made him scornful of his very ordinary schoolboy contemporaries. His sister Amy remembers how difficult it always was to induce him to go to parties; he contrived to avoid playing games, and, with the exception of one master, thought of Bradford Grammar School with little admiration, declaring that 'my school was of no great moment to me'. This unintended paternal influence may also have endured, encouraging that impatience sometimes amounting to contempt towards lesser mortals, for which he has often been criticized.

One other activity of this period deserves mention: Wheeler's eager endeavour to train himself as a painter. He spent many half holidays in the Art Room at school, and at home, as Amy recalls, tyrannized over the family through his heedless concentration on poster painting. The two of them united, however, in producing an art magazine, writing all the articles themselves under a variety of names. Although a later oil portrait of Amy shows considerably more ability than has usually been allowed him, this ambition of Wheeler's was probably the only one in his lifetime which he pursued but lacked the talent to sustain. The technical skills that he mastered, such as lettering and elementary drawing, were to be useful to him and a pleasure to the rest of us, in the plans and sections that were to illustrate his archaeological publications.

The formative Bradford years ended when Mortimer Wheeler senior was invited by the *Yorkshire Observer* to take charge of their London office. His son was then fourteen years old, had reached the sixth form, and was confidently expected to win an Oxford scholarship. J. E. Barton, later to be headmaster of Bristol Grammar School, and the only master to have had a considerable influence on the boy, protested vigorously at the

London move, declaring 'You are not taking him away from Bradford, you are taking him away from Oxford'. Neither father nor son was daunted: for both of them the lure of London was too strong. Almost certainly their decision was the right one for Wheeler's future, yet in later years he could feel regret at not having gone to Oxford and was happy to send his own son there.

He never returned to school, his father allowing him something like five shillings a week to gain a freelance education from the great city, its museums, galleries, and buildings, its alleys and thoroughfares. It was part of the bargain, however, that he should also work for his matriculation to the University of London, an examination which he passed when he was sixteen, following it with a classical scholarship that took him to University College in the year 1907.

In those days Gower Street was very much a well-knit college in the academic sense and had distinguished men in most of its faculties. Wheeler was fated to be taught Latin by A. E. Housman—who professed his subject in a 'take it or leave it' style. He often preferred to leave it, for he still cherished his hope of becoming an artist, and had made a private arrangement to study at the Slade. There he greatly admired Tonks, who taught drawing, and made friends with his own contemporary, Paul Nash. Then, quite suddenly, Wheeler took one of those sharp decisions that were to be repeated throughout his career. Realizing that he had no genius and could only be either a penniless rebel modernist or a merely competent professional, he cast out hope and left the Slade on the instant.

He had been earning his keep by coaching and a little journalism, and on taking his first degree was evidently recognized to be a student as promising as he was impoverished, for the Provost offered him a job as his secretary. This enabled Wheeler to work for an M.A. which he gained in 1912. It must have been during these last two years at University College that he turned towards archaeology, for in 1913 he applied for and won an archaeological studentship just established in memory of Wollaston Franks, offering research in Roman-Rhenish pottery. It is well known that as he walked away, jubilant but wondering how to live on £50 a year, Sir Arthur Evans, one of the selection committee, ran after him and said he would like to double the endowment. Such were the advantages of an academe of personal relationships and private fortunes.

Wheeler made his Rhineland study tour, then took a miserably unworthy appointment with the English Royal

Commission of Historical Monuments, at that date almost entirely concerned with buildings. Except that it led him to take a course in architectural drawing, while the pittance he received enabled him to marry the enchanting and gifted Tessa Verney, this was an interlude that might well be forgotten. It was not to last long.

On the outbreak of war, Wheeler immediately volunteered and was commissioned into the Royal Artillery. Although early promoted Captain, his ardent desire to reach the front was frustrated until 1917. In that year he had contrived to use some of his men to excavate the Balkerne Gate of Roman Colchester. Then 'Passchendaele, Italy, the last advance on the Western Front . . . followed in eventful succession'. During that last advance he carried out the crazy exploit of capturing German guns from the castle mound of de Warlencourt that won him the M.C. It is a proof of the present difficulty for even a natural hero to play the heroic role that Wheeler records how, as he led his men into no-man's-land, he had 'a slightly strained feeling about the ribs and a growing sense of the silliness of the whole affair'. It seems clear, however, that the First World War brought out and hardened his power of command. It also gave him the lifelong conviction that he need fear no further experience, for at Passchendaele he had known the worst.

Demobilized in 1919, he had a small son (Michael born in 1915, now a Q.C.) and wife to support. He was obliged to return briefly to the Royal Commission, although this meant that pay and status plummeted from those attained as a Major. He saw this as a year of decision. He was determined to remain in archaeology and had a characteristically clear idea of the part he should play in it. The degree of ignorance of Roman and prehistoric Britain at that time is now often exaggerated, but it is true that excavation was insufficient, without strategic direction, poor in method and techniques. Wheeler had long recognized the greatness of General Pitt-Rivers as an excavator, and saw himself as donning the mantle that had hung neglected on a hook, and returning to the high standards of Cranborne Chase before leading a new advance. In this he was driven on by a deep awareness of himself as an isolated survivor, conscious, as he said, 'of the responsibility which a deadly war had bequeathed to me'. Those other survivors, his friends Cyril Fox and O. G. S. Crawford, were a little ahead of him in their own fields, but he felt himself alone as a leader in purposeful excavation.

