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PROFESSOR CHARLES McBURNEY

Professor Charles McBurney, FBA, FSA, who died on December 14, at the age of 65, enjoyed a world-wide reputation as a prehistorian. As University Lecturer in Archaeology, 1953-67, as Reader 1967-77, and since 1977 as Professor of Quaternary Prehistory at Cambridge he produced a succession of brilliant pupils as well as making seminal contributions to our understanding of the Middle and Later phases of the Palaeolithic over extensive areas of Eurasia and North Africa. He was brought up in the New Forest where his American parents made their home and was educated privately. He chose to become a British citizen at the nadir of our national fortunes in 1940, the year in which he was elected a Research Fellow of his first college, King's.

Like many archaeologists of his generation he did his war service in the RAFVR interpreting air-photographs. This took him to North Africa which left a permanent mark on him. On resuming his Fellowship he wrote his first book, *Prehistory and Pleistocene Geology of Cyrenaican Libya* (1955), in conjunction with Richard Hey, the geologist, who served in the same theatre. A Pelican *The Stone Age in Northern Africa* (1960) reflected the experience in exposition that came to him as a University Lecturer.

Meanwhile three campaigns of excavations between 1951 and 1955 in the great cave of Haua Fteah with its sixty distinct levels provided an unrivalled means of training the students to whom he was devoted. The years spent in analysing the half million flints, the many thousands of animal bones and the numerous

samples taken for radiocarbon dating and other purposes gave successive generations of students an insight that no amount of reading or attendance at lectures could provide. The results set out in *The Haua Fteah (Cyrenaica) and the Stone Age of the South-east Mediterranean* (1967) provided a document of prime importance to prehistorians as much for its demonstration of method as for its substantive value.

Although North Africa claimed much of McBurney's attention, his research interests were by no means confined to this region. He undertook excavations of crucial importance at the Cotte de St Brelade, Jersey, as well as on the British mainland. He was keenly interested in the relations between the palaeolithic of Russia and that of central and western Europe and made this the subject of his Reckitt Archaeological Lecture to the British Academy of which he was elected a Fellow in 1966. His concern with the emergence of Upper from Middle Palaeolithic culture took him to central Asia where he excavated on the Caspian shore and in Afghanistan.

Charles McBurney was a true professional. Without interest in self-promotion he devoted himself to his researches and ensured that his pupils acquired a similar devotion. He deeply appreciated his Fellowship of Corpus Christi to which he was elected in 1952. He was a keen fly fisherman and a devoted family man. His pupils in every part of the world will mourn a man of probity who found satisfaction in a life well lived.

He married, in 1953, Anne Frances Edmonstone Charles. They had two sons and one daughter.

CHARLES McBURNEY

Charles McBurney never visited Australia, but he exerted indirect influence on the development of prehistoric research in this region. Those numerous prehistorians who were his students will mourn his death and feel sympathy for his devoted wife, Anne, and their talented children. Not all of Charles' students accepted the numerous theories which he devised, while others criticised his field methods, but nobody could deny his enthusiasm, dedication and humanity. Both Charles and Anne gave generously of their time and hospitality, whether during supervisions at their Grange Road home, at their memorable reunion garden parties (with John Clegg's sculpted bison lurking in the bushes), or on those annual Jersey expeditions which became synonymous with the Palaeolithic trips.

My own association with Charles was unique and my debt profound. I attended his first lecture course, in the year before Dorothy Garrod retired and left him free to develop his innovative ideas. In 1952, with three other undergraduates I spent the summer on his first major excavation season at the Haua, and in 1961 and 1970, participated in the campaign at La Cotte de St Brelade, Jersey. I had the opportunity to join the 1977 season also, but instead, I spent some days with my family in the McBurney cottage in the Scottish Highlands, just above the turbulent trout stream which Charles enjoyed fishing.

Students grumbled about conditions, yet almost every 'stone age' person for almost twenty years visited La Cotte. The 1961 roll call included John Clegg, Wilfred Shawcross, Glynn Isaac, Derek Roe and Desmond Collins; Peter White, Rhys Jones and Carmel Schrire were there the following year; Isabel McBryde participated the year that the Prince of Wales trowelled the Mousterian deposits.

From the class of 1953 onwards, few student archaeologists were not set to sorting and analysing the enormous artefactual and faunal assemblages from Haua Fteah or La Cotte. It proved a valuable apprenticeship, particularly for African studies to judge from the crop of Africanists which resulted. Australian region researchers also benefitted from the experience. To those mentioned above, others now resident in Australia who were involved in lab work under McBurney's direction include Richard Wright, John Campbell, Iain Davidson, Paul Ossa, Caroline Bird and Patricia Vinnicombe.

Charles was an innovator, as exemplified by the contrast between his lectures and those traditionally given on the Palaeolithic before his time. His 'Geographical study of the Older Palaeolithic Stages in Europe', was a significant contribution, in the context of thirty years ago (PPS 1950). He collaborated with scientists at a period when that was uncommon and he was one of the first to attempt a systematic use of radiocarbon dating. At the Haua in 1952, we went to enormous trouble to collect carbon samples in huge sterile jars. Because contamination at that time was thought to be all-pervasive, we packed those jars in 44-gallon drums, buried within earth from the layer in which each sample was collected.

He worked his field teams hard, yet nobody worked longer hours than himself, despite disabilities of health. At the Haua, after packing each day's findings every evening, he drew sections in the trench until midnight. His use there of sieves with varying mesh

size suspended upon a shaking frame, was a pioneering device to maximise retention with a small team. I adapted its design for my fieldwork in the 'fifties, and so this now ubiquitous device entered Australia.

Charles McBurney did not prompt his students to research projects in order to score points off opponents, and he is likely to receive less credit in archaeological history than other more self-advertising practitioners. But to those many student generations for whom he was a significant influence, he will be respected for conveying something of his enthusiasm for fieldwork, empirical analysis, and the world of Palaeolithic people.

John Mulvaney