

'Rex' Hull on the Roman Bridge Abutment at Chesters 1949

[Facing page 1

Photo: Grace Simpson

Mark Reginald Hull

1897-1976

Archaeology and Roman studies, by the death of Mr. M. R. Hull at Colchester, have lost a devoted practitioner who also was a champion of the modern museum. He was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and of the Museums Association. His service in the Second World War was done at Colchester with the Observer Corps; in the First he fought, with commissioned rank, in the Northumberland Fusiliers.

Son of a vigorously learned incumbent of Belford in the north of that county, he was bred to scholarly and outdoor pursuits combined. When peace returned he took the combination into Roman frontier archaeology; as a Durham undergraduate it drew him towards a discipleship to F. G. Simpson, who already had renown for excavations on Hadrian's Wall. His 1925 work with Simpson, at the fort of Great Chesters (*Aesica*), gave vital clues to the Wall's original designing on a broad foundation, which has ever since remained essential to interpreting its history. Professional advancement followed, but far down south. Roman Colchester's military start, and sack in Boudicca's revolt soon after, left it thenceforward as peaceful as its English successor. A Norman peace, in this, had indeed been enforced by the Conqueror's castle, but by the 1920s, in a private park and meadow, the castle was roofless—except where it harboured what was then quite small, a museum. The Corporation, presented by Lord Cowdray with the whole large property, put the museum at the centre of its planning afresh; and Hull was appointed Curator. The change from the north was personal and social besides being archaeological.

But the road to success lay ahead; it was quickly taken. In and beside the meadow he disclosed unexpected Roman structures; the castle vaults were revealed as having formed the podium of Claudius's temple, famed from Tacitus as scene of Boudicca's slaughter of its last defenders; her sacking was discovered at a pottery-shop with the whole of its stock inside it; and this was all done while the plans were maturing, through what then was the Office of Works, for roofing and equipping the castle to make it the museum that exists today.

When further, in 1930, Colchester was ready for its by-pass road, on a course through the pre-Roman capital site, the *Camulodunum* of the Britons, new excavations were begun in which Hull had his indispensable place. Ahead of foreseeable development of all that area, Sheepen and its hill, he worked through to their end in 1939: he had found, in addition to his share of the British and earliest Roman discoveries, two Roman temples and a pottery-works with 'Samian' amongst its products. All that time besides, and on until his still quite recent retirement, he was busy in the new museum, at the castle and the nearby Holly Trees mansion. His older and his younger assistant, though each was remarkable, were mainly self-taught; money was lacking for ancillary staff, and indeed for a great deal else. Yet his Annual Reports were archaeological literature in themselves, for every period documented fully, and throughout with his admirable drawings. And his Research Reports were major works, produced by the Society of Antiquaries. He began them with *Camulodunum* as author jointly with the present writer, his *Roman Colchester* covered the mass of its known material remains, and the rest was in his sequel on its *Roman Potters' Kilns*. The German Archaeological Institute had made him a Corresponding Member. He marked the Roman town's 19th centenary, in 1950, with a festival conference and (then quite novel) an extensive loan exhibition, using his museum's capaciousness to match its treasures with many from elsewhere;

there were distinguished speakers, some from the Continent; the ladies of his family were hostesses. Finally, his life's last work must be recorded, though its issue has now to be posthumous; it is a further reminder that he always was very much more than a Colchester researcher. Brooches or fibulas, Provincial Roman costume's most frequent accessories, had attracted him for long; and he has left, to be published in the near future, a classified and illustrated corpus of all of them for Britain. Barely a year ago, he was awarded a pension from the Civil List.

Rex Hull was a quiet and a patient man. Underneath his reticence of manner were strong convictions; the reticence might be broken, indeed, on occasions of their seeming to be flouted. And yet such moments of indignation were rare. He had a wry Northumbrian humour, and it always prevailed. The near-octogenarian kept the character that marked him from early years. Its principles showed in his work, insistence on truth, and steadiness of friendship; unselfish and kindly altogether, it had also its cheerfully convivial side.

He had for several years been a widower, after being long and most happily wedded; there were two daughters of the marriage, and both survive him.

C. F. C. HAWKES

By kind permission of *The Times*, Wednesday 1 December 1976