

From Poetry to Prehistory: Mary Boyle and the Abbé Breuil

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Abstract: This paper looks at aspects of the life and work of Mary Elizabeth Boyle, a Scottish aspiring poet and author who by chance found her way into prehistoric studies, firstly through working with Cambridge archaeologist Miles Burkitt and then, most significantly, by her encounter in 1920 with the Abbé Henri Breuil, the famous French prehistorian, whose aide and companion she became for the final 37 years of his life. Recently revealed documents allow for new insights, particularly with regard to unsuccessful publication projects, and include an archaeological poem and a preface by Hugo Obermaier to one of Boyle's unpublished books, reproduced here as appendices.

Keywords: Mary E. Boyle, Henri Breuil, Miles Burkitt, history of archaeology, Hugo Obermaier, prehistoric art, Scottish poetry

Introduction

Mary Elizabeth Boyle (1881–1974, hereafter MEB), insofar as she is known at all archaeologically, is referenced in relation to the Abbé Breuil (1877–1961), whose assistant, English translator and companion she became. The Abbé Henri Édouard Prosper Breuil was, and remains, one of the great figures in the history of archaeology from the first half of the 20th century (Cohen 1999; Davies 2009; Fagan 2014). His life and legacy have seen increasing critical evaluation benefitting from archive research (Coye 2006; Arnould 2011; Hurel 2011; Bahn 2016: 65–69). This contrasts with the lack of attention for the Abbé's 'faithful fellow-worker' of the second half of his life (Breuil 1949: 15), even though 'it is impossible to think of the Abbé without her' (Fawcus and Jarrell 1996). There are few obituaries of MEB (Anon 1975; Mora-Figueroa 1975), and in obituaries, biographies and reviews of Breuil's life and work she is often overlooked (e.g. Brodrick 1963; Skrotzky 1964). This may reflect reluctance by earlier commentators to express views while MEB was still alive, followed by a period of relative disinterest in Breuil before research in the history of archaeology came to prominence. More attention has been given recently to her work with the Abbé in southern Africa (Le Quellec 2006a, 2006b, 2010), but MEB deserves a larger footprint in the record on account of her own achievements, the part she played in Breuil's later career, and because she interacted with many well-known archaeologists and personalities of the mid-20th century.

In this overview of MEB's life, during which she went from poet to prehistorian, I aim to show her role in supporting the latter part of Breuil's career, alongside other activities undertaken on her own or with the Abbé. The focus is on publication projects, including previously unrecorded failures. The basis for undertaking this study is the availability of fresh archive

material, which has not yet been fully documented and is at an early stage of investigation, but should reveal much more about MEB's early days and her own literary output, as well as giving a more rounded insight into the relationship with the Abbé.¹

Formally the Abbé, as did most people, referred to MEB as Miss Boyle, whilst his letters to her were headed 'chère et grande amie'. To friends and family she was known variously as May, Mai or Mémé, but not Mary. Much of the information used in this paper comes from those letters written by MEB to her family which touch on archaeological matters. These are personal letters, written in a casual fashion, and frequently make use of remembered reported speech. Two attributes for which MEB was appreciated were her ability as a raconteuse and her memory, which made her an excellent conversationalist, at home in various social milieux, and these qualities enhance her correspondence. Of course there is often no means to check the validity of what she recounts, especially when quoting what others have said, and this can be compounded by allusion to what she and others, including Breuil, are about to do, rather than what they have done. Nevertheless, her

¹ This material was in the possession of Robert Walter Canning Large (1927–2011), MEB's nephew, to whom she was closely attached and with whom she corresponded candidly. Robert Large was the son of MEB's younger sister Dorothy from her second marriage and came to know the Abbé and many others in France around him and MEB. It was Robert as residuary legatee who marshalled her effects, from France and Scotland, and had them at his home in England. They include letters, offprints, photographs, poetry, prose and ephemera, separate from those that went to archives in France or elsewhere (Labarre 1997; Bon *et al.* 2004; Potin 2006; Hurel 2011: 19–25). Together with letters MEB sent to Robert and others they came to light after Robert's death in 2011. I am indebted to Robert's widow Margot Large and his daughter Sylvia Large for having realised their importance and for kindly making them available to me for examination. Any letters quoted in this paper as archive are from this 'R. Large Archive' unless otherwise indicated. In order to shorten this introductory paper and reduce the number of footnotes I have omitted specific documentation of each letter.



Fig. 1. Camphill, Milltimber, Aberdeen, Scotland. Autumn 1904. MEB standing on the right, her younger sister Dorothy standing on the left, with family group of Lumsdens and friends. Photographer unknown. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.

correspondence opens up a window on her life, with and without Breuil, which is remarkably evocative of an archaeological and social world now disappeared. By the late 1960s her letters became rather rambling and repetitive, dwelling on incidents further back in time.

MEB had a lifestyle which might be seen as rather eccentric, but was not so unusual for people of her class and situation, particularly in the case of the many over this period who remained spinsters. Early on she became accustomed to travelling widely both within Britain and on the Continent. In fact her whole life was lived out of suitcases and trunks since she never acquired a home of her own, did not cater for herself ('she couldn't boil an egg'; M. Large, pers. comm.), and relied on the hospitality of friends and family or serviced rented accommodation.² That she was able to sustain this lifestyle says much for her resilience and her social and networking skills, including the ability to maintain firm friendships throughout her life.

² MEB's preferred residence in Paris was Reid Hall (The American University Women's Centre), Rue de Chevreuse, Montparnasse, a residential centre for women which, between the Wars, was a vibrant social and intellectual hub. After World War II it developed more as a student study centre and in 1964 it was bequeathed to Columbia University and not thereafter available to such as MEB. The 'American Club', as MEB called it, was patronised by Dorothy Garrod (1892–1968) and many other foreign scholars, several of whom became MEB's friends. MEB was a popular resident and often entertained guests with her stories.

In offering this paper to my friend and colleague Jacek Lech I do so in recognition of his major contribution to the history of archaeology in the 20th century and his interest in the role played by individuals, whether eminent prehistorians themselves or their associates.

Early days

Mary Boyle was born on 11 August 1881 at Pittachar on the outskirts of the small town of Crieff in Perthshire, central Scotland. She was the second daughter of Agnes and Rear-Admiral Robert Hornby Boyle (1841–1892), who already had two sons and a daughter, but her mother Agnes Peile Boyle (1847–1885; née Lumsden) died after giving birth to a third daughter, Dorothy, when MEB was four years old. MEB's father married again, to Agnes Lucy Harris, to whom MEB grew much attached. Her father died in 1892, followed by her stepmother in 1899. As part of a large family, both immediate and extended, MEB did not lack for companionship and support, but these bereavements nevertheless left their mark.

In her earliest years, living in a comfortable upper middle-class Victorian environment and educated at home by governesses, MEB had a privileged youth, albeit overhung by sadness at the deaths of mother, father and stepmother. The family connections, such

as cousins the Campbell Colquhouns,³ the Lumsdens of Aberdeenshire,⁴ and the Metaxa family,⁵ show the circles to which MEB was accustomed and which helped shape her personality and outlook (Fig. 1). To round off her education, which had already included learning 'a fair amount of French' (Boyle 30.8.1971),⁶ MEB's uncle organized that she, her elder sister Agnes, and their older cousin Agnes Henrietta Pelly (1865–1943; née Campbell Colquhoun), should go to Italy to learn something of art, music and Italian. The two winters 1900–1901 and 1901–1902 were spent in and around Florence and Settignano. An important encounter at a singing class in Florence was with Nicky Mariano and her sister Alda – both of whom became lifelong friends – which led to stays at the I Tatti villa with the Berensons.⁷

On MEB's return from Italy in 1902, aged 20, doctors in London diagnosed tuberculosis and warned that she might not have long to live. She and her sister Agnes went to stay in Dunblane, Perthshire, near her cousins, where a chance encounter with an acquaintance of Agnes Pelly led to MEB spending a lengthy and leisured convalescence, from October 1903, in the household of Agnes Smith and her father at their home, at Kinbuck, near Dunblane. Agnes's father was the distinguished preacher and poet, the Revd Dr Walter Chalmers Smith (1824–1908), a former senior minister of the United Free Church in Edinburgh and best remembered as composer of the hymn *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*. Dr Smith encouraged her to make use of his extensive library – and she recalled reading 'all the classic Balzac novels in French and all the classic Russian novels in English' (Boyle 30.8.1971)⁸. She also gained exposure to

his intellectual circle, which must have influenced her literary endeavours.

Over the years MEB was at Dunblane she received medical treatment from local physician Dr Thomas Dewar,⁹ a friend of the Boyle family, who became especially close to his patient and with whom he maintained a regular correspondence until his death in 1931. Dr Dewar's treatment included frequent, sometimes daily, iodoform injections, his own special remedy for tubercular illness (Dewar 1909). Not until 1909 was MEB considered to be fully recovered, though by then she had been able to resume her travels: visits to Italy in 1906 and 1908, and France in 1907 are recorded. Subsequently she was in Italy in 1910, in France during the winter 1911–1912, and France, Switzerland and Italy in the winter of 1912–1913. In the autumn of 1913 she was again in France, in Paris, Lyon, and touring Provence. On these trips she was normally accompanied by her half-brother David and/or cousin Agnes Pelly.