He was soon to seize the right opportunity to put this sense of

mission into practice on a sufficiently large scale. He won an advertised double post as Keeper of Archaeology in the National Museum of Wales and Lecturer in Archaeology in the University College at Cardiff—making the move in 1920. Here at once was a challenge of the kind he was to meet and overcome several times during his life. There was an enfeebled administration to be energized and an integrated archaeological strategy to be planned and executed.

In 1920 the National Museum in the grandiose new civic centre being built in Cardiff was little more than a façade, construction having come to a standstill in the face of a large debt. As a departmental keeper (his collections were stored) Wheeler could not do much to end this impasse, so set himself instead to get the *idea* of a National Museum recognized throughout the sharply divided principality. He spent much time 'in the hills' (too much, his critics said) lecturing, helping local museums in a practical way. He led them at last into a Welsh Federation of Museums under National Museum chairmanship and with a training school in Cardiff. He also used excavations as a part of this integrating policy and clinched it with his first substantial book, *Prehistoric and Roman Wales*, published in 1925. He refers to it as 'a scrap book' scribbled at odd moments, and it is true that the writing shows only a few touches of his style. Yet it was at once a useful textbook for students and 'served its frankly political purpose, as a primary medium of integration'.

Meanwhile he was not neglecting his lectureship or his avowed aim of winning archaeology a place in the curriculum of the University of Wales. Here again he directed combined operations, for he could train and use his students on his excavations.

In 1924 he was made Director of a museum still sunk in lethargy and debt. Immediately the power was switched on. The grant was increased by a private visit to the Treasury, an inefficient alderman sacked from the treasurership and replaced by a friendly shipping magnate who arrived with a cheque to pay off the entire debt; an appeal was launched, building restarted, collections installed, and a royal opening staged. It can be assumed that the 'private visit to the Treasury' was the very first of many such successful forays—needing no introduction to Fellows of the British Academy.

The main excavations that with Tessa's help Wheeler carried out during his already crowded life at Cardiff were selected to straddle the country and to construct a unified picture of the Roman occupation of Wales. Of the three—the forts of Segon-

tium and Brecon Gaer, and the great legionary fortress of Caerleon—the first is the most significant from a biographical point of view. Here was Wheeler's first chance to test his ability in historical interpretation while at the same time building excavation techniques on solid Pitt-Rivers foundations. He followed his master also in prompt publication—a duty he was always to observe. *Segontium and the Roman Occupation* contains the earliest, still tentative, sections and plans in which Wheeler improved upon the General. At the Gaer the director had the bonus of the 'fishful' Usk; Caerleon (begun only in 1926) was notable as the site of his discovery of the uses of publicity. The *Daily Mail* paid for the digging of the fine amphitheatre, spurred on, he believed, by the spectacularly successful press sponsorship of the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb through which 'archaeology had, almost overnight, acquired a new market value'.

In many ways, then, the achievement of the years in Wales was the Mark I prototype of the greater achievements that lay ahead. One other must be mentioned. In *Still Digging* Wheeler writes movingly of how his Welsh excavations heightened his sense of personal responsibility, as a 'survivor' to gather the young generation about him to share not only skills, but also 'controlled enthusiasm' and a sense of direction. He certainly started well for on these digs he had Ian Richmond, Christopher Hawkes, and Nowell Myres as undergraduates; also Victor Nash-Williams and Aileen Fox.

By 1926 Rik and Tessa Wheeler (the Wheelers as they were now beginning to be called) could feel that their Welsh archaeological mission had been fulfilled in the museum, in the University, and in the field. He feared that if he remained in Cardiff much longer he would inevitably become rooted in the provinces. Already in that year he had been making precise plans for a university Institute of Archaeology where the young could be trained to play an efficient part in the more professional and academically respected archaeology to which he was dedicated. It seems that from boyhood Wheeler had identified himself with London as the heart of power in the land, the place where the High Command could be reached, strategies agreed, and money found. He was therefore convinced that in London his Institute must be, and when through Charles Peers he was offered the directorship of the London Museum he accepted, although the museum was moribund and the pay miserable.

In the same year he was invited to occupy the first chair of Prehistoric Archaeology in the country, the Abercromby Professorship in Edinburgh. That he turned it down was very largely because it was not in London, but perhaps also because Wheeler knew that the life of pure and peaceful scholarship was not for him. These events of 1926 seem to justify a few words about the 'devouringly ambitious temperament' recently attributed to him. At 35 he had turned down the certainties of two positions of considerable prestige in favour of a 'mission' which promised hard work, struggles, and a private life very near to poverty. It seems to the writer that Wheeler was immensely ambitious to incarnate the children of his imagination and therefore to win the power needed to overcome all obstacles and opposition. That purely personal ambition was never paramount is suggested by his attitude to money. The man who raised so much for activities and institutions of all kinds, and who loved panache, style, good food, drink, and other indulgences, never earned a large salary or gave more time to his finances than dashing off a book or two and performing on T.V. He lived against a simple background to the end.

If, as he wrote, Mortimer Wheeler arrived in London his pocket bulging with the blueprints for his Institute, it was to take a long time to build from them. He began to prepare the ground in the learned world and particularly in the University of London (through his fellowship at University College) where hitherto archaeology had hardly been recognized. Meanwhile the London Museum, then in Lancaster House, had to serve as the base for his campaign—and indeed gradually became the Institute in embryo.

