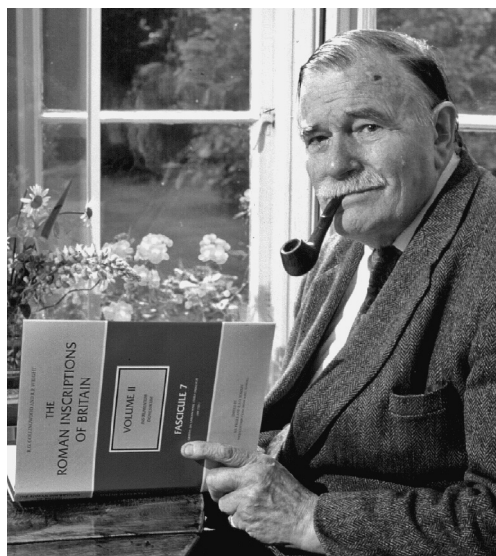


Sheppard Sunderland Frere

(23 August, 1916– 26 February, 2015)

by R. J. A. Wilson



Sheppard Frere, who has died at the age of 98, was the foremost scholar of Romano-British history and archaeology for much of the second half of the 20th c. He was born in the Sussex village of Graffam, near Midhurst. His father Noel served as a Provincial Commissioner in Sierra Leone, continuing a family tradition of diplomacy and overseas service. The latter soon settled the family in Norfolk, where Sheppard spent much of his childhood, and some of Sheppard's earliest publications were concerned with Norfolk's antiquities, including three on work at the Romano-British village of Needham, where he had first excavated while still a schoolboy.¹ Sheppard's interest in archaeology, kindled by long walks over the Sussex Downs as a boy, was encouraged during his school days at Lancing College, above all by the inspirational guidance of one of his teachers, B. W. T. Handford,² and the fieldwork he conducted under Handford's direction in the immediate

environs of the College was published a few years later, accompanied by immaculately drawn and meticulously labelled sections, later to become such a hallmark of Sheppard's work.³ He was also President of the school's Haverfield Society, named after Francis Haverfield who taught at Lancing before going to Oxford where he was later to become Camden Professor of Ancient History. Haverfield was to become an important influence on Sheppard's intellectual development, even though the two never met. From Lancing, Sheppard went up to Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he read Classics (including Ancient History), but archaeology formed no part of his formal undergraduate degree.⁴ Instead, he gained more fieldwork experience during vacations, including participation in G. Bersu's classic excavation of an Iron Age house at Little Woodbury in 1938.⁵ Sheppard seemed set for a career as a schoolmaster, reckoning that the long summer breaks would give him ample opportunity to conduct archaeological research; so he accepted a teaching position at Epsom College in 1938. Before long, however, hostilities had broken out, and he spent the war years in the fire service in London.

Despite the war, his archaeological interests continued unabated. Free time was spent on a series of small-scale excavations on a wide variety of sites (prehistoric and mediaeval, as well as Roman) in the London district, mostly in Surrey, promptly written up in a series of notes and

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- 1 Sheppard's first, "Three flint implements from Shimpling," *Norfolk Archaeology* 27 (1939) 29-30, concerned finds from the village where he had lived since the 1920s; for the Needham work, cf. *AntJ* 20 (1940) 272-74; *ibid.* 21 (1941) 40-55; (with R. R. Clarke) *Norfolk Archaeology* 28 (1945) 187-216. All works cited in the notes below are by S. S. Frere unless indicated otherwise.
 - 2 Sheppard always acknowledged his debt to Handford, not only in his early work (e.g., *infra* n.3, p. 141), but also in the dedication of his *Britannia* (1967) to his mentor. B. W. T. Handford, already the author of *Lancing. A history of SS. Mary and Nicolas College, Lancing 1848-1930* (Oxford 1933), became a fount of knowledge about every aspect of the College's history.
 - 3 *Sussex Arch. Coll.* 81 (1940) 140-72 (the sections are figs. 7-8 on pp. 150-52).
 - 4 Sheppard commented on his lack of formal training in Roman archaeology in *Archaeology International, Institute of Archaeology UCL* 6 (2002-3) 10 ("in those days at Cambridge Roman archaeology was considered a branch of art history").
 - 5 "Roman Britain since Haverfield and Richmond. A lecture delivered in All Souls College on 23 October 1987," *History and Archaeology Review* 3 (1988) at 32.

