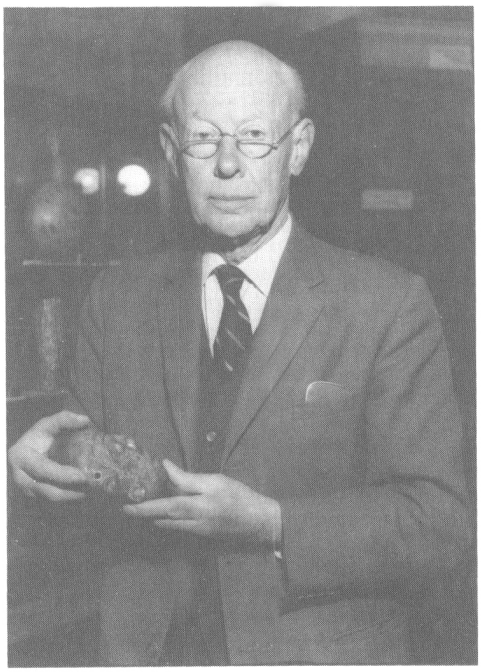
OBITUARIES

GEOFFREY HEXT SUTHERLAND BUSHNELL, 1903–1978



Geoffrey Bushnell was born in May 1903, the son of the Reverend G. D. S. Bushnell and Mildred Mary Earle. He was educated at Wellington College, a traditional British public school, and from there went as an undergraduate to Downing College, Cambridge. Although his antiquarian and archaeological interests dated back to schoolboy years, these subjects did not offer a career in the 1920s, and Geoffrey took his degree in natural sciences.

It was geology rather than archaeology which led him to Ecuador. Graduating at a time when jobs were hard to find, he ignored the advice of his family and, against their wishes, accepted a position with Anglo-Ecuadorian Oilfields, with whom he remained from 1926 to 1938. The work that established his archaeological reputation was a spare-time activity, carried out (as he wrote in the Preface to *The Archaeology of the Santa Elena Peninsula*) "with very moderate resources and in short periods of leisure in a busy life." During one such period, in 1936, he married Patricia Ruck, the sister of a friend and brass-rubbing colleague from Cambridge days (see 1947b). She went on to help him with the final stages of the research and was responsible for many of the published drawings. It was a partnership which gave Geoffrey great happiness, and which produced four sons.

In the quality of its fieldwork and in standards of presentation, the Santa Elena study was in advance of its time, and for many years it remained the cornerstone of coastal Ecuadorian archaeology and the stimulus for most future work there. Geoffrey had concentrated on the Guangala and Manteño periods, but he also excavated a Colonial cemetery and, at the other extreme, described some Valdivia sherds. He correctly placed these in a "pre-Guangala" stage, but in the days before radiocarbon dating, the very early date of this material was not yet apparent. In 1971 the Ecuadorian Government recognized the importance of this pioneering study by creating Geoffrey *Comendador al Mérito* of Ecuador.

The Ecuadorian research was his only published fieldwork, though in 1955 he carried out surveys and excavations in Tobago under circumstances which are now difficult to reconstruct. The finds remain unpublished (Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology collection no. 1957: 115–157), but from a manuscript account sent to Professor Irving Rouse it ap-

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pears that Geoffrey arrived in Tobago in March and left in late April: "about 4 weeks were spent in reconnaissance, including a voyage round the island in the coasting steamer Trinidad, to visit areas which were difficult of access by road. The rest of the time was spent in making trial excavations in the Mount Irwin and Plymouth areas." The Cambridge collection covers the series of local pottery styles from about the seventh century A.D. until the Conquest.

Apart from this West Indian venture, Geoffrey never excavated again, and from 1938 his career took a new direction. In that year he left the oil industry and returned to Cambridge to work on his Ecuadorian material. The key figure in this transitional period was Louis Clarke, at that time Curator of the Museum at Cambridge. Geoffrey had sent his first batch of Santa Elena sherds to Clarke. "The result," as he noted in his obituary for Clarke, "was an enthusiastic letter, painting the importance of the material in the most vivid terms and imploring me to get some more, which was of the greatest encouragement to a young man ploughing a lonely furrow far away" (1961a:192). Now Clarke persuaded him that the results should be worked up into a thesis for the Ph.D. degree, which was still something of a novelty in the Thirties. These studies were interrupted by the outbreak of war. During the war years Geoffrey was mainly engaged in the preparation of military maps, finishing as a major in the Royal Engineers. Throughout this period he kept up his connection with the museum, helping to pack its treasures for safe keeping at the start of hostilities, and unpacking them at the end of the war.

In 1946 he returned to Cambridge, becoming Assistant Curator of the Museum in 1948 and Curator a year later, a post which he held until his retirement in 1970.