At some point MEB began an annual routine of renting for the summer the farmhouse at Kindrochat, near Comrie, Perthshire (Fig. 2). The Dewar correspondence indicates she was renting Kindrochat by 1912, and it continued to feature whenever possible as her summer base (and Scottish address) through the 1920s into the 1930s, much to the enjoyment of the many friends and archaeological acquaintances for whom it provided a holiday stopover.

Bereavement struck MEB again soon after the beginning of World War I when her beloved half-brother David was killed in action at Le Cateau, France, on 26 August 1914. There seems little doubt that, just after her 34th birthday, this was a major marker-point in her life. In Paris she had been amused by being mistaken with her half-brother for a married couple (Fig. 3). Apart from the close relationship with David, there are no details of other emotional attachments.¹⁰

As an introspective child, liking nature more than people, MEB took early on to writing poetry and stories,

³ As a teenager MEB stayed at Chartwell, Kent, which was then one of the Campbell Colquhoun residences, and she went to her first ball from there. Chartwell subsequently became the home of Winston Churchill.

⁴ This included cousin Louisa Innes Lumsden (1840–1935; Morse 2004), with whom MEB corresponded after Dame Louisa's 'retirement' to Edinburgh. The formidable Dame Louisa had been to North America lecturing in the 1880s, and had published poetry in *The Scotsman* and prose in *Chambers Journal* (Lumsden 1933), so she may well have been an inspiration for MEB.

⁵ Admiral Count Frederick Cosmeto Metaxa (1847–1910) was MEB's stepmother's brother-in-law. MEB was bridesmaid to Linda de Pedrosa when she married Captain Count Frederick Robert Wyndham Metaxa.

⁶ This, and any references in the text for which (Boyle 30.8.1971) is cited, relate to a short autobiographical note compiled by MEB at this date and sent to her nephew John Boyle. I am grateful to Fiona Stanley, John Boyle's daughter, for access to this note and permission to quote from it.

⁷ Nicky Mariano (1887–1968) was Bernard Berenson's secretary and her sister Alda (Baroness von Anrep; 1883–1974) became the librarian at I Tatti, Berenson's villa at Settignano, outside Florence (Cumming 2015: 509–511). On learning of Mariano's death MEB reflected: 'Nicky was to Berenson as essential as I was to Breuil'. MEB got on well with Berenson (1865–1959) the expatriate American art historian. After a weekend staying at I Tatti in 1950 she wrote: 'Mr Berenson was extremely nice to me urging me to come back any time. He said I had an immense gift as a raconteuse and a prodigious memory'.

⁸ Look at footnote 6.

⁹ Thomas William Dewar FRSE (1861–1931) was an experimental physician and an accomplished artist in his spare time. He was the nephew of Sir James Dewar (1842–1923), Scottish chemist and physicist (inventor of the 'Dewar flask'), who was a stalwart of the Royal Institution (Crichton-Browne 1923; Meiklejohn 1990). Thomas Dewar introduced MEB to his uncle and aunt, whom she visited in 1921 at their London home, and who enabled her to attend the Royal Institution in London on at least one occasion.

¹⁰ As MEB wrote to R. Large in 1948: 'I learnt at 19 to keep my love affairs and personal friendships from my family though one has to speak about them to someone or they get out of proportion. Nora was a help to me which is why I am more closely attached to her than to my sisters'. MEB's Scottish lifelong friend, Nora Anderson Forman (1886–1974), also a spinster, was independently wealthy and her large London apartment (with its three resident staff) in Knightsbridge provided a base for MEB's (and sometimes Breuil's) London visits.



Fig. 2. Kindrochat, near Comrie, Perthshire, Scotland. MEB in front of the farmhouse she rented whenever spending the summer in Scotland and where many archaeologists visited her, including Henri Breuil, Raymond Lantier, and Hugo Obermaier. Undated, but probably 1920s. Photographer unknown. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.



Fig. 3. MEB and her half-brother David in a commercial studio photograph, presumably taken in Paris. Undated, but probably late 1900s or early 1910s (David died in 1914). Photographer unknown. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.

and she continued to compose verse throughout her life, though it became more spasmodic after the 1920s. Her first major poem, *Pilate in Exile at Vienne* (Boyle 1915a), was published by Heffers of Cambridge, followed by *Aftermath* (Boyle 1916) from the same publisher. Correspondence with Ernest William Heffer (1871–1948) during the period 1915–1919 shows her hope that he would publish more, but although he read and advised on her drafts of poetry and prose, he was not persuaded of their commercial viability.

Drum-na-Keil (Boyle 1921a) and *Daisies and Apple Trees*, a book of children's verses (Boyle 1922a), were produced by printers in Scotland, and a final extended work, *Herodias Inconsolable* (Boyle 1923), was published in London. Several poems appeared in newspapers and anthologies (Boyle 1915b, 1921b, 1924a, 1927a, 1929), and her poetry garnered interest in the local and national press and received favourable reviews. *Aftermath* is particularly affecting, being a series of sonnets in remembrance of David Boyle. These poems have been largely forgotten, although studies in recent years, because of *Aftermath*, have considered MEB as a war poet (Khan 1988: 146–148; Plain 1995), and her work has appeared in new anthologies (McMillan and Byrne 2003).

MEB also wrote numerous pieces of prose and sought opportunities to publish in newspapers and

magazines (Boyle 1913a, 1913b, 1914a, 1914b, 1922b). In fact, insofar as she had any plans for her future, she harboured the desire to pursue a literary career. The catalyst linking this to archaeology can be traced to a chance meeting when she was in Italy in 1912. In a guest house near Florence she encountered the Burkitt family from Cambridge: Norrisian Professor of Divinity F.C. Burkitt (1864–1935; Bethune-Baker 2004), his wife Amy, and their son Miles Crawford Burkitt (1890–1971), who in 1915 was to become the first university lecturer in Britain on prehistoric archaeology (Smith 2009, 19–28). Miles Burkitt had been introduced to Breuil in Cambridge and invited to join him in 1913 in northern Spain (Smith 2009; Díaz-Andreu 2013), where the cave of Castillo was being investigated by Hugo Obermaier (1877–1946).¹¹ Burkitt was with Breuil in Spain again in 1914, becoming the Abbé's first British 'pupil', and going on to collaborate with him in a survey of Andalusian rock art (Breuil and Burkitt 1929).

MEB was invited by Mrs Burkitt to stay in Cambridge and visited often during the 1910s, getting on well with Professor Burkitt and the family. They encouraged MEB in her literary ambitions and it is probable that it was Amy Burkitt, a strong advocate of MEB's writing, who facilitated the initial contact with Ernest Heffer.

Encouraged by Breuil to write a book on prehistory, Miles Burkitt recruited MEB as his literary secretary. As he acknowledged in his resulting *Prehistory* (Burkitt 1921: vii–viii): 'For the actual writing of the book I tender my most profound thanks to my secretary, Miss M. Boyle. It is certainly true to say that without her skilful co-operation the book would never have been written; not only was I relieved of the merely mechanical work, but further, the substance dictated was altered and put into a more readable form, and the references have been verified'.

Or, as MEB put it herself: 'I knew nothing about prehistory, hardly anyone did, but I knew a little about writing English and each thing he said I said it again in my way asking if that was right (Boyle 30.8.1971).¹² Similarly, in the preface to his next book, Burkitt acknowledged that My very best thanks are due to Miss Mary Boyle, who has acted as secretary – by no means a merely mechanical work' (Burkitt 1923: 1). Burkitt's knowledge and conceptions of prehistory were greatly influenced by Breuil (Burkitt 1921: vi; Smith 2009:

20–23; Díaz-Andreu 2013), so the version of prehistory which MEB assimilated in Cambridge, and the stories of life and work with Breuil with which Miles Burkitt presumably regaled her, could have predisposed her to what happened next.

MEB was with the Burkitts when Breuil came to Cambridge to receive his honorary doctorate on 19 May 1920 (Clark 1989: 36). Breuil had been invited to stay with them and this was when MEB and the Abbé first met. Because she spoke French, MEB was asked to attend to him whenever Miles Burkitt was out of the house. As MEB explained, it was during one of the times when she was with Breuil that: (...) 'I ran out of ideas not knowing exactly what one said to Abbés and I asked if he would like to see the Professor's rock garden which he accepted with pleasure and suddenly said 'I don't see why you come to Cambridge to learn prehistory from my pupil when you might come to Paris and learn it from me'' (Boyle 30.8.1971)¹³.

MEB records being struck by Breuil's exceptional character (Boyle 1971: 86; Boyle *et al.* 1963: 13) and, in the absence of any focused life plans, this invitation from the Abbé was attractive, and thus began the relationship that was the determining factor of the rest of her life.

It was not until four years later that MEB started her studies in Paris with Breuil, but meanwhile they kept in touch. Travelling and lecturing were a major part of life for MEB in the early 1920s. Letters from Dewar show that she was abroad (Paris, Rome, and Geneva) for the winter of 1922–1923 with Nora Forman, including visiting Nicky Mariano at the Berenson villa in December 1922.

