



### Antiquarian Image Card #1: Sir Mortimer Wheeler by Godfrey Argent

Bromide Print on card mount, 18 May 1970 NPG x165757

Linked to Vindolanda Roman Fort (Northumberland) and Arbeia Roman Fort (South Shields)

Sir Robert Eric **Mortimer Wheeler** (1890-1976) was an eminent and magnetic figure of British archaeology during most of the Twentieth Century. He approached his archaeological research with passion and flair. He used the media to promote his work, creating a public interest in archaeology which he reinforced through charismatic appearances on the ground breaking 1950's TV quiz programme *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*. He led many great campaigns to unravel archaeological issues at home and abroad. Like many others of his generation he was a soldier – a task he seemed to revel in

### Key achievements

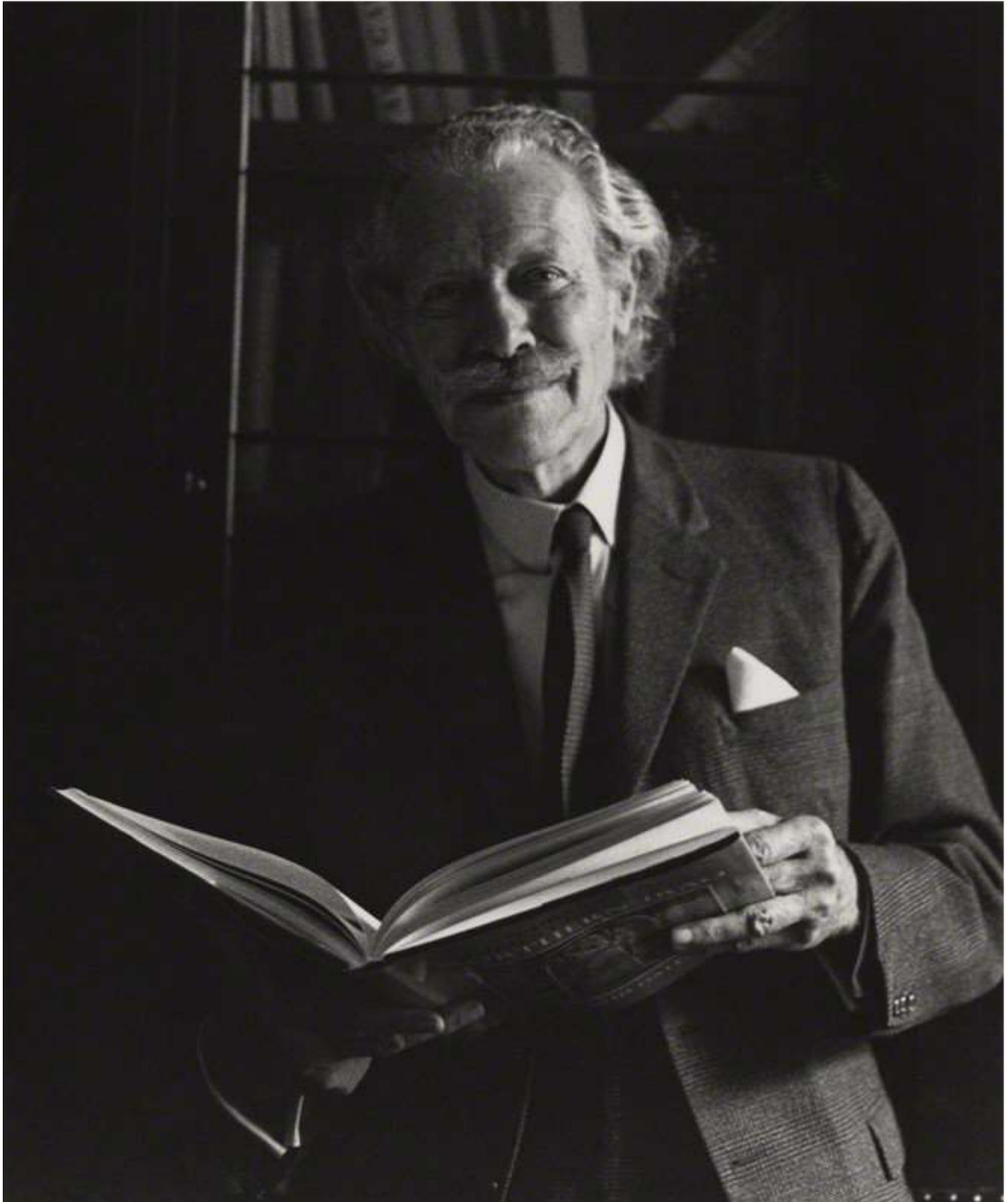
- Fought in WW1 and WW2, becoming a Major, Brigadier and awarded the Military Cross
- Initiated a new method of archaeological excavation allowing better recording and understanding of sites using a precise grid system
- Director of National Museum of Wales, Keeper of the London Museum and established the Archaeological Institute where he became a Professor, was also Director General of Archaeology of India
- Excavated Roman sites in Colchester, and St Albans (Verulamium) and Maiden Castle Iron Age fort in Dorset
- Expert panellist on 1950s TV quiz show *Animal Vegetable Mineral*

### Links to Hadrian's Wall

- He visited Vindolanda Roman Fort several times, was intrigued by the excavations and writing tablets and corresponded regularly with the owner, archaeologist Eric Birley.
- He was opened Arbeia Roman Fort museum on June 20<sup>th</sup> 1953 and was President of the South Shields Archaeological and Historical Society

### Character insights

- In the 1950s quiz show, experts had to identify mystery objects. He was usually right – although he did admit to looking through the cases of a featured museum to see which objects had been taken off display.
- His speech on *The Three Great Achievements of Man* which was described as:  
*'an address that was pungent with racy anecdote, well laced with humour and interspersed with homely illustrations'*.



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