papers.⁶ After the war he returned to his *alma mater*, Lancing, as a housemaster, teaching there from 1945 to 1954. The quality of his wartime excavations had not escaped notice, and in 1946 he was appointed Director of Excavations in war-ravaged Canterbury, in what became a pioneering example of urban rescue archaeology prior to modern rebuilding. He was to serve in the post for 15 years. It was not easy work, much of it conducted by means of small, deep cuttings, but the gains in knowledge were considerable. Quite apart from elements of the pre-Roman settlement and of Saxon huts, much new information about the Roman city of *Durovernum* was recovered — about its defences, street layout, some of its public buildings (including baths and a theatre), and parts of private houses.⁷ The results were obtained through meticulous attention to stratigraphy and observation of the smallest details; the importance of the latter Sheppard underlined in his summary of Roman Canterbury for the general public.⁸

In 1954, he left Lancing for a post at Manchester University, but soon moved to a Readership in the Archaeology of the Roman Provinces at the Institute of Archaeology in London. This coincided with his appointment as Director of Excavations at *Verulamium*, where investigation was necessary in advance of the widening of a road running through the heart of the Roman town; the research was to continue for 7 years. The importance of these excavations is hard to overestimate, and they confirmed his reputation as a superb excavator.⁹ Firstly, they rewrote, with a wealth of intricate detail, *Verulamium's* development as a Roman town, greatly amplifying and in part overthrowing the conclusions of Wheeler's excavations two decades before.¹⁰ Secondly, they were among the largest excavations of their time, with up to 100 diggers on site on any one day. Thirdly, from 1958 he pioneered the use of open-area excavation, instead of the box-grid system of trenches favoured by Wheeler (and with which Sheppard's *Verulamium* excavations had begun).¹¹ Fourthly, Sheppard's invitation to Martin Aitken, who traced the buried line of *Verulamium's* earliest urban defences (the "1955 ditch"), resulted in an early application of what we now call geophysics.¹² Fifthly, he devised a new technique for rolling mosaics entire onto a drum when lifting them, rather than cutting them up.¹³ And sixthly, the *Verulamium* excavations marked a watershed in developing new ways of saving and raising large areas of fallen wall-plaster, masterminded by Norman Davey and building on techniques first pioneered at the villa at Lullingstone.¹⁴ In all these aspects Sheppard's work at *Verulamium* made an enormous impact on Romano-British archaeology, reinforced by three immensely detailed reports published between 1972 and 1984.¹⁵

A felicitous event in 1961 was the marriage of Sheppard to Janet Hoare, an architect who was responsible for reconstruction drawings in his *Verulamium* publications.¹⁶ The couple, who were to have two children, had met though a Lancing connection, Janet being the sister of Sheppard's Head of House there.

6 E.g., *Surrey Arch. Coll.* 48 (1943) 45-60; *ArchJ* 101 (1944) 50-67.

7 The final reports were written up with the collaboration of S. Stow in *The archaeology of Canterbury*, vol. I. *Excavations at Canterbury Castle* (Maidstone 1982); vol II. *Excavations on the Roman and medieval defences* (Maidstone 1982); and vol. VII. *Excavations in the St. George's Street and Burgate Street areas* (Maidstone 1983). The Roman theatre was published separately in *Britannia* 1 (1970) 83-113.

8 *Roman Canterbury: the city of Durovernum* (3rd edn., Canterbury 1962) 23: "it should always be remembered that the information that is needed can be obtained from quite unimpressive-looking sources ... Witness the early Saxon sherd found near Rose Lane, which opened up exciting pictures of the arrival of the first Saxons as *foederati*, or even of trade with northern German lands before the Roman power ceased to exist in Britain. This one sherd is perhaps the most important single object yet excavated in Canterbury; yet it is entirely insignificant to look at".

9 R. M. Robbins, President of the Society of Antiquaries, in awarding Sheppard the Society's Gold Medal, stated that Sheppard had "extended archaeological techniques and demonstrated the highest skills of his craft in a remarkable series of excavations" (*AntJ* 69 [1989] 2).

10 *Verulamium excavations*, vol. II (London 1983) 1-25.

11 *Ibid.* 1; also commented on by C. Higham, *Archaeology International* 7 (2003-4) at 11.

12 For a photograph of this in use, cf. *supra* n.4, 13, fig. 8.

13 "Lifting mosaics," *Antiquity* 32 (1958) 116-19.