The immediate task was to set the London Museum itself in order. That curious establishment with its direct royal patronage had to be cleared of junk, provided with a more adequate staff, and refurbished to make it a worthy shop window to display the best styles in modern archaeology. To attract a wider public a private endowment was found for concerts on the highest level, the music ranging from piano recitals by Harriet Cohen and Schnabel to full-dress performances by the London Symphony Orchestra under Thomas Beecham. Public lectures were delivered and school classes extended. All this was given solidity by the publication of a series of excellent guides, which Wheeler was able later to approve for their 'satisfactory intermingling of *vulgarisation* and scholarship'. The first, *London and the Vikings*, appeared as early

as 1927, to be followed by *London in the Roman Times* and *London and the Saxons*. Writing them after a long day, Wheeler could seldom leave the museum before midnight. The useful *Medieval Catalogue*, prepared by his young assistant Ward-Perkins, appeared only in 1940, by which time they were together in the Artillery. *London and the Saxons* led to a vigorous dispute with Nowell Myres concerning the extent of Roman survivals in the city.

Behind all museum work the drive towards an academic Institute was maintained. More students and research workers were attracted to Lancaster House, an Esher studentship was endowed there and Wheeler began to lecture, without fee, to student audiences. An important advance towards the goal was made in 1934 when the University of London gave Wheeler an official, though part-time, appointment as lecturer in British Archaeology and established a post-graduate archaeological diploma.

Side by side with this advance at the centre, the Wheelers were organizing ambitious excavations, as in Wales, where students could be given practical training and, some of them very real responsibilities. The first was not of Wheeler's own selection but the response to an appeal by the Bathurst family to the Society of Antiquaries for an excavator to explore a Roman site in their park at Lydney on the fringes of the Forest of Dean. Here digging was to discover an underlying late Iron Age settlement, the only known Roman iron mine, a temple, bath-house and other buildings associated with a cult of the Celtic god, Nodens, which had lingered on from the fourth into the fifth century. It was Wheeler himself in an idle moment who found the famous Lydney hoard of minute, depreciated fifth-century coins, which, as 'King Arthur's small change' added to the already considerable publicity. It might be said that it was symbolic of the Wheeler partnership that while Rik found the hoard it was Tessa who made the meticulous report on its 1646 coins.

Lydney occupied the seasons of 1928-9. It was to be followed by one of the most extensive and complex excavations of Wheeler's career: that of the Roman Verulamium and the adjacent Belgic settlements and defences. His involvement with Roman London had already convinced him that more knowledge of Roman towns was badly needed and he had recommended Verulamium as the best place to provide it. When, in 1931, the Corporation of St. Albans sought advice on the

excavation of that part of the ancient site that they had just acquired for recreation grounds, the undertaking chimed in perfectly with his strategy. Work began that same year and was to last for four seasons.

In his book on methods, *Archaeology from the Earth*, Wheeler chose this excavation as his best example of tactical planning, of the logical advance from the known into the unknown. The walled Roman *municipium* of Verulamium was conspicuous where it lay beside the Ver. It was known that the pre-Roman Belgic capital of Cunobelin's father was in the area and it could be assumed that here, too, was the *oppidum* of his great precursor, Cassivellaunus, stormed by Caesar in 54 B.C. It had also been assumed that the Belgic capital would lie below the *municipium*. In a campaign of five stages the Wheelers, with their gifted team of assistants, satisfied themselves (though later exploration has proved them to have made some errors) that while the earliest Roman town sacked by Boudicca partly underlay its successor, the post-Caesarean Belgic settlement was behind an embankment above the valley to the west. Also the Cassivellaunian presence could almost certainly be identified with a powerful *oppidum* at Wheathampstead to the north-east adjoining a mighty defensive dyke between Ver and Lea. Meanwhile Tessa directed the uncovering of the Roman city itself.

As his strategy unfolded in this way, Wheeler found himself exploring 'not a site, but a landscape' and had the enjoyment of dashing from digging to digging on horseback—or in the old Lancia in which he also sometimes drove straight from 'the trenches' to address students at Lancaster House.

Taken as a whole, these excavations did much to add substance to the shadowy history of the century before the Roman conquest of Britain, including the characteristics of Belgic tribal centres, and even more in establishing such archaeological foundations as dated pottery types, brooches, and the like. In this they converged with the information being obtained at much the same time at Cunobelin's capital of Camulodunum.

Wheeler's classical education had led him to concentrate his first decade of purposeful excavation on Roman Britain: now Verulamium had led back into the protohistory of late pre-conquest times, and therefore to sites devoid of formal architecture. The great sections cut through the massive Belgic defences were as well suited to his flair for reading history from stratification as they were to the fine draughtsmanship that

visualized his findings. This new encounter with prehistory was not disagreeable to him. Indeed, he was later to make the surprising declaration that in 1934

For the moment I suffered from a satiety of Roman things. The mechanical, predictable quality of Roman craftsmanship, the advertised *humanitas* of Roman civilization, which lay always so near to brutality and corruption, fatigued and disgusted me . . .'

So in that year the Wheelers gladly took an opportunity to transfer themselves and their now numerous and experienced staff to the noblest, most spectacular of all our Celtic Iron Age monuments: Maiden Castle in Dorset. Here for the first and only time in his life Wheeler had unexpectedly to deal with important remains from the depths of our prehistoric past—a neolithic enclosure and long-barrow—but the purpose of this remarkable excavation was, of course, to discover the building sequence and history of the famous hillfort itself.

With his usual precision and dispatch, Wheeler followed the development through all its phases from the small fort of the third century B.C. to the last, Belgic-dominated, stronghold that fell to the Romans. With its strong military interest, it was a story that might have been composed for him. The unique tactical ingenuity of the entrance works, the evidence supplied by huge stores of slingstones that the introduction of this weapon accounted for the elaboration of the ramparts, and, far above all, the grim spectacle of the 'war cemetery' appealed to his best interpretative powers.

