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Bernard Ashmole, CBE, MC, MA, BLitt, FBA, 1894–1988

Bernard Ashmole died on 25 February 1988 in his ninety-fourth year. He was one of the most distinguished classical archaeologists of his generation, not himself an excavator but bringing a perceptive mind, deep learning, a fine aesthetic judgment and a great deal of common sense to the interpretation of Greek and Roman sculpture.

His long and unusually varied career was punctuated by two World Wars. In the first he served with the 11th Royal Fusiliers, was severely wounded on the Somme and won the Military Cross.

Returning to Oxford, he held the Craven Fellowship in 1920, and began a long association with the British Schools in both Athens and Rome. He was admitted as a Student in Athens in both the 1920–21 and 1921–22 sessions, but spent most of the winter of the latter year in Rome, where he contributed a number of entries to the *Catalogue of Sculptures in the Palazzo dei Conservatori*, edited by H. Stuart Jones. From 1923 to 1925 he was Assistant Keeper of Coins at the Ashmolean Museum, of whose founder he was a collateral descendant. He returned to the British School at Rome as Director in 1925 and stayed until 1928. His combination of scholarship with aesthetic sensitivity was particularly appropriate in a mixed community of archaeologists, artists and architects. In 1929 he returned to England on appointment as Yates Professor of Classical Archaeology at University College London. He later commissioned one of the architects from the School at Rome to build a house with a Y-shaped plan in a commanding position in the Chilterns. Controversial at the time as the first concrete-frame house in England, it is now a listed building. Here too Ashmole demonstrated his practical approach to problems: faced with a huge estimate from the local Water Board for filling the swimming pool, he had a well dug instead.

In 1929 his first major independent publication appeared, a *Catalogue of the Marbles at Ince Blundell Hall*, which remains a model archaeological catalogue of an eighteenth-century collection of classical sculpture. In the same year he collaborated with Beazley and D.S. Robertson in a broadsheet that was to have a lasting influence on the British Museum's galleries: *Suggestions for a New Exhibition of the Sculptures of the Parthenon* proposed that the sculptures should be displayed in isolation, unencumbered by the plaster casts, photographs and models that had been for so many years so conspicuous a feature of the Elgin Room. The present exhibition in the British Museum's Duveen Gallery embodies these proposals. It was in preparation for the new exhibition in 1939 that unauthorized over-cleaning of some of the sculptures brought the British Museum and some of its Officers under public attack from the sculptor Epstein and others. Heads rolled, and in the aftermath it was Ashmole whom the Trustees of the British Museum appointed as Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities to restore public confidence. For several years he emulated Sir Charles Newton by holding the Keepership and the Yates chair simultaneously.

Before long, war service again interrupted his career. He served in the Royal Air Force

from 1940 to 1945, helping to organise the allied evacuation from Greece, when he made practical use of his knowledge of Greek topography, and later in serving in Egypt and the east. He was mentioned in dispatches twice and was awarded the Hellenic Flying Cross.

After the war he returned to the Museum to begin the rebuilding of the bomb-damaged galleries and the re-installation of the collections. In 1948 he gave up the Yates chair but remained at the Museum until 1956, when he was elected to succeed his old friend Sir John Beazley, CH, as Lincoln Professor of Art and Archaeology at Oxford. As well as teaching he was able to continue museum work by planning the arrangement of the Cast Gallery and by supervising the cleaning and placing of the casts. His Fellowship at Lincoln College dated from his election to the Lincoln chair and was held until 1980, having been exceptionally renewed when he retired from the chair in 1961. From 1961 to 1963 he was the first Geddes-Harrower Professor of Art and Archaeology at the University of Aberdeen and in 1964 he was Visiting Professor of Archaeology at Yale.

His achievements were recognised in many ways, both at home and abroad: Honorary Membership of the Archaeological Institute of America (1940), CBE (1957), Honorary FRIBA, Honorary LL.D. at Aberdeen (1968), Honorary Fellow of the Archaeological Society of Athens (1978), the British Academy's Kenyon Medal (1979) and the Cassano Medal from Taranto (1980). In 1980 he was elected an Honorary Fellow of Lincoln, having also been an Honorary Fellow of his old college, Hertford, since 1961 and of University College London since 1974.

His long membership of the Managing Committee of the School began with his election in the 1931–32 session and ended only in 1984, when he had also been a Trustee of the School for some fifty years. In the spring of 1960 he was Visiting Fellow, and devoted much time to the students. With characteristic modesty he spent most of Easter Sunday morning with them, sharing the chore of turning the spit to roast the Easter lamb under the supervision of the expert, the School's gardener. His tenure of the Visiting Fellowship was also memorable for expeditions combining archaeology and swimming on Aegina and at Rhamnous, the latter involving a seven-kilometre walk in each direction between the site and the nearest bus terminus. He always kept himself fit, and remarked after his retirement to Peebles, where the Tweed bisects the Green, that had he been thirty years younger he would have taken up fishing.

He had a reputation, not entirely deserved, for having published relatively little. He belonged to the generation that did not weigh scholarly achievement by *avoids*, and he did not waste words. Indeed his preferred medium was the lecture, and we are fortunate that so many of his lectures, full of stimulating ideas and new insights, found their way into print. He gave the British Academy's Italian Lecture in 1957 on *Cyriac of Ancona*, the first J. L. Myres Memorial Lecture at Oxford in 1961 on *Forgeries of Ancient Sculpture: Creation and Detection*; he was Rhind Lecturer in 1952 and Norton Lecturer of the Archaeological Institute of America in 1963. His Louise Taft Semple lectures, given at the University of Cincinnati in 1963, were published in 1964 (*The Classical Ideal in Greek Sculpture*), and the Wrightsman Lectures he gave in New York in 1967 were published as *Architect and Sculptor in Classical Greece* in 1972. The interrelationship between sculpture and architecture was also explored in *Olympia: the Sculptures of the Temple of Zeus* (1967), where he and N. Yalouris amicably presented somewhat different views within the same covers, separated only by Alison Frantz's superb photographs.

Ashmole himself was no mean photographer. His work may be seen not only in Eugenie Strong's catalogue of the Melchett collection and Rhys Carpenter's book on the

sculptured parapet of the Nike Temple but also in countless photographs in the Ashmole Archive at King's College London, the nucleus of which is constituted by his own negatives.

Elegant, witty, charming and ever courteous, Ashmole had an inner warmth that spread beyond his own family to embrace colleagues and pupils. In them he inspired admiration, loyalty and affection. He is much missed.

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