14 N. Davey, "The conservation of Romano-British painted plaster," *Britannia* 3 (1972) 251-68.

15 *Verulamium excavations*, vol. I (London 1972); vol. II (London 1983); vol. III (Oxford 1984).

16 E.g., *Verulamium excavations*, vol. I, 16, fig. 5; 79, fig. 18; vol. II, 64, fig. 25; 66, fig. 26; 68, fig. 28.

The other excavations he conducted over the course of his career, alone or in partnership with others, read like a roll-call of some of the key sites in Romano-British archaeology:¹⁷ the villa at Big-nor, where the successive building phases of a site explored by Samuel Lysons were for the first time established and dated;¹⁸ Dorchester-on-Thames, where a highlight was evidence for sub-Roman occupation, with early Saxon *Grubenhäuser* erected beside Roman streets that were still in use;¹⁹ Longthorpe near Peterborough, still the only 'vexillation' fortress of the early Roman campaigns to have been extensively excavated;²⁰ Brandon Camp in Herefordshire, another early military base, with a ramshackle collection of timber buildings which bucked the usual trend of orderly military planning;²¹ Bowes, a fort at the E end of the Stainmore Pass, where the defences and part of the interior were examined and a long sequence of occupation established;²² and Strageath in Perthshire, where a fort occupied in the Flavian and two Antonine periods was extensively investigated.²³

In 1967, soon after his transfer to Oxford to become Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire, his great book, *Britannia: a history of Roman Britain*, was published, immediately establishing itself as a definitive statement, universally acknowledged in reviews.²⁴ The subtitle is important: Sheppard firmly believed that archaeological evidence was to be evaluated for the information it could provide for social, economic and military history, and that, along with literary, epigraphic and numismatic evidence, the overall goal was to construct a narrative account which took due account of all forms of available evidence.²⁵ It was the first full-length study of Roman Britain since Collingwood's of 30 years before.²⁶ Revised editions were issued at intervals;²⁷ the fourth and last, now with 20 images in colour, was published in 1999.²⁸ Its place as a "classic overview"²⁹ in the historiography of Roman Britain is secure.

Another aspect of Sheppard's contribution was his selflessness, including his willingness to give huge amounts of his time to help his colleagues to bring their work to completion. This took many

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- 17 There were also excavations of Iron Age sites, such as Camp du Charlat, Corrèze (*Antf* 38 [1958] 218-22) and Ivanhoe Beacon (*Records of Buckinghamshire* 18 [1968] 187-203), both with Molly Cotton. Another important service to Iron Age studies was his editorship of a conference proceedings, published as *Problems of the Iron Age in Southern Britain* (Inst. Arch. London Occ. Pap. 11, 1961)
- 18 *Britannia* 13 (1982) 135-95.
- 19 *ArchJ* 119 (1963) 114-49 and 141 (1984) 91-174.
- 20 *Britannia* 5 (1974) 1-129 (with J. K. St Joseph).
- 21 *Britannia* 18 (1987) 49-92.
- 22 See *infra* n.37.
- 23 *Strageath. Excavations within the Roman fort, 1973-86* (Britannia Monog. 9, 1989) (with J. J. Wilkes). Sheppard dug there between 1973 and 1980, Wilkes from 1981 to 1986.
- 24 Reviewers commented on Sheppard's "lucid presentation, firm reasoning and steady judgment ... [his] command of the minutiae is really amazing" (C.E. Stevens, *Antf* 48 [1968] 322); "this is by far and away the best introduction to the subject, a volume full of insight, which repays rereading time and time again. Indeed, one suspects that, in another twenty years, [it] will have been cited just as much as it has been over the last twenty: the ultimate accolade of fine scholarship" (T. W. Potter, *CR* 38 [1988] 439, on the 3rd edition).
- 25 Sheppard had little taste for alternative approaches: cf. his concluding comments in his Oxford lecture (*supra* n.5) 36: "we want fewer Central Places, Gift Mechanisms and such-like Models and more study of the almost illimitable resources of the archaeology of the Roman Empire". He railed against the view that "ancient writers were too full of bias to be allowed any credence, or that archaeology and history cannot blend ... It is folly not to use the material to construct a history, however provisional"; also against another belief that "military archaeology is of little or no value compared with social archaeology" (*Britannia* [4th edn. 1999] xvi-xvii).
- 26 R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English settlements* (Oxford 1936; 2nd edn. 1937).
- 27 1st edn. 1967; 2nd edn. (pbk.) 1974, lightly revised, issued in hardback in 1978; 3rd edn. 1987 ("extensively revised"); 4th edn. 1999 (see next note).
- 28 It is regrettable that this edition was published by the Folio Society for its members only, and not in a commercial publication; as a result this edition, which is rarely cited, did not receive the widespread circulation that it deserved then, and still does.
- 29 So described by S. James in *The Sunday Times* (Dec. 22, 2006).