In October 1924 MEB gave a lecture on *Cave paintings in France and Spain* to a meeting of the Glasgow Archaeological Society. Dewar attended and wrote the next day congratulating her on her delivery, adding 'when you return from France and Breuil's tuition and having seen some of the caves you will lecture still better'. MEB had already put to use the knowledge of prehistory gained from Burkitt and her developing acquaintance with the Abbé, as she explained: 'In 1922 [*sic*; actually 1923] I went to the United States to visit a friend (...) and wishing to bring something interesting to show one who was so immersed in the study of Art, I wrote to the Abbé Breuil having met him in Cambridge, to ask if I could borrow a set of the colour-prints of the Altamira book, which were unbound and in Cambridge (...). He replied, 'yes, if you return them to me personally in Paris'. For 4½ months I showed these colour-plates in (...) Universities and in innumerable Clubs and Societies;

¹¹ Hugo Obermaier (1877–1946), a Bavarian Catholic priest, shared a career as a prehistorian with his friend Breuil. He occupied a Chair alongside Breuil at the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine in the early 1910s, subsequently becoming a Professor at Madrid University 1928–1936 (Züchner 2009; Lanzarote Guiral 2011).

¹² Look at footnote 6. Burkitt's *Prehistory* was an influential book but the Breuil bias was noted by reviewers, as were 'evidence of haste' and 'poor writing style, frequent repetitions, apparent contradictions and possible errors' (Smith 2009: 27), for which MEB was presumably at least in part responsible.

¹³ Look at footnote 6.



(Comrie, Perthshire, and Paris.)

Miss Boyle was first the pupil, then the collaborator, of the Abbé Henri Breuil (the Prince of Monaco's Professor at the Institute de Paleontologie Humaine, Paris).

Miss Mary E. Boyle

Author of "Pilate in Exile"; "Aftermath"; "Drum-na-Keil"; "Daisies and Appletrees, or Secrets Children Share"; "Herodias Inconsolable"; "Man before History"; "Barma Grande, the Great Cave and its inhabitants"; "In Search of our Ancestors."

THE DISCOVERY OF THE PAINTED CAVES IN FRANCE AND SPAIN.

A Five-Year-Old Girl Leads the Way—Explorers thought to be Mad—England follows France—Scoffers are Converted—Old Finds Remembered—The Man who Found a Theory and Left a Science—Adventure of the Three Youths and their Foster-brother.

THE OLDEST ART IN THE WORLD AND THE ARTISTS.

Engraving, from Finger-drawing in Clay to the Finest Work on Stone—Painting, from Hands Dipped in Ochre to the Great Friezes—"Sorcerers"—The First Artists and Their Difficulties—Were the Caves Temples?—Were Art and Religion Born Together?

BARMA GRANDE, MENTONE. (Few Slides.)

The People of the Red Cliffs—Strange Burials of Shell-crowned Folk—Little Children in Shell Kilts—The Man with the Red Halo—The Lady in the Cloak—Strange Negroids—The Cro-Magnon People—Their Ornaments—Their Art and Their Dinners.

"Delighted her hearers by her charming voice and easy delivery."—"Mentone and Monte Carlo News."

"An Interesting Lecture."—"Glasgow Herald."

"She possesses the gift of clothing the most unimaginative material with the glamour of the mysterious."—"Montreal Daily Star."

Fig. 4. Extract of page from the List of Lecturers produced by the Lecture Bureau of the Selborne Society, featuring Mary Boyle. Date unknown but probably late 1920s or early 1930s. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.

two years later I was fetched back to do a similar 4½ months tour with the same pictures' (Boyle 1965a: xvi).

The two lecture tours in the USA were over the winters of 1923-1924 and 1926-1927. The Boston *Christian Science Monitor* for 11 January 1924 carried an extensive preview of her talk on the painted caves of Spain and France, describing her, rather grandly, as 'poet, author, and archaeologist' and a 'pupil' of the Abbé Henri Breuil and Miles Burkitt. In the *Bulletin of the American Association of University Women*, Washington, for January 1924, which advertised MEB's lecture on 3 January, she is described even more grandly as a 'noted archaeologist'.

For the tour in 1926-1927, presumably trading on Breuil/Burkitt connections, MEB was able to produce an encomium from Henry Fairfield Osborn of the American Museum of Natural History, New York. As well as lecturing on cave paintings, she recited her own poetry during both her tours. Some of these lectures were given free, others were fee-paid, and she also sold copies of her poetry. That MEB was seeking speaking engagements is evident from her entry in the Selborne Society's Lecture Bureau *List of Lecturers* (Fig. 4; Clarke 2005).

The 1927 USA tour came to an end clouded by concerns at home. MEB's younger sister Dorothy had entered into what the family felt was an unsuitable liaison. MEB pleaded with her by post not to rush into anything and decided to cut short her trip in order to intercede face-to-face, but Dorothy: '(...) could not wait (...) to give

me the time to come back from the States but married on the day I landed and spoilt her own life as well as my then American career. The latter may have been a blessing in disguise but her impetuosity brought her little but trouble'.¹⁴

From the winter of 1924 MEB attended the Abbé's classes in Paris. At the beginning the 'master-student' situation appears to have been demanding. Not perhaps as demanding as that for Dorothy Garrod, who was tasked with getting to grips with Compton's publications on the Somme gravels (Garrod 1961: 206; Boyle *et al.* 1963: 14; Caton-Thompson 1969: 343), but more revealing of entirely different, non-archaeological, mutual interests. Aware of her fascination with the esoteric, Breuil asked MEB to find out all about 'cosmic light' and report back to him (Mary Morrison, pers. comm.). Presumably she succeeded because she rapidly came to assume the role of his amanuensis. In particular she became Breuil's valued accomplice in his *relevés* (i.e. his reproduction drawings and paintings), produced by his method of direct copying of rock art involving tracing, which required assistance not only in holding the copy-paper firmly in place against the rock surface and registering the junctions when moving from one sheet of paper to the next, but also, in the context of cave and megalithic art, holding the required light source to the Abbé's satisfaction (Boyle 1971: 92; Boyle *et al.* 1963: 15). Silence while he worked was another attribute

¹⁴ The reference to her American career is enigmatic, apart from a comment by Dr Dewar in a 1926 letter to MEB: 'I'm glad you refused the offer of the post in the girls' school in America'.

he valued in MEB's presence with him in the caves and tombs. This work was not without its occasional dangers; MEB recounts an accident while working in the cave of Pair-non-Pair in 1936.¹⁵ She enjoyed this work with the Abbé, however, and was at least once moved to express this poetically (Appendix 1).

Publications: success and failure before World War II

During the 1920s MEB began to publish on archaeology under her own name. Her poem of 1921, *Drum-na-Keil: the ridge of the burial place*, was a fantasy on the mystique of a prehistoric monument and its setting, but without much archaeological awareness, whereas by 1924 she had produced her own introduction to prehistory. *Man Before History: a Short Account of Prehistoric Times* (Boyle 1924b) was a work aimed at children ('for boys and girls 12 to 16'), which was reissued in the UK in 1930 and 1939. After its launch in the USA in 1924, it was also republished there with a different title, *Prehistoric Man: Life in the New and Old Stone Ages* (Boyle 1931). The book has an introduction by Breuil and four colour pages of his reproductions of animal paintings. In the acknowledgements MEB thanks the Abbé for not only providing these illustrations, but also for reading part of the manuscript. More significant, however, is that her 'interest in the subject was awakened by the teaching of Mr Miles Burkitt' (Boyle 1924b: 5), since the book is clearly derivative of both of his first volumes (Burkitt 1921, 1923).

Man Before History reveals that by this stage MEB had gained only a partial understanding of prehistory but one which adhered by default to a Breuil storyline as filtered through Burkitt. Looking back 90 years to this book, it is hard to get a sense of how it might have been regarded by its target young teen audience. It now seems an awkward mix of quite complex concepts and specialist terminology, but delivered in a chatty, rhetorical fashion, and it does have errors of fact.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it was received well by reviewers,¹⁷ and that it went into several editions indicates it was widely seen and read.

In Search of Our Ancestors, subtitled: *An Attempt to Retrace Man's Origin and Development from Later Ages back to their*

¹⁵ She recalled later: 'I was nearly finished yesterday by a ladder, Breuil, and a lamp falling on me. He had planted the ladder on boards and trestles we had been standing on to reach the engravings and I had just got down to get a brush when I saw the whole thing sway and jumped forward to steady it and the ladder struck the side of my head and my arm. My thick hair saved me from having my head cut but it is a rainbow colour today and my arm a sight for the gods. Breuil got off with bruises on one leg as his fall was broken'.

¹⁶ E.g. MEB mistakenly described Aurignacian split-based points as being of flint rather than bone (Boyle 1924b: 73).

¹⁷ 'Within its limits this is an admirable little book and one of the best of its kind' (*Supplement to Nature*, 13 September 1924, p. 410).

Beginnings, came next (Boyle 1927b). This was a more ambitious undertaking, written for adults, in which MEB followed the Abbé's suggestion of telling the story of prehistory backwards from the Iron Age to pre-human times. It is a well-illustrated book, again including colour plates of the Abbé's reproductions of cave paintings and a preface by him. *In Search of Our Ancestors* shows that MEB now had a broader knowledge and understanding of prehistory, but still on a rather superficial level which allowed errors to creep in, and still heavily indebted to Burkitt's *Prehistory*. This work was not reprinted; perhaps the publishers felt it would be too difficult to purge the book of the 'inaccuracies and errors' alluded to in an acerbic review (Dobson 1929).