Cambridge was to be his home for the rest of his life, and it provided the ideal setting for his varied and miscellaneous talents. The university takes delight in its traditions, and it tolerates—perhaps even encourages—personal idiosyncrasy as long as this is allied with professional competence. Geoffrey was a sociable person, and completely unselfconscious. The innocent visitor, meeting him for the first time, began by being slightly unnerved, and ended by being delighted, as well as better informed. Latin American students, accustomed to a more formal style, returned to London in a state of happy shock after a Bushnell consultation, with tales of a besandaled (and often sockless) individual, with a great cackling laugh and a shiny head surrounded by its rim of duck fluff, and with an endless stream of funny—and frequently scandalous—stories in English and Spanish. They sampled his fearsome snuff (usually only once), ate apples from the woven *alforja* which accompanied him everywhere (and served as the scale in so many of his photographs), and then went back for a very English tea at the house in Wordsworth Grove. For most of them, their final glimpse of the doyen of British Americanists was the distant view of a figure weaving dangerously on a bicycle through Cambridge traffic, en route to the next appointment.

As a teacher, Geoffrey was at his best in this kind of informal setting. He gave lectures on American archaeology and on material culture to a department which took neither of these things seriously, and it was not until 1966 that the university recognized his academic distinction by electing him Reader in New World Archaeology. National honors followed in 1970, when he was made a Fellow of the British Academy.

But the center of Geoffrey's academic life was the museum. He ran this, or at least the American section of it, like a private collection, and with a scorn for unnecessary bureaucracy. He wheedled type specimens out of his friends and students in order to build up one of the best small reference collections in the country, and he believed it was there to be used. As a self-taught Americanist, he encouraged others to take the same path and readily unlocked the museum's files for anyone with a serious inquiry. Like most good museum archaeologists, Geoffrey thought through his fingertips and believed that objects should be handled and tried out. One of his favorite reminiscences was of the visiting musicologist who managed to get a tune out of one of the museum's penis sheaths, under the impression that it was a flute. True to his principles, Geoffrey himself would just as happily blow conch trumpets to amuse small boys, demonstrate the atlatl for undergraduate classes (a dangerous experience, this), or pick over his Peruvian textiles with international specialists.

He had little time for pure theory, and never wrote a theory paper himself. Having worked as a real scientist, he had no patience with the pretensions of pseudoscience and the jargon which so often accompanies it. He preferred to let the facts speak for themselves, and he supported the old-fashioned virtues of literacy, courtesy, and common sense—qualities which made him a popular chairman or panel member of conferences in the United States as well as in Britain. Several of his papers were first delivered at such meetings (1971a, 1971b, 1976).

His bibliography reflects his changing contribution to American archaeology: first the field research, then a series of notes (often for the Congress of Americanists) on items from the museum's collections, and finally, in his later years, a series of review articles and works of popularization. Of these, his *Peru* (1957) was the standard reference text for many years. Above all, for many of us Geoffrey was our only link with the world of transatlantic scholarship. In those days, when no university offered serious degree courses in American archaeology, it was the Cambridge Museum and the British Museum which between them kept the subject alive, and there were times when it was a very close thing. Generations of undergraduate expeditions asked his advice, and those of us who managed to stay in New World archaeology habitually raided his library and slide collection, and begged introductions to his wide network of personal contacts.

Although his friends were many and cosmopolitan, Geoffrey was, and took pride in being, a traditionalist. He enjoyed college life as a fellow of Corpus Christi from 1963, and in *Who's Who* he listed his recreations as gardening and visiting ancient buildings. He was a practicing Christian, with an interest in all aspects of liturgy, church architecture, and ecclesiastical antiquarianism, and in a practical way, he served his church as a member of the Cathedrals Advisory Committee and as a trustee of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust until the time of his death. Besides architecture, he had a detailed knowledge of heraldry, monumental brasses, and silver plate. Although not himself a great collector, one of his personal treasures was a fine Colonial Spanish silver jug, which (in an attempt to disguise its value) he would use to refill the car radiator in Santa Elena. It is fitting that one of his last publications (1975) was a study of the silver belonging to his own college.

Until illness slowed him down during his last three years, Geoffrey took enormous pleasure in everything he did, believing that wit and humor should enliven even serious discussions, and that scholarship is something to be enjoyed. His death, on 26 December 1978, following so closely on that of his friend Eric Thompson, marks the end of an era for American archaeology in Britain.

Acknowledgments. It is typical of Geoffrey Bushnell that he kept neither a curriculum vitae nor a complete set of his own publications. In preparing this obituary I have drawn on the memories of his friends, and have been greatly helped by discussions with Pat Bushnell, Mary Cra'ster, Peter Harris, Olaf Holm, and Irving Rouse.

WARWICK BRAY

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