different forms. The most obvious was his contribution as Founding Editor of the journal *Britannia*, launched in 1970. He served as Editor for 10 years, and then a further 10 as Editor of the *Britannia* Monograph series, which started in 1981; he was member of the Roman Society's editorial committee for 40 years, resigning only at the age of 93. The deployment of his literary skills and his desire to polish and improve the work submitted by others, as well the many other tasks that fall to any editor, was one that he greatly enjoyed.³⁰ In the same vein was his work on preparing the final English text for publication of a volume in the series "History of the Provinces of the Roman Empire" (of which his *Britannia* had been the first), that on *Pannonia* and *Upper Moesia*.³¹ Another service was the annual round-up of "Sites explored" that he compiled for *Britannia* from 1983 to 1992. Then there was the writing-up of the work of others, such as Ian Richmond's re-excavation (1961) of the Romano-British church at Silchester, or Donald Atkinson's exploration (1929-34) of the forum, baths and south defences at Caistor St Edmund.³² He also served on various national committees, where his work included publication in 1975 of an influential report (the "Frere Report"³³) on how to manage the expansion of archaeological reports as a result of increased specialist contributions, which made a notable impact on procedures for shaping the publication of excavations. He was always ready to travel hundreds of miles to visit the excavations of others, putting his archaeological experience at their disposal — a vivid illustration of his indefatigable energy and his readiness to help others.

In 1983, upon retiring from his Oxford Chair, he was presented with a Festschrift, *Rome and her northern provinces*³⁴ (he was to receive another on his 90th birthday in 2006³⁵), in which John Wachter, one of its editors, wished Sheppard and his wife a long and happy retirement. His productivity in the period that ensued was little short of astonishing. No less than 21 books and over two dozen major papers (some collaborative) flowed from his pen in the 28 years from 1983 to 2011. They included *Roman Britain from the air* (1983), co-authored with his close friend, J. K. St Joseph. Stunningly illustrated with the latter's air photographs taken over the previous three decades, this book represented the fulfillment of a project conceived some 20 years earlier; it remains a compelling and very useful introduction to the Romano-British landscape. Another collaboration was his monograph with Frank Lepper on Trajan's Column, to which Sheppard contributed his expertise on Roman army organization, fortifications, arms and equipment, and their Dacian counterparts, as well as the organization of the province of *Dacia*.³⁶ His final book, on his excavations at Bowes fort with Brian Hartley, was published when he was 93,³⁷ while his last paper, a trenchant defence of his dating of a late mosaic at Verulamium, characteristically underlining the superior value of stratigraphical evidence over arguments based on artistic style, was published when he was 95,³⁸

30 As was made clear in the paper jointly written with R. Goodburn to celebrate the 40th anniversary of *Britannia*: "some papers involved editorial personnel in more than desk-work ... overall the variety of tasks to be performed in those days of un-specialization provided a very wide range of interest and satisfaction for those involved" (*Britannia* 41 [2010] 35).

31 A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia* (London 1974).

32 Silchester: *Archaeologia* 105 (1975) 277-305. Caistor St Edmund: *Britannia* 2 (1971) 1-26; *ibid.* 36 (2005) 311-27.

33 *Principles of publication in rescue archaeology*, Committee for Rescue Archaeology, Department of the Environment (London 1975).

34 B. Hartley and J. Wachter (edd.), *Rome and her northern provinces: papers presented to Sheppard Frere in honour of his retirement from the Chair of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire*, University of Oxford, 1983 (Gloucester 1983).

35 R. J. A. Wilson (ed.), *Romanitas. Essays on Roman archaeology in honour of Sheppard Frere on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday* (Oxford 2006).

36 (with F. Lepper) *Trajan's Column: a new edition of the Cichorius plates. Introduction, commentary and notes* (Gloucester 1988).