MEB's other monographic publication was a booklet about the Italian site of Barma Grande at Grimaldi (Boyle 1925). She was encouraged to write this as a guide for English-speaking tourists by the Abbé and Alfredo Lorenzi, curator of the museum at Barma Grande, with whom MEB spent some time digging 'about in the floor of the cave' (Boyle 1925: 3). MEB seems rarely to have participated in archaeological excavation, and then only during some of the Abbé's irregular delvings, for example at Lascaux in 1949 (Leroi-Gourhan 1979), so the experience at Barma Grande in the 1920s was for her an important one (Fig. 5a-b).¹⁸

Prehistoric Art

If these three publications of MEB can be regarded as on the whole successful ventures, there were others in the 1920s–1930s which never reached fruition. One failed project which is very instructive, since it presages difficulties to come, is that Breuil was commissioned in 1927 by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, to produce a major work on prehistoric art. MEB was contracted by the Press to spend six months in Paris over the winter 1927–1928 to work with the Abbé on producing the book, which was to be in English. From the outset A.P. Norrington at the Press referred to this intended publication as 'Breuil's great book',¹⁹ and clearly hopes were high for a prestigious product, probably requiring two volumes.

By September 1928 Norrington had doubts: 'We have been reading the chapters you sent us, and I am afraid that, to be frank with you, the book is not turning out at all as we had hoped'. The problem at this stage

¹⁸ The photographs in Fig. 5a-b date to 1928, the year when Breuil visited the excavations (Balout 1963: 23). Fig. 5b is the same image reproduced by Ripoll Perelló (1964: fig.5) and given a date of 1933, but without any mention of the photo in his accompanying text.

¹⁹ Sir Arthur Lionel Pugh Norrington (1899–1982), publisher, President of Trinity College Oxford, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University (MacLagan 2004). His letters to MEB are in the R. Large Archive.



Fig. 5a-b. Barma Grande, Grimaldi, Italy, where Mary Boyle participated in the excavations; she holds a digging pick in her right hand (Fig. 5a). Photographs taken in 1928 during the visit by Breuil and Marcellin Boule (either side of MEB in Fig. 5b). Photographer unknown. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.

hinged on the drafts being too focused on the history of the discovery of prehistoric art and on controversies, rather than on a survey of the art itself and its changes through time. But also there was concern that ‘a more English book’ was needed because ‘your version does read very like a translation’. MEB continued working on the text, but the concerns at the Press continued and relations with the Abbé began to falter.

In 1930 Norrington wrote confidently that ‘The Delegates have now had an opportunity of considering the typescript of Volume I of the great work as a whole, and are astonished by its range and erudition (...) it should instantly become a classic of prehistory’. There was, however, a caveat: ‘it will be necessary to have the text worked over from the point of view of the English’, and to that end a ‘sympathetic reader coming fresh to it’ will be used, as the Abbé is to be informed. Breuil took umbrage at this, protesting that he wanted no others involved and definitely no names on the title page other than his and MEB’s. By November 1930 the Press had decided not to contemplate a second volume, and to further consider what was to be done with the existing typescript. In fact relations broke down completely and the Abbé withdrew from the project.

The Robert Large Archive does not include correspondence from the Breuil/MEB side of the affair, but some further insight can perhaps be gained by looking back to Breuil’s previous experience with the Clarendon Press in publishing his volume on Andalusian rock pictures, which included on the title page ‘with the collaboration of Sir Montagu Pollock’

(Breuil and Burkitt 1929), the person who also assisted with Burkitt’s *Prehistory* (Burkitt 1921: viii). The Abbé was not happy with Montagu-Pollock’s name being there and was annoyed by the omission of that of Willoughby Verner (Ripoll Perelló 1994: 124, 2002: 73). In April 1931 the same Sir M. F. Montagu-Pollock (1864–1938) wrote to the Abbé advising him in the strongest possible terms not to continue with an English version of this book. He had obviously been asked by the Press for advice on the text and had concluded that ‘unless rewritten by yourself it would be damaging to your reputation. Forgive me, as a friend, for speaking so openly’. Montagu-Pollock’s letter in the archive is a handwritten copy made by MEB, which incorporates comments Breuil had scribbled on the original. So where in the letter Montagu-Pollock has expressed the fear that if taken by another publisher the book would be a failure, Breuil has added: ‘*Non, seulement pour les ignorants et les gens de parti pris*’ and, more strongly, where he suggests the need for rearrangement to make it easier for students ‘*Je m’en fiche des debutants!*’ One wonders how much of what was intended for this book found its way into *Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art* (Breuil 1952a, 1952b).

The Clarendon Press episode was clearly unfortunate but in MEB’s case did not prevent her entering into similar difficulties in the 1930s and after. From other MEB correspondence there are some factors, however, which shed light on underlying problems faced by this and other projects, which are important for understanding the way in which many of Breuil’s later publications were produced. One is the technical



Fig. 6. Pindal, Asturias, northern Spain. 20 March 1932. Left to right: Hugo Obermaier, Renée Doize, MEB, and Henri Breuil. Photographer probably Cecil Mowbray. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.

difficulty of translating into English some of the terms and concepts used by the Abbé, whose language could be complex. MEB complains, for example, of what seems to translate as ‘mimetic art conventionalised’, and comments (when the Abbé starts a correspondence with an English bishop about his ideas on Adam and Eve) that ‘the translation of his ideas on these subjects is not easy’. Another is that the way MEB and the Abbé worked together meant there was often no definitive manuscript text by Breuil. She might be taking down his dictation or they could jointly shape a portion of text verbally, which MEB would then note down. When there were written texts or notes provided by Breuil, MEB could not always read them fully, so notoriously opaque was the Abbé’s handwriting, and he had to be asked to explain verbally, or else on occasion MEB extemporised with textual matter. These procedures show, for example, why when asked for the French text from which the English version was produced for the benefit of a translator to work on the proposed Spanish edition of the Altamira volume, it had to be admitted that one did not exist (cf. Fawcus 1966a).

Iberians

Another doomed project, this time MEB’s own, lasted through the 1930s. In anticipation of his absences in Africa in 1929 and in China and elsewhere during the 1930s Breuil was instrumental in facilitating MEB’s studies with one of his closest friends and colleagues, Hugo Obermaier at the University in Madrid. When she met Obermaier in Paris in 1928 she commented ‘the two Abbés are great contrasts’. MEB and Obermaier got on well; some of Obermaier’s correspondence addresses her as ‘grande Reine de toutes les ibérias’ and in 1934 he wrote a very supportive encomium for her use. Their

most significant collaboration was over the production of the monograph on Altamira (Breuil and Obermaier 1935a, 1935b). MEB was responsible for the English text and commented that ‘working to please both Breuil and Obermaier when they were together was not too easy’.

On her first visit to Obermaier in Madrid in 1929 he proposed the Iberians as a suitable field for her studies. This challenge was accepted and after several years of research MEB produced a complete typescript and illustrations for a book to be entitled *The Iberians and their Art*. Whereas her previous books were prefaced by Breuil, this one was to be introduced by Obermaier (Appendix 2). Much to the disappointment of both MEB and Obermaier, after an initial unsuccessful (and foolhardy?) approach to the Clarendon Press in 1932, further overtures to a publisher in Belgium and subsequent submission in 1935 of the completed text to at least four publishers in England all met with rejection. Whilst disheartened, MEB did not give up and was still in contact with Obermaier about the book in 1938. The only published outcome for all her efforts, however, was from her presentation at the 1935 Anthropology Congress in Brussels (Boyle 1936).

In autumn 1931 MEB was in northern Spain with Breuil and Obermaier, and again in 1932 along with Breuil’s ‘pupils’ Renée Doize and Cecil Mowbray (Fig. 6), including a week at Altamira in March, where they assisted the Abbé with the revision of some of his *relevés* (Hurel 2011: 343). In summer 1932 Obermaier was in Scotland staying with MEB at Kindrochat, and over winter 1934–1935 MEB continued her studies under his auspices in Madrid. As with her work with Breuil, MEB was useful to Obermaier and vice versa: ‘I have translated a geological article on loess for O. from Spanish into English and typed it by which I earned a hundred pesetas and today post a short article to the *Illustrated London News* which I wrote for him on a newly discovered Iberian city fortress. If it is taken we share the proceeds’.

In March 1935 she and Obermaier spent a week together in southern Spain and, as she frequently managed after the war (by herself or with Nora Forman), MEB spent Christmas 1935 at El Castillo, Arcos de la Frontera, Cádiz, the residence of her friends Vittoria and Bill Riddell (Boyle 1965a).²⁰ In August 1936 Obermaier was at the Oslo Congress, as were Breuil and MEB, when the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War effectively put an end to his career in Madrid (Züchner 2009).

²⁰ William (Bill) H. Riddell (1880–1947), naturalist painter, who published a booklet on Altamira (Riddell 1938) and contributed to *Antiquity* (Riddell 1942).