The cemetery uncovered in the eastern entrance with its battle-hacked skeletons, one with a Roman arrow embedded in the spine, could be identified beyond reasonable doubt with the aftermath of the capture of Maiden Castle by the Second Legion under Vespasian. Wheeler was to reconstruct the events of that day with a brilliance and force that have made them a part of our history. The method of excavation of this east entrance is also of interest. Wheeler had started to explore it with what he called 'substantive' trenching which proved so cumbersome that he switched to the 'grid' system that is still associated with his name, and which he was to employ on a large scale in India. If a choice had to be made of a single site as best representing Mortimer Wheeler as excavator-interpreter, it should probably be the east entrance of Maiden Castle.

Verulamium, so accessible from London, had attracted visitors in large enough numbers to contribute substantially to

excavation funds. The romantic fame and dramatic excavation results of Maiden Castle lured them in swarms, and the conduct of parties round the dig laid quite a heavy duty upon assistants and students. One day a week was appointed as a press day. Wheeler was always popular with reporters, for he understood their needs, and, as he freely admitted, enjoyed dealing with them. Inevitably there was criticism from more staid, traditional, or simply envious archaeologists of his use of publicity and what could be seen as the resulting ballyhoo. If there were minor dangers in working under public relation floodlights, it should be remembered that not only was the cash raised from newspapers and visitors much needed in days before the tax-payer met the bills, but Wheeler had always believed that it was part of his mission to rouse the interest of the general public in archaeology and the ancient history it revealed. It is probably true that his success in doing so during the inter-war years, and later through television, did much to prepare opinion for the present generous endowment of archaeology from the public purse.

The Wheelers' two great excavations of the 1930s had a dynamic effect on the now fast-growing science of British archaeology. The writer well remembers the enthusiasm and criticism they generated among its followers everywhere. Moreover, a remarkable group of experienced excavators and specialists was created, many of whom were to become leaders in their turn. That this band was coherent and usually happy, both in the field and back in Lancaster House, in spite of the emotions sometimes aroused by the extra-curricular activities of the Director, was largely due to Tessa's presiding influence. It was therefore a tragedy of many dimensions when in 1936 she died from a totally unexpected medical mishap. Wheeler, who was always to carry the inner scars of this loss, declared that the Maiden Castle dig must be worthily completed as a memorial to her. The last two seasons were carried out in this spirit, with Mrs. Alwyn Cotton gallantly substituting as second in command.

From quite early days of the excavations it was appreciated that the history of the Dorset site could not be fully understood unless it were related to that of the adjacent regions of Gaul—known to have had intercourse with Britain before, during, and after Caesar's campaigns. Preliminary surveys of earthworks in Normandy and Brittany during 1935–6 were succeeded in 1938–9 by further fieldwork and selective excavation by Wheeler and members of his band. This programme, precisely

purposeful and well organized as ever, did in fact throw much light into the then dim, uncultivated fields of French archaeology. In particular confirmation was found for cultural connections between Brittany and the Celtic tribesmen of the many-ramparted, sling-using Maiden Castle. Further north, distinctive types of Belgic fortifications were identified for the first time. The results of this bold foray were not fully published until 1957, but they proved of real value when at last French archaeology woke from its slumbers. This was Wheeler's only mature contribution to European studies: in general his interest passed the Continent by, and he probably maintained fewer contacts with European scholars than was usual among his more academic colleagues. His failure to do so may have contributed in a small way to the criticisms from younger men that were the inevitable accompaniment to his rising fame and success during the later thirties.

The Verulamium and Maiden Castle excavations were handsomely published as Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries. *Verulamium, a Belgic and Two Roman Cities*, under the joint authorship of the Wheelers, appeared in 1936, *Maiden Castle, Dorset* not until 1943, when Wheeler, dedicating it to Tessa, apologized for its incompleteness, explaining that it had been prepared 'amidst the watches of the War' and was no more 'than the salvage of the report that should have been'.

Both led to criticism not only of the publications themselves, but of some aspects of the excavation policy they represented. Reduced to essentials, the burden of complaint was twofold. First it was said that Wheeler's highly selective method of digging might miss important features and certainly could not provide the social and economic information that depended upon the total excavation of a site. When Wheeler began his digging the creation of a sound historical framework was the first essential, and it is true that this goal remained paramount for him. The younger generation meanwhile had lent ear to ideas of the economic determinants of history and total excavation was the password of progress. It was to reach its apotheosis a few years later at Little Woodbury where a farmstead was completely excavated by the German archaeologist, Gerhard Bersu. No disciple of General Pitt-Rivers could be unaware of the advantages of uncovering the whole of vestiges of this kind, but it is hard to see how it could have been done at the two enormous sites in question with the limited means of the thirties.

The second line of attack was against the Reports themselves. The main charges were that in his desire for a publication of form and style, Wheeler had provided too little evidence for his interpretations, had given a wrong impression of finality, and even that he had intentionally concealed unanswered questions. There was a further complaint that if excavations were to be published in this elegant way Reports would become literary works rather than serious scientific data banks.

Unquestionably these criticisms marked the beginning of the swing towards a sociological, common-man approach that has dominated the archaeology of the past decade or so. Looking back after suffering the gaseous and insignificant effusions that this has produced at its worst, the virtues of Wheeler's works shine again. The swing also accounts for the great paradox fully recognized by Wheeler: his mission had been to produce the trained personnel for a scientific archaeology, yet for much of his life he found himself passionately defending the humanist values of history.

