

Ian Alexander Morrison (1940-2005)

THE death of Ian Morrison, on February 10th, 2005 has deprived scholarship of a unique character. Members of the Society will remember him warmly for his many contributions to Northern Studies, a spell as committee member, and as President, 1983-86.

It is difficult to categorise Ian, since it was remarked at his funeral that the term 'polymath' was all too modest a soubriquet for his talents. Born in Aberdeen, he moved to Edinburgh with his family and was educated at George Watson's School, where he shone in many subjects, including science, art and music. After a spell at Glasgow College of Art, he took an Honours degree in Geography at the University of Edinburgh, and went on to complete a PhD on raised beaches under Professor Stuart Piggott. This stimulated an interest in underwater archaeology, and he acquired skills in diving, especially in cold-water conditions.

His publication of *The North Sea Earls* in 1974 was the result of underwater research into sunken Viking ships off Skerries, Shetland, and this continued to be a major interest of Ian's, culminating in his setting up of an archaeological and geomorphological survey of Loch Awe in 1973. This involved a joint project between teams of divers from the Royal Navy and Edinburgh University, investigating the crannog sites in the loch. From 1978 he jointly supervised the PhD thesis of Nick Dixon, with Professor Dennis Harding of the Department of Archaeology at Edinburgh University, on the experimental excavation of the Oakbank crannog on Loch Tay. His *Landscape with Lake Dwellings: The Crannogs of Scotland* was published by Edinburgh University Press in 1985.

Ian's wide range of skills made him a valuable member of staff in the Geography Department of Edinburgh University, where he lectured on such subjects as cartography, climatology and human geography. But his archaeological expertise drew him to the Middle

East and the Eastern Mediterranean, where he worked on sites in North-East Syria with Dr Trevor Watkins, and in the Cyclades with Dr Colin Renfrew, as well as on mainland Greece, Cyprus and Malta. His ability to communicate with local people was quite remarkable, and this despite numerous language barriers. Local Greek workers insisted on calling him 'Jani', and of this he was immensely proud.

His association with *Northern Studies* continued, and he contributed articles from the second number (1973) until 27 (1990), on topics mostly connected with the Northern Isles, climatic influences, and traditional boats. Many of his articles were vividly illustrated by line drawings of small craft, and his was a gifted cartoonist. His letters to friends, colleagues (and their children) were always accompanied by sketches and drawings. He had picked up the technique of shadow puppet theatre in Turkey, and his wide circle of friends was encouraged to collect cereal cartons which he cut out into complicated figures for the entertainment of his colleagues' children.

On his retirement from the Geography Department, he went 'freelance' although he remained an Endowment Fellow in both Geography and Archaeology. One of his last teaching courses was to an Honours Scottish Ethnology class in Scottish Studies, on the historical geography of the North Atlantic Zone. He was an enthusiastic and stimulating lecturer to people of all ages, especially to the wide range of Extra-Mural classes which he taught over twenty years. He also gave lectures to undergraduate archaeologists in the University of St. Andrews.

As a writer, he published over two dozen 'Ladybird' books on subjects ranging from science-fiction to the Royal Family, as well as more archaeological subjects such as the 'Mary Rose' excavation, and 'The life of a powder-monkey in Nelson's flagship.' Most of these were profusely illustrated by his drawings, all of which displayed his close observation of the technical side of ships and sailing.

Ian's final years were blighted by illness, and he was largely unable to leave home. His interest in the wide range of historical topics never ceased, however, and he continued to write reviews for a number of journals until his death. He is fondly remembered by many in the academic community, as well as by many thousands of those who attended his lectures – always stimulating, and full of

humour. Geographer, archaeologist, writer, artist and raconteur – his talents enriched us all.

Ian A. Fraser