
Preface

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Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. A 1970 **269**, iii

doi: 10.1098/rsta.1970.0080

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PREFACE

The joint symposium recorded in this volume was an historic occasion. So, too, is its publication.

They mark the decision of the Royal Society and the British Academy to work together in the many fields of learning where their interests overlap. It is commonplace today to speak of the two cultures, but the implication contains an oversimplification. The range of knowledge and research remains, as it always has done, continuous; it is divisible only because it has proved convenient at times to draw distinctions and by now some of the walls of the compartments of knowledge are wearing thin.

The genesis of the symposium lay in a working lunch of the Presidents and Officers of the Royal Society and the British Academy held at the Royal Society on 12 June 1968. It was felt by all present that a joint enterprise was called for and that there could be no more appropriate subject, linking science with the humanities, than archaeology. From this table talk evolved the concept of celebrating the 20th anniversary of the discovery of radiocarbon dating. Dr Allibone on the scientific side and Sir Mortimer Wheeler on the archaeological proceeded to organize the joint symposium, with the assistance of a small Committee, to whom we are much indebted. It was held at the Royal Society on 11 and 12 December 1969, and was attended by 350 persons, including the discoverer of radiocarbon dating himself, Professor Willard Libby. The event was a marked success, not only in that it brought together the representatives of different disciplines and countries, but because the papers recording new research at the points of overlap, and the discussions on them, made important additions to knowledge and understanding in both fields.

It is, therefore, with unusual pleasure, and as an earnest of the collaboration which will continue, that we present for the public jointly this report on our first combined symposium.

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