The Picts

Breuil was a frequent visitor to Scotland during the 1920s and 1930s, including staying with MEB at Kindrochat, for the first time in 1926. Intrigued by his encounter with Pictish art (Balout 1963: 28), Breuil encouraged MEB to study Pictish monuments, which she adopted as another project during the 1930s, marking her main engagement with Scottish archaeology. She spoke on this topic at congresses in Oslo in 1936 and Edinburgh in 1937, and published her studies in a Spanish journal (Boyle 1933; Obermaier translated her paper into Spanish), in a paper in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (Boyle 1938), and belatedly, after the intention to publish in *Préhistoire* fell through, in the German periodical *IPEK*²¹ (Boyle 1948). In these works MEB took a heretical view that some carved stone monuments record historically identifiable events which are centuries more recent than conventional dating would permit (Stevenson 1959: 33). In her Pictish studies MEB made loose art-historical analogies, far-flung both in time and place, undoubtedly another pointer to problems to come when interpreting rock art in Africa. Most rash was her suggestion regarding the derivation of the enigmatic ‘Pictish beast’ (or ‘Scottish elephant’) symbol from prehistoric megalithic art of the Morbihan in Brittany (Boyle 1948: 73; cf. Daniel 1981: 235). These flaws, including the introduction of personal anecdote in the text of the *IPEK* paper, show a *modus operandi* of research presentation which resurfaces in the African volumes. One positive aspect of MEB’s *IPEK* paper was that it was copiously illustrated by her own photographs of Pictish stones. Despite the long gap between writing and publication (Boyle 1948: 52), there was no attempt at revision or updating, MEB’s interests and capacity being committed elsewhere by the time proofs appeared.

What the correspondence now available in the archive reveals, however, is that the original intention was to produce a book on the Pictish material, co-authored with Cecil Mowbray.²² They were both working on the chronology of Pictish art, initially pursuing some of their research together. Nevertheless, there was no joint publication, and in Mowbray’s own substantial paper on the subject there is no mention of any joint venture (Curle 1940), just as Mowbray’s name is absent from MEB’s papers.

In addition to her own research, MEB was busy with work for the Abbé, including assisting and translating his study of the bone and antler from the ‘Choukoutien’ site in China (Breuil 1939). Even so, she was also

pursuing opportunities for other translation work, both to accommodate the aspirations of friends within her and Breuil’s circle and with a view to acquiring additional income. Thus in the mid-1930s when she and Breuil were socialising in Paris with Henry de Monfreid and his wife Amgart, MEB started translating into English Monfreid’s *Vers les terres hostiles de l’Éthiopie*.²³ Several publishers were approached about the concept and declined, but in 1936 Amgart sent Methuen in London MEB’s translation of this book and a proposal to consider translation of another of Monfreid’s books, *Le lépreux*. The response must have been negative, though Methuen did publish two of Monfreid’s other books, translated by Helen Buchanan Bell.

None of the relinquished plans for books, nor those of translations, should be evaluated independently of the circumstances of the time. The developing political situation in the later 1930s, which both MEB and the Abbé followed closely via the newspapers and their network of contacts throughout Europe, would have been a distraction, and the eventual outbreak of war and the unexpected and dramatic changes in both their circumstances must have contributed to the final abandonment of these projects.

World War II and Africa

Given what was happening in Europe at the end of the 1930s, it appears remarkable that Breuil asked MEB to return from England to France to assist him with his work in the museum at Bordeaux. This was the period in 1939 of the ‘phoney war’ and, in challenging circumstances, getting to Paris involved MEB doggedly crossing the Channel three times before finally being allowed to enter France. The work in Bordeaux was accomplished, with the help of their friend Suzanne de St-Mathurin,²⁴ and was followed by the recording of decorated blocks at the Grotte de la Marche, Lussac-Châteaux (Vienne), then further recording work at Kercado and Mané-Lud in the Morbihan, Brittany. They were working there when given news of the German army entering Denmark and Norway, and returned to Paris on 12 April 1940.

MEB left Paris for London on 29 April 1940, while the Abbé moved initially to the South-West. Thus when he became involved in the early stages of the examination of Lascaux in the Dordogne (Delluc and Delluc 2008: 53–55), which was discovered in September 1940, MEB was

²¹ *Jahrbuch für prähistorische und ethnographische Kunst*.

²² Cecil L. Curle, née Mowbray (1901–1987). Art historian and archaeologist who did important work in Scotland (Ritchie 1987). She studied with Breuil and others in Paris in the 1930s.

²³ Henry de Monfreid (1879–1974), French adventurer and author. Breuil travelled with Monfreid on his dhow in 1933 (Balout 1963: 36; Ripoll Perelló 1964: 25; Arnould 2011: 167–170; Hurel 2011: 345–347).

²⁴ Suzanne Cassou de Saint-Mathurin (1900–1991; Mohen 1991), the excavator of the Roc-aux-Sorciers rock shelter at Angles-sur-l’Anglin (Vienne) with its Magdalenian sculptured frieze. Associated in projects with Dorothy Garrod and Germaine Henri-Martin.



Fig. 7a-b. North-east Angola. June 1948. a - Musolexi mine, Lunda. Breuil examines a rock specimen, MEB is on the left, and the other figures are unidentified. b - Luaco, Lunda. MEB and Breuil with three unidentified figures. Photographer(s) unknown. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.

not able to participate and could only enviously await the Abbé's news by mail.

At first MEB went to Scotland as secretary to her cousin who was raising the local Home Guard and collecting clothes for refugee children. She then applied for a post with the Imperial Censorship, taking a test in Edinburgh in July 1940 to demonstrate her foreign language abilities. Having succeeded in her application she was recruited and sent to Liverpool in September 1940, where she worked in the Censorship head office for five months. There she used her Spanish and Italian as well as French in the course of Censorship work and she recounts how, because of her particular knowledge and life experience, she was treated by her colleagues as a sort of first-stop encyclopaedia.

Promotion followed further tests and resulted in being sent to Bermuda, which was the central location for the Imperial Censorship monitoring of all communications from Europe.²⁵ The remarkable circumstances by which after 18 months MEB was transferred, quite irregularly, from Bermuda to join the Abbé in Lisbon in 1942 and then accompany him to South Africa have been recounted many times and need not be recapitulated (Garrod 1961: 206; Boyle 1965b: 140–141, 1971: 94, Le Quellec 2010: 63–64; Arnould 2011: 227). Suffice it to say that under the patronage of Premier Jan Smuts (1870–1950) they became attached to the Archaeological

Survey of the Union of South Africa at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, where they remained until 1945.²⁶

There was a small French community in South Africa for which the Abbé was a celebrity. While there he had a newsworthy status in which MEB participated by association.²⁷ She had her own contacts to take up, in particular Ian Campbell Colquhoun who ran Clathick, an orange farm at Rustenburg in the Transvaal, and she and the Abbé soon made other friends, some of whom, such as the Cansons and Grassetts (Breuil 1949: 15), proved subsequently important for MEB back in Paris. They left South Africa in 1945, but returned again in 1947 and 1950 (Fig. 7). During their years in Africa they undertook an impressively prodigious amount of research (Champion 1962; Pales 1962).

The episode which became both the highpoint and the nadir of their work in Africa – the White Lady of

²⁵ <http://www.bermudastamps.co.uk/info/imperial-censorship/> (accessed 3 January 2016).

²⁶ 'The Abbé Breuil, who was met at the station today by a delegation from the Fighting French community of Johannesburg, declined to discuss politics (...) saying that he had his own thoughts and opinions, but was not a military man or a politician, but a scientist (...) I don't want life, I want work (...) South Africa is the best ground for hard work' (*The Johannesburg Star*, 28 October 1942).

²⁷ In a letter to R. Large in 1944 MEB wrote: 'I am now de Gaulle's employee adorned with a badge of the Lorraine cross and have given up all other work but the Abbé's secretarial business. There is plenty to do as he is the most important Frenchman in this part of the Continent'. Other correspondence shows that MEB initially worked in Censorship at the Johannesburg post-office, but the French Consulate objected to this as incompatible with her paid role as Breuil's secretary.

the Brandberg (Breuil 1948a, 1948b, 1955a, 1966a) – a painted figure they made famous but misidentified in gender, colour, date and origin, has come to overshadow anything else the Abbé and MEB did in southern Africa (Davis 1990: 281–283; Mulot 2006). Aged 70 by the time he first encountered the White Lady face to face, and 78 when the monograph was published in 1955, the Abbé was content to leave most of the speculation on the White Lady's pedigrees to MEB, ignoring all advice (Le Quellec 2010: 85–86), and it is this aspect in particular which has haunted their reputations (Garlake 1993).

When the *White Lady* volume was republished, MEB took the opportunity to write a new preface explaining more about the South African venture (Boyle 1966). No mention was made of the criticism their interpretations had attracted and there were no references to new research; the main body of the text, including her own chapter, with all its flaws, was simply reprinted. As in the case of Pictish art, MEB was predisposed to see exotic external influences, and was clearly as stubborn as Breuil in refusing to consider any revision of her opinions once formulated. In this, as in other respects, MEB and the Abbé were a good match.

