



*Photograph by Alexander Corbett*

SIR JAMES MANN, K.C.V.O.

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1897-1962

JAMES GOW MANN, the leading historian of European armour and the *doyen* of British national museum directors, was born on 23 September 1897 in London. His father, Alexander Mann, was a Scottish landscape painter who had studied in Paris under Carolus Duran, lived for some years in Morocco, and was a founder member of the New English Art Club. This family background accounted for a good deal in Mann's future make-up. To it he owed a keen eye for a work of art, and it gave him an unusual breadth of understanding of historical styles. In addition, it developed a sharpness of observation and an ability as a draughtsman which enabled him to fill a long series of notebooks with neat, carefully annotated drawings of armour seen in remote parts of the world. There is no doubt that it was to this that he owed his remarkable visual memory for a work of art, for a student will usually remember what he has drawn far better than what he merely sees in a photograph.

He spent five years at Winchester from 1911 to 1916, in Mr. R. L. G. Irving's house. It was perhaps an inborn shyness, emerging as reticence later in life, which prevented him making any great mark at school, though he was already interested in antiquarian pursuits and spent many holidays brass-rubbing in country churches. It had been intended that he should proceed from Winchester to Oxford, but the First World War intervened. In 1916 he joined the Royal Artillery, rising in the course of the next two years to the rank of major, and seeing service on the Western Front and in Italy. There can be little doubt that he enjoyed army life, even the battle of Passchendaele, and for the rest of his life he was an avid reader of books about the First World War; his memory was stored with details of the campaigns in Flanders and at Vittorio Veneto which he loved to dwell on in conversation. His war-time experiences were crucial to his future development. They gave a maturity to his character and developed a latent administrative ability and power of command. In addition to this they deepened his understanding of the art of war, in which he had already shown a marked interest as a boy, and thus gave added breadth to his appreciation of armour, the study of which was thenceforward to be the informing passion of his life.

After demobilization he went to New College in 1919, remaining there after he had taken his B.A. degree in 1921 to take a B.Litt. with a thesis on armour in 1922. Immediately after completing this in the summer of 1922 he joined the staff of the Ashmolean Museum, where the Keeper of the Department of Fine Art, Mr. C. F. Bell, first set him to work on calendaring the prints left by the early nineteenth-century antiquary, Francis Douce, then recently transferred from the Bodleian Library to the Ashmolean Museum. This work on a collection particularly rich in prints of medieval life and customs merely whetted further Mann's growing love of armour. He felt this to be frustrated by the nature of the Oxford collections, and in 1924 applied for the post of Assistant to the Keeper of the Wallace Collection, and was appointed. It was whilst helping the then Keeper, Mr. S. J. Camp, with the preparation of the Catalogue of European Arms and Armour in the Wallace Collection, that he published his first major contribution to the study of the subject. This was the introduction to an English translation of *The Armour of the Castle of Churburg*. It was common knowledge that its author, Hans Graf Trapp, owed much to Mann's assistance in the compilation of the catalogue of this last medieval armoury to survive in private ownership. Whilst working on this, Mann formed a close friendship with both Graf Trapp and his brother Oswald, which lasted throughout his life. There were very few holidays on the Continent on which Mann did not visit Schloss Churburg in the valley of Vinschgau, going far out of his way to do so if necessary, for he found the atmosphere of a hereditary armoury to which nothing had been added as a collector's piece, peculiarly sympathetic.

The first major task assigned to Mann at the Wallace Collection was the preparation of the Sculpture Catalogue. This assemblage, if small, is of high quality and of unusually wide range, including in its orbit not only French eighteenth-century marbles, bronzes and terra-cottas but a quantity of medieval and renaissance works as well, thus bringing into play Mann's breadth of knowledge of the arts. The catalogue, when it appeared in 1931, was acclaimed as a remarkable first achievement and when shortly afterwards the Courtauld Institute of Art was founded, Mann was offered the post of Deputy Director, an appointment which carried with it the readership in the History of Art at London University. He did not, however, remain at Portman Square for long, for on Camp's death in 1936 the Trustees of the Wallace Collection asked him to return



as Keeper. He accepted this offer and was still Director (the Keepership had been raised to that status in 1946) at his death in 1962, an unusually long tenure of such an office.

