

## MR WILLIAM J WEDLAKE MA F.S.A.

The inspiration for the creation of the Society and its first Director of Excavations was Mr William ("Bill") Wedlake. His life-long interest and role in archaeology overcame the lack of formal training in the discipline. However his commitment to Archaeology brought recognition by an honorary MA in July 1986 from Bristol University.

Bill Wedlake was born in Camerton in 1904. He left School at 13 to work on Camerton Farm. His interest in archaeology began as this had been a Farm excavated by the Reverend John Skinner in the previous century. Sir Mortimer Wheeler, an eventual mentor and friend, takes up the story: writing in 1958 he said "*Some forty years ago a master of Downside School was walking along the Fosseway near the village of Camerton, when, looking over the hedge, he saw a boy's head sticking out of the ground. The head was wholly preoccupied with a subterranean problem which, on closer inspection, turned out to be the emergent contents of a Roman rubbish-pit. When sufficiently distracted from his primary task, the head, in conversation, proceeded to reel off the names and dates of a long succession of Roman emperors ... The head belonged to William Wedlake*". (From the Foreword of "*Excavations at Camerton, Somerset*" by Bill Wedlake, 1958.)

Bill gained experience on excavations with Sir Mortimer Wheeler at Maiden Castle and was encouraged by notable active other archaeological figures of Sir Arthur Bulleid, Harold St George Gray, and Father Abbot Horne. He excavated at Camerton from 1926 to 1956 and the Society published a report of his excavations in 1958. It remains the principal source of archaeological record of Camerton for the pre-mediaeval period.

He excavated a Romano British Temple site at Nettleton between 1956 and 1972 and again the Society published his research. The Society Journal no 26 (1987), also records that he excavated in Standix, Yorkshire in 1951, with Sir Mortimer Wheeler for the Festival of Britain.

Other publications of the Society were produced by him "*A North Somerset Miscellany*" and a second volume, both of which are still available for sale. He devoted extensive time to a research of the writings of Reverend Skinner. In the first edition of *Camertonia* he listed the manuscripts of Skinner available at the British Museum.

He was Director of Excavations of the Society from its creation to his death in 1989. He became the President and Chairman as well, after the death of Sir Mortimer Wheeler in 1976.

A tribute to him in Journal no 29 (1990) spoke of him as honest and forthright, and "*the most charming and revealing raconteur*". Apparently his face would light up when recalling an escapade with Sir Mortimer Wheeler, "*yet there was an abiding seriousness about his passion for the past and its study which won the respect of all that knew him*".

Alan Jenner