The final years with Breuil

After 'retirement' at 70, Breuil spent more time in his house and garden at L'Isle-Adam, north of Paris (Fig. 8). There and in Paris MEB and the Abbé continued to work on his publications and archive. They travelled and participated in conferences, and were in general extremely active despite their ages. The Abbé's most famous and widely-used work – *Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art* – was published in 1952 both in French and in an English version translated by MEB, sealing his reputation as the leading authority on the subject (Breuil 1952a, 1952b). MEB is not acknowledged in the French edition of this book, but she was much involved in its production along with Fernand Windels (1893–1954), the photographer and publisher of the volume, which was well received by specialist and non-specialist reviewers.²⁸ There were criticisms, for example of the accuracy and selectivity of some of Breuil's copies of parietal art, most negative of which came from Osbert Guy Stanhope Crawford (1953), such that Dorothy Garrod took the unusual step of publishing a rebuttal in defence of the Abbé (Garrod 1953). Crawford's harshest words, however, were directed at MEB for the 'editorial slovenliness' and 'the gaucheries of translation', 'defects, for which we expect the Abbé is not directly responsible' (Crawford 1953: 48–49). MEB reported Breuil dismissing this as nit-picking, and in



Fig. 8. MEB and Breuil outside the Abbé's house at L'Isle-Adam (Val-d'Oise), northern France. Undated, but between 1957 when MEB received the Légion d'honneur she is wearing and Breuil's death in 1961. Photographer unknown. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.

a dispassionate sense it surely was, since Crawford made no allowance for the circumstances of production. Unlike Windels's (1949) own book on Lascaux, published by Faber and Faber, this one was produced entirely 'in house'. Thus MEB had no benefit of the copy-editors that a commercial publishing house would use to iron out minor issues such as Crawford raises. The flaws are there, but reflect the ambition of this local Montignac production.

Following on from the fieldwork in southern Africa, an outstanding commitment was the publication of Breuil's work on rock art, undertaken contractually on behalf of the South African Government. This turned out to be a traumatic episode for both MEB and the Abbé, which continued for MEB after the Abbé's death. The Government insisted on initial publication in English, not French. Since a series of high-quality, technically complex volumes was envisaged, the Abbé and MEB felt an English person was needed to negotiate with a publisher in Britain on their behalf. An arrangement was entered into with W.J.W. Synge, beginning in 1951, to proceed with this. Thereafter matters became complicated, and this is one case where the Abbé's intuition in selecting a suitable collaborator let him

²⁸ 'Une sensationnelle publication d'art préhistorique', review by H. Goutier, *Le régional du nord de l'Île-de-France*, 21 June 1952; 'A monument to French science', review by B. D. Conlan, *Daily Mail* (Continental Edition), 16 August 1952.

down (Fawcus and Jarrell 1996). An Abbé Breuil Trust was created, primarily to receive grants and donations to fund the publishing costs. Syngé assumed the role of Managing Trustee and appointed Arnold Fawcus/Trianon Press to produce the first two volumes. The *White Lady* volume became the first in the pipe-line, but a major problem over the binding saw the beginning of litigation. Meanwhile, having fallen out with Syngé and seeking his resignation and the closure of the Trust, Breuil and MEB developed a good working relationship with Arnold Fawcus and his team in Paris. All the problems with the Trust involved a great deal of worry and diversion from their work for both the Abbé and MEB (Boyle 1966). Nevertheless, volume one, *The White Lady*, did appear in 1955 (reissued in 1966), and the subsequent five volumes (ten or twelve were planned originally) appeared in 1957, 1959, 1960, 1966 and 1975.²⁹

MEB assisted in the 1954 exhibition of the Abbé's artwork in London (Arts Council 1954) and another special visit to London was in 1957 when she was invested with the *Légion d'honneur* at the French Embassy. She was extremely proud of this award, and often wore her medal (Fig. 8). Also in 1957 was the grand ceremony at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris in celebration of the Abbé's life. MEB was not involved in organizing this or the accompanying publication (Lantier *et al.* 1957) because she was part of the event, receiving a special, glowing tribute from Breuil in his speech, his most significant published acknowledgement of their relationship (Breuil 1957b: 491).

Despite her experiences before the war, and commitment to working with the Abbé on the southern African publications, it seems MEB was still unable to resist taking on other projects. One was a translation for Baron Alberto Carlo Blanc (1906–1960), Italian friend and colleague of the Abbé, of his book *Dall'Astrazione all'Organicità* (Blanc 1958). There is no indication this translation was ever completed, though MEB's help may well have been needed to decipher Breuil's letter reproduced in the book (Blanc 1958: 7).

Another unrealised publication project loomed large in the 1950s. *Les Hommes de la pierre ancienne (Paléolithique et Mésolithique)* was published under the joint authorship of Breuil and his friend Raymond Lantier (1886–1980; Breuil and Lantier 1951). The text was primarily based on the lecture series Breuil had given in Toulouse, Bordeaux and Lisbon at the beginning of World War II, which Lantier had added to and seen through the press while Breuil was in Africa. Breuil was not satisfied with

the outcome, and a revised edition was published in 1959. Meanwhile he had decided a version in English was needed, and an agreement was negotiated with Harvard University Press. MEB embarked on the translation in 1956, but once completed and submitted to the Press it was rejected for much the same reasons as the Clarendon Press had with their book in the 1920s. In this case the Abbé and MEB were mollified by receiving half the fee originally offered, and MEB took comfort from reassurance by Hallam Movius Jnr that her translation was not the issue (though surely this required some self-delusion on her part). In 1965 an English version of the second edition was published, translated by B.B. Rafter (Breuil and Lantier 1965).

There were many other distractions during the years before the Abbé died, including: the Rouffignac controversy (Arnould 2011: 278–284); clashes over new interpretations of Palaeolithic art (Hurel 2011: 418–422); difficulties over the proposed Levantine rock art books; the fight in 1961 against planned redisplay at the St-Germain museum; and not least issues with health. On the whole, however, MEB and Breuil were able to lead a sociable life in Paris, relished their trips away, and enjoyed more relaxed times at L'Isle-Adam (Fig. 8), with in good weather an evening routine of strolling and sitting by the River Oise. Then on 14 August 1961, when Breuil passed away at L'Isle-Adam, aged 84, MEB was there to comfort his last moments and she has left a moving account of his death (Boyle 1971: 97; Boyle *et al.* 1963: 18; Sonolet 1967: 66). Apart from missing their annual jaunt to Les Eyzies in the Dordogne that summer, MEB later expressed regret that his death foiled the Abbé's plan to take her on a trip to Peking. But writing to R. Large just a few days after Breuil's death MEB reflected positively: 'I have had a marvellous 37 years, we had such fun, adventure and interesting work'.

After the Abbé

After Breuil's death MEB continued to live mainly in France. Immediately before and after the funeral she stayed with his cousin's people at Maffliers (Seine-et-Oise) and then returned to Reid Hall. The pressing task of acquiring and sorting Breuil's effects was undertaken by Arnold Fawcus, one of the Abbé's executors and legatees, Breuil having come to rely on him to publish his remaining rock art books (southern Africa and Spain) and to take financial responsibility for MEB for the rest of her days. There had been a plan for both the Abbé and MEB to be installed in Fawcus's 'château' in Burgundy, then still under renovation.

Complications arose over the use and future of Breuil's papers, one proposal for it to form part of an extended Fondation Teilhard de Chardin – Henri Breuil

²⁹ Much of this saga can be appreciated by reading the introductory matter in the two iterations of the *White Lady* (Breuil 1955b; Tallents 1955; Boyle 1966); see also Breuil (1957a); Hurel (2011: 414–416) and from the Trianon Press perspective Fawcus (1966b) and Fawcus and Jarrell (1996).

being rejected, and another for Teilhard's biographer Cuénot to write the Abbé's biography falling through. Fawcus, who needed MEB to carry on with the African publications, encouraged and supported her with a view to producing a Breuil biography and was a zealous guardian of what he considered his copyright of the Abbé's material (Ripoll Perelló 2002: 371). Roger Heim (1900–1979), Director of the National Museum of Natural History, who became part of a small informal committee to deal with the Abbé's papers, agreed to provide a workroom for MEB and Mary Laing, one of the key staff at Trianon Press. As for the biography, MEB realised that she would not be able to cope with the academic side of his work, and decided to restrict herself to a life history of Breuil and completion of their African project.

In June 1962 MEB was installed in Fawcus's Château de Villers, Pouillenay (Côte d'Or) and while there in September was excited to have found another cache of the Abbé's letters going back to 1923. Being in Burgundy, however, did not really suit her and she returned to Paris and to travelling.

By autumn 1963 the biography project had changed to a book of the Abbé's pre-WWII letters to her. This involved deciphering them, transcribing into both French and English, then having them typed at Trianon Press or by anyone else who could help. Arnold Fawcus and Mary Laing continued to encourage MEB to work on this, hoping she would ensure the story from the letters was in the context of her own life at the time, feeling that 'it is the combination of the two lives which is so extraordinary'.

In spring 1966 MEB worked on the proofs of the Rhodesian volume (Breuil 1966b), which she had completed seven years previously. This was published in July and in October the major Breuil exhibition at the Singer-Polignac Foundation, in the planning and preparation of which she had been involved, had its grand opening. MEB was thanked and quoted in the catalogue (Sonolet 1967). Originally intended to run until January 1967 the exhibition proved popular and was extended until March; MEB was much in demand giving interviews and tours. Autumn 1967 saw MEB in Spain with Nora and while staying at the castle at Arcos de la Frontera she had a health problem, possibly a minor heart attack.