Science was still very much to the fore when at last the Wheelers' arduous struggle for their Institute was won. During the years of digging and of the development of research and teaching at Lancaster House, efforts were made to raise funds through public appeal. A good beginning had been made when Sir Flinders Petrie handed over a gift he had received for the housing of his important Palestinian collections—on condition that this became the responsibility of the projected Institute. The further money needed came in slowly and there was a long hunt for suitable premises—that is to say a large building at low rent. It was found in St. John's Lodge, Regents Park, the elegant but neglected former town house of the Marquesses of Bute. Refurbished, it was to provide a charming, intimate, if far from glossy, home for the infant Institute.

The opening was in April 1937, when Wheeler shared the platform with the Earl of Athlone, Chancellor of London University, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Colonial Secretary, Lord Harlech. A black marble memorial plaque to Tessa Verney Wheeler made its presence felt. The opening speech from the Chancellor had been carefully prepared by Wheeler to emphasize the Institute as a 'laboratory', a centre of research where humanity could be studied against its natural environments with the aid of 'the geologist, the botanist, the palaeontologist, the climatologist. . . .' A place, too, where students could familiarize themselves with archaeological collections

and be trained in techniques needed for excavation and preservation.

The actual provision of the Institute could hardly at first be up to the high status and high aspirations of its opening day. Still, under Wheeler as honorary Director, it had the future Dame Kathleen Kenyon as chief administrator; an environmentalist of repute in Dr. Zeuner; Sidney Smith and Professor Hooke lecturing in Near Eastern and biblical studies; a library, an excellent little photographic studio, and a modest technical laboratory. As well as expanding collections of British antiquities, the Petrie Collection had been reinforced by material from Mesopotamia, Syria, and Cyprus.

Professor Piggott has recently commented on the early weakness of the Institute as a place of academic research, on 'the discrepancy soon to arise 'between promise and performance''. In particular he criticizes Wheeler's failure to relate with other growing points in archaeology, and, despite the brave words put into the Chancellor's mouth, to realize a true collaboration with other sciences.

One explanation is that the Director was an out and out humanist by upbringing, education, and temperament. Another may be that his earlier sense of isolation, of himself as the lone survivor with an obligation for leadership, had not quite left him. Perhaps he did not fully perceive that he was no longer isolated, that a full degree course and scientific projects were going forward in Cambridge, intellectual light emanating from Professor Childe in the Abercromby chair, and potent influences flooding in from the archaeologists of north-west Europe. Shortcomings of the early years of the Institute can also be explained by the pressure of other work on the honorary Director, by acute shortage of funds and the failure of the University of London to welcome a new subject with open arms. At least the place had enough life, ability, and fellowship in it to grow, to survive the war, and to enjoy a post-war period of great distinction under Professor Childe. Professor Mallowan, one of those who then made it a home of Oriental studies, has contrasted the days in St. John's Lodge, 'an exciting place to live in' where everyone was in touch with all that was going on, with those that followed the 1957 move to the expensive 'new box' in Gordon Square, when, in his opinion, the Institute became heartless and impersonal. Whatever judgement is made on such relative merits, there is no question that the Wheelers were the founding parents of what was to grow into the

largest, best-endowed centre of archaeological enterprise in our country.

By the middle of August 1939 Rik Wheeler could no longer endure the pursuit of archaeology in the peaceful fields of Normandy and dashed home to press upon the War Office the promise he had extracted during the shameful aftermath of Munich. This was to be commissioned to raise an anti-aircraft battery to defend the citizens of Enfield. Within a day he was in that little-renowned suburb and was soon to recruit his battery—with the assistance of John Ward Perkins, his son Michael and, before long, A. Goodman, solicitor, one of several of his enlisted men who were to achieve eminence.

No one who knew him supposed that Rik would rest content with a battery or with Enfield. The battery grew into a well-trained regiment and its Colonel strove desperately to get an overseas posting. The frustration was severe for it was not until September of 1941 that he sailed for North Africa with three of his batteries. The next year he was in the grim retreat from Tobruk and was commended for the good order in which his regiment accomplished it. Behind the El Alamein line, during rare intervals from dealing with enemy air attacks, he read Gordon Childe's *Man Makes Himself*. In October 1942, in one of the remarkable letters to Cyril Fox published in *Still Digging*, Wheeler wrote 'congratulate me. I'm now in the crack Division of the British Army! This means a seat plumb in the first row of the stalls for anything that is going. . . . I've been able to lead this gang from the suburbs of northern London right into the very middle of the picture'. In the front row he was when the attack started weeks later: with the Armoured Division, Desert Rats, he went through the second battle of Alamein with distinction. Then, beset by characteristic restlessness during the slow advance on Tripoli, he devised and led an advance foray among the retreating Italians and Germans that was a psychological counterpart to the de Warlencourt action of World War I. Once again no men were lost, and if this second escapade was not so completely successful, it did lead to the party entering Tripoli on 23 January. Soon 'the guns were in action on the quays—the first A.A. guns in Tripoli'.

On his first day in Tripoli Wheeler went to the High Command to insist that steps must at once be taken to protect ancient monuments and museums, a duty hitherto totally neglected. The High Command listened. With Major Ward Perkins Wheeler hastened to survey the principal sites, particularly

Lepcis Magna (Sabratha was still in enemy hands) and draw up a forceful report on what must be done. Amazingly, he was able to get Ward Perkins seconded for a month to take charge. At Sabratha the entire staff of the Italian Antiquities service was found sheltering: they offered prompt and valuable collaboration.