The years between 1929 and the outbreak of the Second World War were academically the most fruitful of Mann's career. He published a large number of papers on armour and cognate subjects, in a wide variety of learned journals (it is to be hoped that someone will publish a hand-list of these), amongst them the Henriette Hertz Lecture to the British Academy which he delivered in 1940 on *The Etched Decoration of Armour*, which opened up an entirely unexplored field of research by linking the art of the armourer with the early history of engraving. Twelve years later he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. Of at least equal significance was his discovery of a quite unknown group of Gothic and Renaissance suits from the Gonzaga armoury in the Sanctuary Church of the Madonna delle Grazie outside Mantua. On a visit to the church in 1929 he noticed that the dummy figures of wax, clad in what had hitherto been thought to be *carta pasta* armour, standing in niches round the walls, were in fact wearing genuine armour, begrimed with the dust and rust of centuries. With the permission of the Bishop of Mantua and the Soprintendenza for Lombardy, he spent a series of summer holidays at Mantua taking down these figures and cleaning the armour. It was work into which he threw himself with the enthusiasm of a schoolboy, spending day after day under the hot August sun of Italy literally boiling the armour in a sort of witch's cauldron in the courtyard outside the church. The result, published in two important papers in *Archaeologia*, was to increase the recorded total of surviving suits of Gothic armour by almost a third. As a by-product, he wrote two papers on 'The Lost Armoury of the Gonzagas', which appeared in the *Royal Archaeological Journal*, in 1939 and 1945.

On the eve of the outbreak of war, he was appointed Master of the Armouries at the Tower of London in succession to Mr. Charles ffoulkes. During the war years his time was divided between two houses in the Home Counties looking after the evacuated contents of the Wallace Collection and the Tower Armouries. A year after hostilities ended he became Surveyor of the King's (later the Queen's) Works of Art in succession to the present Duke of Wellington. Thenceforward administrative matters were increasingly to occupy his time, somewhat to the exclusion of research. His most permanent monument is, as he

would have wished, at the Tower of London. At his instigation, early in the war, the National Art-Collections Fund had purchased *en bloc* for the Tower the large collection of arms and armour formed by the bibliophile Beriah Botfield at Norton Hall at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When the war was over, anticipating a flight of armour to America such as had followed the end of the First World War, he used his considerable powers of persuasion to induce the Ministry of Works to provide a purchase grant. This the Ministry did for the first time in the history of the Armouries, and Mann used it with great effect to enrich the collection with armours dating from earlier than the reign of Henry VIII, the section where it was most weak. With this (and subventions from other sources) he acquired the cream of the William Randolph Hearst collection from St. Donat's Castle in 1952, when there was a danger of it leaving for America. Equally notable was the purchase at auction in Switzerland in 1958 of a Gothic horse armour from Anhalt, a purchase organized with masterly strategy in the face of competition from the leading American museums. With these two acquisitions and other lesser ones, he took the first steps in transforming the Armouries of the Tower into a collection with a scope not incomparable with the great dynastic armour collections at Vienna and Madrid. As part of this campaign to instil new life into the Armouries he initiated a series of outstanding exhibitions of armour such as had not been since the Ironmongers' Hall Exhibition of 1861. These awoke a wider enthusiasm for a subject that had fallen from the popularity it had enjoyed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an enthusiasm which bore fruit in the foundation of, for instance, the Arms and Armour Society with its *Journal*.

His sudden death occurred less than three months after the publication of his completely revised *Catalogue of European Arms and Armour in the Wallace Collection*, a project which he had meditated for some forty years and which provided a fitting consummation to a lifetime devoted to a passion for armour.

From 1946 to 1949 he was Director of the Society of Antiquaries and President from 1949 to 1954. He threw himself with enthusiasm into the celebration of the bicentenary of the granting of the Royal Charter to the Society, an event which fell during his term of office. He was an excellent committee-man, and his services were constantly in demand. As President of the Society of Antiquaries he was an *ex officio* Trustee of the British Museum, he was also a Trustee of the College of Arms, a Governor of the

National Army Museum, a member of the Advisory Committee of the Royal Mint, of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, Vice-Chairman of the Archbishops' Historic Churches Preservation Trust, an active member of the Historic Buildings Council, and Chairman of the National Buildings Record, and he gave his time unstintingly to a number of lesser organizations in addition.

Mann had an exceptionally quick, lucid, and incisive mind which made him an able administrator, with notable skill in dealing with public organizations like the Treasury or such charitable foundations as the Pilgrim Trust and the National Art-Collections Fund. He spoke concisely but with great clarity and conviction, so that he seldom found difficulty in convincing his hearers of the necessity of supporting any cause he had at heart. A streak of Scottish austerity in his character made him increasingly out of sympathy with certain developments in the modern world, and an inborn shyness which sometimes appeared to those who did not know him well as superiority was in fact due to reticence towards a world which he found singularly lacking in this classic quality. His scholarship was of the same fastidious, spare, precise, and accurate character. But those few who knew him intimately were aware that he had a highly idiosyncratic humour, an almost schoolboyish sense of fun, and a warmth that let few who came to seek his advice or help go away without a feeling of having been given far more than conventional advice and sympathy.

FRANCIS J. B. WATSON