By now MEB's health in general and eyesight in particular were becoming of major concern. She was fortunate in that her archaeological friends, Renée Doize,³⁰ Suzanne de St-Mathurin and Germaine Henri-

³⁰ Renée Louise Doize (1901–?), a Belgian 'pupil' of Breuil from Liège who became an important friend and helper to both him and MEB, taking on some of MEB's role at times when working closely with the

Martin³¹ were there to help when they could. More significant at this stage were other prominent women friends who were able to provide monitoring and closer support, such as Nicole Grasset,³² Joan Canson,³³ and Eleanor Spencer.³⁴ Nicole Grasset was granted power of attorney for MEB in 1968, and both she and Joan Canson, having studied what had been achieved so far, realised that no book by MEB on the Abbé was ever going to appear, though all those around her were keeping up the fiction. After three weeks in a Paris hospital at the beginning of 1971 MEB agreed to move to a nursing home, Le Vieux Château at Crosne (Essonne), on the outskirts of Paris, found for her by Joan Canson. There she continued to work in a desultory fashion on the Abbé's letters, though she could no longer read the originals herself. MEB died at Crosne on 22 December 1974, aged 93. Some of her own and the Abbé's papers and letters which she held, including a copy of his unpublished autobiography, were passed to Arnold Fawcus, and were eventually donated by his widow Julie Fawcus to the Musée des Antiquités Nationales (Labarre 1997).

Conclusion

This paper has concentrated on previously unexplored aspects of publication projects, completed or abandoned. MEB was not the most gifted of translators, and this was part of the problem with the failed projects, but her work was perfectly adequate for the Abbé, for whom any perceived shortcomings in this area were clearly outweighed by other considerations. Some of what these may have been are probed here from two perspectives, MEB's wider role and their joint relationship.

On a day-to-day basis, when they were not on fieldwork or trips, what did MEB actually do for the Abbé? First and foremost was his correspondence. Breuil was an even more committed letter-writer than MEB, and yet as is well-known much of his crabbed writing was indecipherable (Faveaux 1964: 138). His handwritten

Abbé, with whom she co-published. Like MEB, she deserves further attention in her own right.

³¹ Germaine (Minne) Henri-Martin (1902–1975), excavator of the Fontéchevade cave (Charente), friend of MEB and Breuil, was associated in various projects with Suzanne de St-Mathurin and Dorothy Garrod (Saint-Mathurin 1976).

³² Dr Nicole Grasset (1927–2009), Swiss-French scientist, brought up in South Africa, whose family befriended Breuil and MEB during their first visit there in 1942 (Breuil 1949: 15). While based at the Pasteur Institute in Paris she was a great help to MEB, and continued to be a frequent support whenever in Paris.

³³ Joan Canson was South African. She and her French diplomat husband Claude Canson became friends with the Abbé and MEB during their first stay in Johannesburg. When the Cansons relocated to Paris, Joan became a prominent help to MEB in her old age. Their cottage south of Paris at Étréchy (Essonne) provided MEB with some welcome breaks.

³⁴ Dr Eleanor P. Spencer (1895–1992), American medieval art scholar who retired to Paris.

letters were frequently returned with a request for a readable copy (Boyle 1971: 89); other letters would require MEB to read and understand them before typing and sending, or translating into English and typing. After the eye trouble experienced on the final African trip, even MEB found the Abbé's writing increasingly difficult. Official correspondence to do with travel, lectures, publications, conferences, and other organizational aspects could be left to MEB. Then there was always something to do with Breuil's astonishing publication output requiring attention, from the perfunctory to the more creative on MEB's part; she claimed to have written *Quatre Cents Siècles* (Breuil 1952a) from Breuil's dictation (Boyle 30.08.1971)³⁵. And the work could become hectic, as MEB explained to her cousin in February 1933: 'The last week in Paris was quite mad, B's brain began to work both day and night and masses of criticism and chronology were piled on my table every morning (...) I worked early and late, took stuff back to my hotel and finished all but five pages which do not need Breuil but it was a delirium'.

With the publications there was the 'mechanical work' which Burkitt mentioned (*supra*); for example, MEB writes of placing illustrations and indexing for the Altamira volume. Books usually required the raising of funds in advance of production, which often involved MEB but was not a task she relished (e.g. in 1951: 'I must interview Sir Douglas Malcolm on Monday, member of the S. Rhodesian Council, and see if there is any hope of cash. Not the easiest side of a secretary's job'). There was preparation for small-scale displays of the Abbé's artwork on numerous occasions, apart from work on two major exhibitions (Arts Council 1954; Sonolet 1967). Speeches and addresses to be given by Breuil, sometimes lengthy, needed translating for him to deliver or for publication (e.g. Breuil 1934). At events, especially when in South Africa, MEB would follow his speech in French by giving her version in English. Situation management was called for when the Abbé behaved inappropriately, probably many more times than are recorded, and occasional 'dirty work' was required, such as when warning organisers that the Abbé would not present his lecture if a particular person was invited. More indirectly, but I think importantly, MEB acted as a constant publicist for the Abbé, always taking the opportunity to promote his work and recount stories of his exploits in any conversation and social gathering. The White Lady episode became a favourite topic, MEB being aware that despite all the controversy they had at least 'founded a great tourist industry'. There was also the matter of companionship and the simple usefulness of having a partner in social situations. MEB wrote in November 1933: '(...) as there are no pupils yet the Abbé and I have made various short trips together. He insisted on my coming to Soissons with him when

he went to pray at his ancestral tomb (...) Another day we went to L'Isle-Adam, another to a picture show of Renoir's pictures and to tea with Madame de Monfreid (...) Last Sunday we both lunched with the Lantiers at S. Germain and next Sunday I believe we go to the Comtesse de S. Périer'.³⁶

Breuil may not have always agreed with MEB's opinions and vice versa, and they diverged apparently in their political views, but he did seek her advice, and often acted on it, as when she suggested appealing directly to General de Gaulle over the St-Germain museum affair in 1961. All in all, however, as the Abbé was quoted in the *Johannesburg Star* on his arrival in South Africa in October 1942, MEB had been his 'righthand man [sic] for the past 20 years'.

As for the joint relationship, what exactly was it that kept MEB and the Abbé together for nearly 40 years? One can presume there was, right at the beginning in 1920, a sense of ease in each other's presence and probably a contemplation of mutual advantage. Breuil, who was ambitious globally for his chosen field of prehistory (and for himself) realized the importance of a pathway into the Anglophone world in which his 'Frenchness' and imperfect English could be a hindrance. Here was a mature British woman, only four years his junior, fluent in French and knowledgeable about France, who appeared to have the secretarial skills she was deploying on behalf of Miles Burkitt which were what he needed to support and progress his own work. MEB was interested in prehistory, but Breuil could no doubt see that she was in that area a novice and not going to be in any sense an academic or professional rival. Indeed, she had already absorbed many of his views on prehistory as filtered through Burkitt; she did, as it were, already speak 'Breuil'.

MEB and Breuil were also likely empathetic characters in other respects. Whilst not a poet himself, and with little time to indulge any literary interests outside of his field or his faith, Breuil was inclined to a poetic outlook, as revealed by the White Lady episode (Breuil 1952b: 9–11). He was, therefore, probably attracted by MEB's literary back-story, and by the prospect of this aspect of her talent contributing to the further development of his own oeuvre. This was certainly part of MEB's perspective on the relationship: '[Breuil] chose me for his pupil, not for any supposed undeveloped gift for his science but because I was poet', a sentiment she expounded more 'poetically' in a radio interview when in South Africa:

³⁶ Raymond Lantier (1886–1980; Gran-Aymerich 2007: 919–920) was Conservateur en chef of the Musée des Antiquités Nationales at St-Germain-en-Laye; Comtesse Raymonde-Suzanne de Saint-Périer was the wife of Comte René de Saint-Périer (1877–1950), from 1929 onwards the excavator of Isturitz cave, and one of Breuil's many co-authors (Ripoll Perelló 1994: 140).

³⁵ Look at footnote 6.

MEB: 'So it did not seem at all extraordinary to a Scottish poet when in the twentieth century a great French scientist said to her 'come, my subject needs a poet'.

INTERVIEWER: 'That's a little difficult to understand. Can you explain it more fully?'

MEB: 'Well, I was not expected to turn into rhyme the intricate language of prehistory. But when the way is dark and the problems are overwhelming – and you can imagine how over-whelming it is trying to reach so far back – the intuition of a poet can be used to lighten the path'.