After this brief archaeological interlude, Wheeler's military career was resumed. He was given acting command of the Eighth Army's anti-aircraft brigade, and in May, as the advance neared Tunis, he was promoted to brigadier. He was occupied in the strategic planning for the invasion of Italy when his archaeological self was again evoked. It was August and he was in Algiers, when his Corps Commander, General Horrocks, himself dashed up with a signal asking that Wheeler should be released to become Director General of Archaeology in India.

This invitation, originating with Lord Wavell, was a complete surprise, the one turning-point in his work that had nothing to do with his own forward planning. Wheeler accepted, on condition that he would not take up the appointment until after the next battle—which was, of course, Salerno, then only a month ahead. He duly took part in the landings, which he regarded as 'the most absorbing military operation' of his experience and advanced as far as Naples. Once more that lanky, seemingly charmed body came through unscathed. At 53 Wheeler was ready to engage in what was to be the greatest challenge of his civilian career: the virtual creation of an Antiquities Service for a sub-continent together with the filling of vast lacunae in knowledge of its prehistory and ancient history. The appointment was for four years, but already it was possible to foresee that Independence might shorten the time available for a colossal task.

The British had begun to take an official interest in the recording of India's marvellous architectural heritage as early as 1862 and ten years later the Archaeological Survey of India was in being. It flourished for a time, but was moribund by the end of the century when Lord Curzon became Viceroy. With his real interest in Indian art and antiquities, he quickly appointed John Marshall, a classical archaeologist from King's College, Cambridge, to revive the Survey. Wheeler always insisted that Marshall had many notable achievements during his long tenure—including, of course, the discovery of the Indus civilization. He was, however, an amateurish excavator and, even more unfortunately, quite failed to train up a responsible staff

or anyone able to succeed him. This failure, together with cuts due to the Depression, ensured that when he left in 1929 the survey sank into a second decline. Just before the war Leonard Woolley had been summoned to prescribe for its revival and had produced a devastating critical report which, among many apt recommendations, asked for the appointment of a European Adviser in Archaeology. It seems that he privily recommended Wheeler for the role, and it is likely that it was this which guided Lord Wavell's choice. In sending his invitation, the Viceroy commented, 'the condition of the department is quite deplorable'.

Wheeler sailed early in 1944, and after a voyage enlivened by a German torpedo-bomb attack, he headed at once for the offices at the top of the Railway Board building in Simla that were the headquarters of the Survey. What happened next has become legendary. Entering his own office over the forms of sleeping peons, and seeing everywhere idle clerks and hangers-on he 'emitted a bull-like roar, and the place leapt to anxious life'. Within an hour he had interviewed all, and sacked many, of his staff. That evening one of the peons moaned 'a terrible thing has happened to us this day . . .'. Rik himself found the right prophetic words, 'The Devil has come down amongst you having great wrath because he knoweth he hath but a short time'.

How true this proved to be. The Survey had vast responsibilities: for the administration of one and a half million square miles stuffed with ancient sites and monuments ranging from megaliths to the Taj Mahal; for the running of many museums; for all excavation, publishing and epigraphy. While vitalizing the whole, immense department, Wheeler deployed most of his own prodigious energies, just as he had in the old days at home, on training young men in the skills of digging and conservation and on a crash campaign of selective excavation. He also set himself the task, against all kinds of opposition, to end the shoddy, shabby standards of Indian publication and produce a journal where all research and excavation could be promptly published. The first issue of *Ancient India* was to appear at the beginning of 1946.

Having reformed his headquarters with ruthless speed, the new Director General set off to reconnoitre his sub-continent—to learn something of its nature, to meet his far-flung staff, and to pick likely sites for excavation. He must have been overjoyed that once again, as in the twenties, wide fields of historical

ignorance invited his skill in filling them by purposeful digging. Even before his arrival Wheeler had formed ideas as to where research was most needed. Dividing the country into its two natural parts, he saw the first requirement in the north to be the filling of the gap between the Indus civilization and the Achaemenid empire and in particular to find cultural evidence of the Aryan invaders, while in the south, where there was no archaeology and no fixed dates before the sixth century A.D., the need was to bring some chronological order into a welter of unrelated material. He recognized that the best chance here would be to work from the datum line provided by numerous finds of Roman coins.

Although the first of these propositions had to be modified, they determined the lines of his forward planning and hence, as it proved, the main addition he was to make to 'our knowledge of the components of Indian civilization'. This, he had always believed, was the central purpose of himself and the service he was creating.

With his northern problem in mind, he headed for the Punjab and the North-west Frontier province—a land he was always to love. Quickly selecting Taxila—where Marshall had dug and there were buildings and a site museum—for his projected training school he went on to the eastern Indus capital, Harappa. There Marshall's probings, although they had indeed revealed a new civilization, had failed to discover the essential nature of the ruins. His mistakes had led Professor Childe to identify Indus society as that of a 'peaceful democratic bourgeois economy' with undefended cities and free from the centralized theocracies of Mesopotamia. It seems almost incredible that Wheeler, quite inexperienced in the mudbrick piles of oriental archaeology, instantly spotted that the highest mound at Harappa was in fact a strongly defended citadel. The excavation he was to direct there in 1946, together with his later work at Mohenjodaro, enabled him to portray the Indus civilization as the creation of a highly authoritarian, militaristic, culturally totalitarian state, its urban population fed from huge communal granaries.