37 *Excavations at Bowes and Lease Rigg Roman forts* (Yorks. Arch. Rep. 6, 2009); Sheppard wrote the first 203 pages on Bowes.

38 "The saga of Verulamium Building XXVII 2," *Britannia* 42 (2011) 263-74. His last published words were "instead of attempting to overturn stratigraphical evidence for the dating of mosaics, it may be wiser for students of these designs to take on board the new evidence as an aid to improving the theory".

an astonishing 72 years after his first (in 1939).

One project of his retirement, however, stands out from the rest: his achievement in bringing the whole of *Roman inscriptions of Britain* vol. II to fruition in 8 separate fascicules over 6 short years, carried out with the help of Roger Tomlin in an extraordinary surge of activity.³⁹ To put the amount of work into perspective, had the separate fascicules been published as a single volume, *RIB II* would have comprised a book of 1329 pages, larger than *RIB I*. Its publication meant that *Britannia* is unique among Roman provinces in having its entire corpus of inscriptions, including its *instrumentum domesticum*, accessible in one place; it also gave Sheppard immense satisfaction that he was able to oversee the completion of a project originally envisaged by Francis Haverfield whose work he so much admired⁴⁰ and who had trodden a similar path from Lancing to Oxford two generations earlier.

The impact of Sheppard's scholarship was also felt internationally. He was frequently invited to French colloquia (he excavated in France, notably with Brian Hartley at Lezoux);⁴¹ but his closest Continental links were with Germany, where he was Corresponding Fellow of the German Archaeological Institute,⁴² and where he remained lifelong friends with Harald von Petrikovits, one-time Director of the Rhineland Archaeological Service and of the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, and with his successor, Christoph Rürger. In editorials for early issues of *Britannia*, he drew attention to German scholarship which anyone interested in Roman Britain should read;⁴³ and he could count among his pupils German students who came to Oxford to study with him.⁴⁴

His impact as a teacher was profound. He supervised numerous doctoral theses that were published after due revision as books. An important legacy was his demand from his students for the same lucidity and clarity of expression that he showed in his own writing. Like all great teachers, he dispensed wisdom in unobtrusive ways; words of advice were offered without his always realising the significance of their impact on his students.

His outstanding career was recognized by his peers in many ways: for example, by his Presidency of various societies,⁴⁵ the Gold Medal from the Society of Antiquaries, a Fellowship of the British Academy, by his appointment as a CBE, and honorary doctorates from the Universities of Leeds, Leicester and Kent.⁴⁶ He bestrode Romano-British studies like a colossus, following in the footsteps of Francis Haverfield, R. G. Collingwood and Ian Richmond before him. His legacy to the field will long endure, while those who were privileged to have been his pupils and close friends will remember, with gratitude and deep affection, the sagacity of his advice, his ever-present sense of humour, his many personal kindnesses, and the warmth of his humanity.

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39 *Fasc. 1* (1990); *Fasc. 2* (1991); *Fasc. 3* (1991); *Fasc. 4* (1992); *Fasc. 5* (1993); *Fasc. 6* (1994); *Fasc. 7* (1995); *Fasc. 8* (1995); *Combined epigraphic indexes and concordance with major printed sources* (1995).

40 Cf. Sheppard's comment (op. cit. supra n.5, p. 32) that "one reads Haverfield because what he wrote is still true".

41 (with B. R. Hartley) "Fouilles de Lezoux (Puy-de-Dôme) en 1963," *Cah. Civ. médiévale* 9 (1966) 557-63.

42 He also dug one season with a group of UK students and colleagues at Xanten, when the site of the Roman *colonia* was still threatened with industrial development.

43 *Britannia* 1 (1970) xvii; 3 (1972) xvi.

44 E.g., Sebastian Sommer, currently Chairman of the Deutsche Limeskommission; Michael Mackensen, just retired as Professor of Roman Provincial Archaeology in the University of Munich.

45 Oxford Architectural and Historical Society (1972-80), Royal Archaeological Institute (1978-81), Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (1983-86).

46 FBA 1971; CBE 1976; Hon. Litt.D Leeds 1977, Leicester 1983, Kent 1985. He was also elected FSA in 1944.

47 Corrigendum to be made in the first item (1939): for "Shrimpling" read "Shimpling".

below, as are his papers and a book published since 2006. Not included are the unsigned Editorials that Sheppard wrote for *Britannia* in 1970-73 and 1975-78.

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