They both had a love of nature (Breuil 1949: 11), in particular – as they perhaps discovered on that first day when viewing the rockery in the Burkitts' garden – their love of plants and flowers had a strong importance to both of them (Rodriguez and Danion 2006; Hurel 2011: 292). When MEB went to stay in Paris in 1924 Dr Dewar in Dunblane was concerned she would find it too urban and set up a 'flower fund' for her so she could have flowers in her room all the time. MEB's letters bear frequent reference to flowers and plants being delivered to her rooms, sent by Robert Large and others, and to outings to view gardens. Akin was their shared appreciation of art: 'he [Breuil] writes that we discovered the joy of looking at beautiful things in each other's company'. The Abbé was an accomplished artist in his own right (Bouyssonie 1962), an 'art lover' (Cuénot 1965: 78), and in some respects was as much an art historian as an archaeologist. They both had conventional preferences when it came to fine art and MEB expressed distaste for the 'naïve' paintings of Breuil's cousin at Maffliers, the artist Madeleine Luka, although as a person she was very fond of her and indebted to her for much kindness after the Abbé's death.³⁷

Both MEB and Breuil relished travel, could cope with its hardships, and had limited demands concerning creature comforts and accommodation. Moreover, and not to be underestimated, they both had a fascination for things esoteric and psychic. Hurel (2011: 304) has drawn attention to this little-known aspect in the Abbé's case, but it was even more relevant with MEB, who was interested in astrology, palmistry, fortune-telling, numerology, and other 'unscientific' investigation. She was a devotee of *Prediction* magazine and monitored horoscopes, often in her letters giving Robert Large

advice on what might be good or bad timing for his activities. This mutual interest explains why there is no evidence of Breuil ridiculing MEB for her fascination with matters which he as a priest and self-proclaimed 'scientist' might be expected to disparage. Indeed, their shared belief in an afterlife may not have precluded Breuil from siding with MEB's conviction of direct communication between the dead and the living. One of her letters from 1963 recounts attending a séance in the hope of hearing an 'otherside' message from the Abbé.

It is difficult to disentangle any interests the Abbé had in these aspects from those connected to his religious faith. The fact that MEB was Protestant and Breuil Catholic is often referred to as something most people would have seen as a stumbling block to their relationship, but it was a factor which clearly did not impinge – neither was set on converting the other – and the degree to which MEB was religious, other than adhering to basic tenets of her Protestant background, is uncertain. It is interesting that MEB makes hardly any mention of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) in her letters, despite his important friendship with the Abbé and Breuil's endorsement activity on his behalf after his death (Hurel 2011: 427–431). MEB shows no interest in his life, thought or work, though Teilhard's letters to Breuil do make occasional reference to MEB (e.g. in December 1940: '*Vous ne me dit rien de Miss Boyle? en Ecosse, j'imagine*'; Teilhard de Chardin 1988: 290).

On MEB's side of the relationship it was obviously part of her character to be in awe of and drawn to 'great men'. She had been impressed by the Revd Dr Walter Smith, Sir James Dewar and Professor F.C. Burkitt, and went on in later life to idolise Jan Smuts and Albert Schweitzer (who she met in London) and be won over by Bernard Berenson. This seems an unexpected character attribute, particularly marked in the case of her views on Jan Smuts, who one feels, even from her own descriptions of their encounters, was patronizing and manipulative towards her. Breuil fell into her 'great man' category from the start and he remained so for her until the end.

Over the years the bond between them strengthened in a way that happens with closely compatible individuals (Fig. 9). Because Breuil for many who came into contact with him was seen as difficult (Hurel 2003; Bahn 2016: 69), and he certainly developed a reputation for being high-handed (Burkitt 1961) and on occasion merciless and unforgiving (Brodrick 1963: 69; Daniel 1986: 255), it was imperative that MEB had the ability to stand up to him and curb his temper. That she did so despite being in thrall to him personally and committed to his work, shows her strength of character and independence, and perhaps reflects a high-handed streak of her own. MEB

³⁷ Madeleine Luka (1900–1989), daughter of Maurice Bottet, Breuil's first cousin. Her delightfully insightful painting of Breuil in his garden at L'Isle Adam, with the bust on the wall behind him transformed into that of MEB, and the White Lady marching in the wrong direction in the background (Poirot-Delpech 1976: 146), testifies to the significance of these two women – MEB and the White Lady – in the Abbé's life (Rodriguez and Danion 2006: 54–55). Unsurprisingly MEB took a poor view of this painting as 'art', perhaps without appreciating its humour or any symbolic meaning.



Fig. 9. MEB and Breuil in Copenhagen: a 'professional couple'. Undated, but probably 1936. Photographer unknown. From the R. Large Archive, reproduced courtesy of M. and S. Large.

did anyway see a different side to the Abbé, as she wrote to her sister Dorothy in 1956: 'he is naturally a very nervous timid man and all the bluff is put on'. Moreover, she was able to maintain interests and contacts of her own, with some, such as Robert Large and Nora Forman, also becoming friends of Breuil.

Was there in any sense when they met or subsequently anything more romantic? Understandably there has been hesitation to probe the personal nature of the relationship between the Abbé and MEB, though such closeness between a Catholic priest and a female companion must have aroused speculation. That there was some unwarranted rumour is implied by a comment in one of Robert Large's 1964 letters to MEB: 'I wanted to reply earlier to your letter Mémé; of course I understand how anxious you are that slander and innuendo should be known to have no basis of fact (...) It would be out of keeping with your nature if you and Breuil had not had a perfect friendship – and no more – since that was what you had both decided on from the beginning'.

This seems to be confirmed by the few comments from MEB which bear on this aspect of their companionship. What may have been sublimated is of course another

matter. There is one early letter from Breuil to MEB in 1925 which suggests that, had the circumstances been different and he not a Catholic priest with celibate vows, their relationship might have progressed in another direction (quoted by Rodriguez and Danion 2006: 46; cf. Arnould 2011: 156–162).

MEB adhered in later life to her explanation of 'serene comradeship' (Boyle *et al.* 1963: 15) and 'it was not the ordinary emotion but the pressing need for companionship'. They enjoyed many of the advantages of being a 'professional couple' and, as Julie Fawcus observed: 'They could bicker like an old married couple (...) but nothing could shake the affection and respect they had for each other' (Fawcus and Jarrell 1966).

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Alan Saville (1946–2016)

Alan and Jacek were friends over many years, sharing a deep commitment to the study of prehistory, flint mining and lithic artefacts. Alan admired Jacek's work and his productivity, and always enjoyed meeting him at conferences and research groups, whether in Warsaw, London, Edinburgh or elsewhere in Europe. Despite his illness he was very keen to contribute to this *festchrift* in Jacek's honour and completed his article just five weeks before he died in June 2016. This will be his final publication. His bibliography, including two pieces in *Archaeologia Polona*, can be found in his obituary in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (Vol. 145, 2015).

Annette Carruthers
20 February 2017

Appendix 1. On *Lighting a Copyist in the Painted Caves of France*

(An undated handwritten poem by MEB in the archive; there is no indication to show this has ever previously been reproduced.)

'I stand within a cave and my lamp's ray
Lights up an art created so long since
That any name of hero or of prince
Wrought into legend is but yesterday.
To this strange world emblazoned on the walls
A world of mammoth, reindeer, bison, horse,
Drawn one on other, each pursues its course
Enchanted in the subterranean halls.
Standing I listen, will the shadow's edge
Tremble and footsteps pad on rocky floor?
Or will an artist crouching on some ledge
High in the vault review his work once more,
Watching the modern artist measure, groan,
And trace the lines that centuries have seen
And left untouched, a glowing priceless loan
To these late days of what great Art has been.
There is no sound but water from the dim
Realm of the upper shadows drop by drop
Falling until the rocky basins brim
And tinkle softly downwards without stop,
Flowing like time. We are enchanted too
Art is so old, it is forever new'.

Appendix 2. Hugo Obermaier's preface for MEB's proposed book *The Iberians and their Art*

(This reproduces an apparent final draft version, with Obermaier's signature, but is not dated.)

'When in 1929 you first came to Madrid, I suggested to you the study of the Iberian problem and especially the art, knowing that it was a subject which had been little written of in English. I drew your attention to the fact that the material for such a study was contained in a great number of small brochures written in Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan, with a certain number in French and German, and that the labour and patience necessary to work such a quarry was probably the cause of the neglect of the study. I knew the writer must also possess an extensive and particular artistic training and be fitted by a knowledge of previous and later world art, to see the true position of the Iberian episode.

Your years of work as first the pupil and then the collaborator and literary secretary of the Abbé Henri Breuil, gave you a knowledge which seemed to me to fit you for a task which would be as praiseworthy as it was difficult. I could at that time give you from my own library all the literature on the subject and supplement it with the freedom to work in the various museums and private collections, in which the greatest treasures lay,

accounts of many objects in which have either never been published or else only in short preliminary notes.

Four times you came to Madrid to perfect yourself in this study, and for months at a time passed your days surrounded by objects or descriptions of this art. Professor Bosch Gimpera put his unique knowledge of Iberian pottery and the migrations of the early inhabitants of the Peninsula at your disposal; you went to Barcelona to learn from him.

You visited the strongholds of Tolmo and Meca, passed to Seville and Alicante, to Valencia, Tarragona and Elche. You saw where the statues of Cerro de los Santos were found. You, who had followed prehistoric art from Altamira to Castillo, La Pasiega and Pindal to Minateda and Alpera, were now borne on the crest of a later artistic wave, and fascinated, returned again and again to pursue your research.

No one outside Spain is better prepared and qualified than you are to present to the international world what we actually know of the Iberians and especially their art. Your conscientious study shows a full grasp of the subject; it is a book which is needed, and historians, archaeologists and all those interested in artistic questions will be grateful to you, for you do them a great service.

I congratulate you on your fine piece of work and I wish you great success'.

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