This reconstruction of India's earliest high culture, published in *The Indus Civilization*, a supplementary volume to the *Cambridge History of India*, must count as Wheeler's outstanding contribution to the chronicle of northern India. His excavation at Taxila and, much later, at Charsada (*Charsada*, 1962) were to throw light on Achaemenid times, the impact of Alexander the

Great, and later classical influences. It is ironical that while he had such successes, his intention of filling the hiatus between these two periods was almost entirely frustrated. The Aryans were not to be found—unless it was in the remains of a final massacre he uncovered at Mohenjo-daro.

In contrast, when his survey of 1944 was carried into the southern province, all was to go according to plan. His chance discovery of a fragment of Roman amphora in a museum cupboard in Madras led directly to Arretine ware in the public library of Pondicherry and so on to their source—what proved to be a Roman trading port at Arikamedu. Excavations there in the following year made it possible to date native cultures by association with Roman imports, and these correlations were soon carried northward through the peninsula by diggings at Brahmagiri and Chandravali. One result of many was to date the hitherto mysterious megalithic tombs of the region to the last centuries B.C. Ultimately correlations were extended to the cultures of the Ganges.

The important results of Wheeler's historical researches must claim most attention here, but they were, of course, a small part of his labours during those years of 1944–7. His administrative duties were heavy, and made more difficult by the distance between Simla and New Delhi. He had to fight for more money, to improve museums (he helped to establish an All-India Museums Association) and at the same time to deal with hostile intrigues—in some part due to the excessive ruthlessness with which (here as always) he disposed of the idle or incompetent. More important and exacting still was his campaign to train personnel to staff his digs and to carry on when he himself had gone. This began with the unique training school conducted at Taxila over the winter months of 1944–5. Sixty-one students drawn from all parts of the sub-continent were instructed in every technique then demanded by archaeology. Most of them became devoted disciples and colleagues, prepared to toil like mad dogs in the heat of the sun, and the best endured to work in their respective countries after partition. So continuity was assured between the Wheelerian reign and the developments that were to follow in an independent India and (more shakily) Pakistan.

Wheeler's appointment at New Delhi ended in 1948. He had seen something of the horrors and chaos that followed Independence Day. He could do no more than try to protect his staff and trust that he had prepared the Archaeological Survey of India

for survival. There was to be some decline in standards and Taxila was never to be published, yet in general that trust was to be deserved.

Some of Wheeler's brightest pupils were Pakistani, but they were few, and the difficulties of maintaining an archaeological department in their country were prodigious. Visiting Karachi to say goodbye to his friends, he was surprised to be officially invited to become a part-time Archaeological Adviser to the Government. Although by now eager to be home, he agreed to go to Pakistan for a few months in each of the next three years. He went in 1949-50, working as usual to train, to dig, to win public support. He succeeded in establishing a National Museum at Karachi and in directing effective excavations at Mohenjodaro. Yet, as he said, these part-time labours proved Sysyphean and he did not return for the third year. In 1958, however, he was happy to accept the invitation to dig for a season at Charsada.

After the vast sway of India, Britain must have seemed a small place, yet it did not take long to find worthy outlets for his hardly diminished energies. He went straight to a new chair in the Archaeology of the Roman Provinces furnished by the University of London, and he ended a stirring inaugural (see *Alms for Oblivion*) with Ashoka's words, 'Let small and great exert themselves'. Although Wheeler never was, and never wanted to be thought, a true scholar, this chair fitted well to what by now he had made his most valuable scholarly endowment: an exceptionally wide vision of our planetary civilizations, and particularly of the Empire whose relics he had unearthed from Caernarvon to Pondicherry. It was not, however, to be the main outlet for his own exertions. Nor was the presidency of the Society of Antiquaries which came to him in 1949 after a war-time spell as Director. Unerringly, he recognized that his vitalizing powers could best be devoted to the resurrection of the British Academy, to which he had been elected Fellow in a somewhat irregular fashion, as early as 1941.

In these *Proceedings* there is no need to detail the achievements of Wheeler's twenty years as Secretary of the Academy, with their many victories and one failure. He has, moreover, chronicled them with wit and thoroughness in his *British Academy, 1949-1968*.

The Academy, founded to do for the Humanities what the Royal Society had long done for the sciences, had reached its nadir in the post-war years—having fallen there from no great

height. Agitation for reform from Sir Charles Webster was largely responsible for Wheeler's appointment as secretary in 1949; when Webster became President the following year they were able to work hand in glove for reform. Wheeler has described with brutal frankness how the gerontocracy was overthrown and the whole arthritic body rejuvenated. As urgent as the retirement of the old men, was the extraction of money from the Treasury—an art and craft in which Wheeler was now adept. He saw that the tedious confusion of the administration of the various British Schools overseas would make an opening. It was not very long before it was agreed that the Academy should be paymaster for them all: the old established Schools at Athens, Rome, and Iraq and the new one at Ankara were found a little more cash; the lapsed School at Jerusalem revived. So the Academy began to mount towards its rightful place as grand patron of the Humanities. Later the Secretary was to play a large part in founding research Institutes in Iran and East Africa, the latter involving him years of scheming, travelling, and hard work.

On the home front there was an urgent need to find funds for struggling learned societies and their publications and for individual research. Happily Trusts and other institutions volunteered or were induced to grant the Academy modest sums that could be used to prime the pump until Government money could be deserved and won. Thus, through the fifties, the Nuffield Foundation, followed by All Souls, helped to rescue societies by subsidizing their periodicals, while the Pilgrim Trust supported a pilot scheme that enabled the Academy to make awards for a wide range of research workers, young and not so young.

