

OBITUARY

GERHARD BERSU, Honorary Fellow (1933) and Gold Medallist (1962) of the Society who died on 19th November 1964, was born in 1889 at Jauer in Silesia. His experience in the field began in 1907, when he was an assistant in the excavations carried out by Carl Schuchhardt in the 'Römerschanz' near Potsdam. His work in the following years took him to France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, and Romania, where he was engaged, under Hubert Schmidt, in the excavations at Cucuteni. During the first World War he served in the office for the protection of Monuments and Collections on the western front and was later attached to the German Armistice and Peace Delegations.

In 1924 began his long association with the German Archaeological Institute at Frankfurt-am-Main. In 1928 he became Second Director and three years later First Director. Under Bersu's enlightened guidance the Institute at Frankfurt, which acquired its new buildings in 1928, became a centre at which scholars from all Europe and beyond met to discuss the problems of archaeology. Bersu was an excavator of wide experience with a thorough grasp of the technical problems involved. Those who frequented the Institute in his time owe him a deep debt, both for advice and assistance and for the numerous contacts made within its walls.

In 1935 the Nazi Government removed him from office; in 1937 he was compulsorily pensioned. Not only was there an end to the series of excavations which had served as a training ground for students from many lands, but the carefully planned series of publications was disrupted. Bersu occupied his enforced leisure, if such a term can be used of one so active, by undertaking work outside Germany. In England the excavation of Little Woodbury, organized by the Prehistoric Society, opened up new horizons in the interpretation of the pre-Roman Iron Age. For the first time a great Celtic steading was revealed in all the complexity of its layout and economy. Nor did Little Woodbury stand alone in this country. The investigation of King Arthur's Round Table was completed on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War. This event found Bersu in Scotland; he was interned in the Isle of Man.

In the Isle of Man, with the support of local residents, he was enabled to carry out excavations using the services of his fellow internees. The great Celtic houses at Ballaceigan and Ballanorris, the Norse ship burial at Balladoole, and a number of other sites were explored in conditions of considerable difficulty and explored with his customary thoroughness and understanding. The end of the war in 1945 allowed an extension of this work and the following years saw the excavation, among other sites, of the rath at Lissue in Northern Ireland and the 'concentric circles' at Llwyn ddu bach in North Wales.

In 1947 Bersu was appointed a Professor at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin and three years later he returned to Frankfurt to take up once more his old position at the German Archaeological Institute. The building had been destroyed during the war and his last years were occupied with rebuilding and reorganization. His last official act on 29th and 30th October 1956 was the official reopening, the crown

of his long service to the Institute. The following years were devoted to the organization of the Fifth International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences, over which he presided at Hamburg in 1958.

Bersu's principal activities were carried out in his native land, where his name will long be associated with sites like the Goldberg in South Germany. But it is natural that we in Britain should remember Gerhard Bersu and his wife Maria, his constant companion and helper, principally for the series of excavations carried out in this country between 1937 and 1947. Their extent has already been indicated, but a mere list would not give an adequate idea of the value of his contribution to British archaeology. Already in the years between the wars we were building up a native archaeological tradition. Bersu was the heir and the leading exponent of the German school, on which we had already drawn. His work in Britain did not mean the supersession of our tradition; it involved the dissemination of different techniques and different ideas, the influence of which was quickly apparent. Cross-fertilization of this sort is one of the richest sources of development; we were fortunate in that this influence came at a moment when British archaeology was strong enough to benefit by it.

Formally our debt was acknowledged by the honours listed at the head of this notice, and by others which need not be detailed. For those of us who were privileged to enjoy his friendship and encouragement over a longer or shorter period the debt is more personal—a sense of a gap that it will be difficult to fill. Bersu was born and bred in the civilized society of an earlier age. Both personally and scientifically he had a European outlook and a confidence in the ultimate survival of civilized values. His resilience under stresses that might well have broken a lesser character was triumphantly vindicated by his last official act. It is these qualities that we shall remember.

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