All this was admirable, but it became obvious that in contrast with the orderly arrangements for the support of the natural sciences, that for the humanities and social sciences was chaotic: as Sir George Clark said, it was 'a structure which is truly Gothic in its wealth of irregular detail'. A report on that Gothic structure and how it could best be rationalized would be valuable in itself: it was a necessity if a proper case was to be made for substantial Treasury funding. The Rockefeller Foundation agreed to finance the inquiry, and late in 1961, towards the end of Sir Maurice Bowra's presidency, the Report, *Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, was published.

In all these matters the Secretary had played an active and often leading part, working closely with successive Presidents.

Now he was to score a personal triumph that marked a great leap forward in the Academy's fortunes. A discussion of the Rockefeller Report with the Financial Secretary had seemed to go well. Although care had been taken not to recommend the Academy as the central authority to administer the proposed grant, no one can have been startled when the Financial Secretary himself made this recommendation, with only the proviso that the Social Sciences were to be provided for elsewhere. Bowra led off his deputation confident of being able to announce the good news in his last Address. Week after week went by without word until in desperate resolve Wheeler went down to the Treasury. 'It was now or never. . . . The dramatic moment had arrived to pin . . . substance to the Financial Secretary's expressed goodwill. I left the Treasury with an initial grant of £25,000 a year' and with a promise that it would soon be doubled.

This undoubtedly was the summit of Wheeler's great services to the British Academy and the humanities. For the rest of his tenure as Secretary, however, there was much to be done in the administration of the new affluence, particularly after 1966 when the Academy began to sustain its own research projects. In all this he maintained fruitful contacts with the Royal Society, particularly in the field of prehistoric archaeology. It was only sad that a project dear to his heart, to found a British Institute of Far Eastern Studies in Tokyo, was killed by the 1967 devaluation crisis just at the moment when success had seemed near. On the other hand, at much the same time his efforts to move the Academy from its poky premises in Burlington Gardens to a part of those vacated by the Royal Society in Burlington House were rewarded. The transfer was made late in 1968, a few months before his retirement.

Wheeler ended his *British Academy* with wry comments on the fact that he, who had once driven the old men from the seats of power, had remained Secretary into his eightieth year. He forgave himself as the last of his kind: the officers of learned societies who worked without a salary—as he had done for twenty years. He most treasured a letter in which Professor David Knowles said, 'I always regard you—along with Webster—as the second founder of the Academy . . . and the move to Burlington House is certainly due entirely to you'.

While the British Academy claimed most of Wheeler's time and thought during the fifties and sixties, he contrived to do much more besides—and the honours came rolling in. In 1951–2,

when still holding his professorship, he carried out his last considerable excavation in this country. Stanwick in north Yorkshire, with its extensive earthworks and its association with that most neglected drama of British history, the feud between King Venutius and his pro-Roman Queen, Cartimandua, was almost as well suited to his gifts as Maiden Castle had been. The results were published in his last special Report for the Society of Antiquaries, the slim *Stanwick Fortifications* of 1954. In the same year he published, from the fullness of his experience, the excellent *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*. In 1968 he was to produce *Flames Over Persepolis* in which, perhaps, he celebrated an inner sympathy with Alexander the Great.

He served as chairman of the Ancient Monuments Board (1964–6) and as Trustee of the British Museum (1963–73). He collected honorary doctorates from the universities of Bristol, Ireland, Wales, Oxford, Liverpool, Bradford, and Delhi. His knighthood came in 1952, his C.H. in 1967; then, in 1968, the honour that probably gave him most pleasure, Fellowship of the Royal Society under Statute 12.

It was in the mid-fifties that he hugely enjoyed his extraordinary success in the T.V. archaeological panel game, Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral. With Glyn Daniel as the perfect foil, his panache, humorous self-display, and fine sense of timing—the delayed recognition—captivated the British Public. Sir Mortimer Wheeler was chosen Television Personality of the Year, wherever he went heads were turned and one London schoolchild out of every three declared in favour of archaeology as a career. After this success Rik Wheeler could always perform for the BBC, and David Collison directed a worthy record of his archaeological life and work.

Even in retirement Wheeler was often to be found at the British Academy, and was still attended by Molly Myers who had done so much to support him in his Secretaryship. He was touched and pleased by the Conference on the *Iron Age and its Hillforts* organized in 1971 by the young members of the Southampton University Archaeological Society 'as a token of respect to mark his eightieth year'. He must also have found much to sustain him when in 1972 a peregrination of India came to resemble a royal triumph. Everywhere those whom he had disciplined, driven, taught, welcomed him with honour and affection. His lifelong restlessness never left him even after he fractured his pelvis during a visit to Rome and suffered a slight stroke in Paris and on the flight home.

A somewhat ill-judged marriage to Mavis de Vere Cole in 1939 did not last long; his third marriage, to Margaret Norfolk, celebrated in 1945 at Simla, was also a failure, although they were never legally separated. Thereafter Wheeler rented a little house in Whitcomb Street close by the National Gallery. Although its frame seemed too small for his own, it made a charming retreat graced by pictures, oriental ceramics, and other treasures.

During his last years he lived very largely in the care of Molly Myers in her Surrey cottage. There, although he still visited London and enjoyed female company, including that of a granddaughter, he raged against the cruel thievings of old age. In their despite he set himself one final challenge: to write *My Archaeological Mission to India and Pakistan*. It was no great thing, but he completed the work. It was good to see an advance copy in his hands shortly before his death. On one side the jacket showed a venerable but still commanding Mortimer Wheeler with Indian disciples, facing, on the other side, that sensuous, provocative bronze dancing girl from Mohenjo-daro.

JACQUETTA HAWKES