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Douglas Sutton (ed.), *Saying So Doesn't Make It So: Essays in Honour of  
B. Foss Leach***

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# **SAYING SO DOESN'T MAKE IT SO**

**PAPERS IN HONOUR OF B. FOSS LEACH**

**Edited by  
Douglas G. Sutton**

**New Zealand Archaeological Association  
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# A Biographical Sketch

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Foss Leach resigned from the University of Otago in 1988 to concentrate on his research and writing. This volume is offered as a tribute to Foss on that occasion. It is 25 years since he first enrolled in Anthropology at Otago and 22 years since he began to teach archaeology there. During that period he has made a fundamentally important contribution to the development of archaeological research in New Zealand. Contributors to this volume are, without exception, Foss's former students. We offer this volume as a tribute to Foss Leach, archaeologist and teacher *extraordinaire*.

As I now recall, my first conversation with Foss Leach took place in his home in Leith Street, Dunedin, very early in 1968. There I found him sitting at his desk, books piled high in all directions, while archaeological things of much importance were being discussed in a very animated style with Helen. But the story goes much further back . . .

Foss Leach was born to Bernard and Thelma Leach in Waipukurau on 16th February, 1942. Bernard was then a shepherd at Porangahau Station on the East Coast. He was due to be conscripted into the Army soon thereafter so Thelma, daughter Jo (then three years old) and Foss moved to Waikanae while they waited for Bernard to go into camp. However, Bernard was assigned to farm work, rather than military duties abroad, so the family spent the rest of the war years at Rewarewa, near Masterton. At the end of the war, Bernard and Thelma bought a small house in New York Street, Martinborough. The first winter, before they moved into the house, Bernard spent possum trapping near Waiorongomai Station, where he had grown up, while Thelma drove back and forth taking stores to Bernard, Jo to school and skins to the merchants in Featherston. For several years, Bernard continued trapping and took jobs shepherding and droving. He then started a small market gardening business, using land around the house in New York Street.

The family settled in Martinborough shortly before Foss started school and remained there for nearly 30 years. Foss went to Martinborough Primary School. However, when the time came for him to go to secondary school, Thelma insisted that he do a professional course, rather than the non-academic courses which were available at the District High School in Martinborough. So Foss went to Palmerston North Boys High School, and boarded at College House, from 1956 to 1960. There he established himself as an assertive youngster with an interest in rugby (above all else), boxing and cricket (to a lesser extent), and hell raising. His classroom interests were never pursued with much enthusiasm. However, secondary school physics and chemistry led to an abiding interest in electronics.

Foss became well known during his senior years at Palmerston North Boys. He was always vigorous, often rebellious, and very successful at the things he determined to excel

at. He was in the first fifteen for two years (1959–60), and a school prefect. However, there was no sign of the compliant school boy in Foss Leach. He is recalled as “hard as the hobs of hell” and “a rough diamond”. The School Rugby Notes for 1960 describe him as a “class hooker who played with dash and great heart, showing little finesse in the open”. He was, overall, “a good natured lad, hell bent on adventure”.

His interest in archaeology was probably first aroused during his holidays from Palmerston North. This was due to the interest shown in the talented boy by Dr Budd who was the family’s general practitioner in Martinborough and had attended Foss during periods of childhood illness. He took Foss out collecting animal bones and other odds and ends of interest. He taught Foss about natural history in the late Victorian sense. He showed Foss Maori artefacts from the Wairarapa in his private collection. Dr Budd must be credited with being the person who first told Foss about the stone walls at Palliser Bay, where he had a bach. Thelma Leach recalls that Dr Budd wanted Foss to “do his first thesis” on those anomalous walls.

Although archaeology is the field in which Foss was to have his most notable “adventures”, he enrolled for Medical Intermediate at the University of Otago in 1961. There followed a riotous time of parties, poetry, art and sometimes earnest conversation. After two years of this with little sign of consistent academic progress Foss decided against returning immediately to university.

He spent much of 1963 in the bush on the eastern side of the Rimutaka Range, with Bernard, contemplating the future and trying to save money. Much credit for the result must go to Bernard and Thelma who loved Foss dearly and believed he could succeed and would do so once he found his feet. Bernard was never loath to provoke him into arguments about social, political and metaphysical issues of the moment. Bernard was widely read himself, forthright in his views and formidable in argument. He combined a country sense of humour with a love of debate and profound scepticism of politicians and ideologues, especially “missionary types”. Seldom, in my own experience of life in the house in New York Street, Martinborough, did Bernard retreat to the glasshouse to get away from all “this damned argument”. More commonly, he was provocative, a wonderful raconteur and a source of great good humour.

In 1964 Foss went back to the University of Otago and enrolled in Political Studies, Philosophy and Anthropology. The future course of his career was set by his friendship with Les Groube, then Lecturer in Prehistory. Foss became one amongst a cadre of archaeology students which formed around Les Groube at Otago in those years; the others included Jean Kennedy and Helen Leach (nee Keedwell).

Groube’s personal charisma and the broad intellectual interests he pursued were major formative influences on Foss. Les and Foss had three years together, 1964–1966. Foss began to take part in excavations, where there was much discussion of New Zealand archaeology, then at a very productive and formative stage, based largely on work done from the University of Auckland. At the same time he became more committed to getting through University—which he did brilliantly, especially in Anthropology. The first excavation Foss went on was run by Les Groube with Peter Gathercole at Karitane, also known as Huriawa, in the Easter vacation of 1964. He then dug with Les Groube and Dave Simmons at Little Papanui over Easter of 1965, with Les Groube at Mapoutahi (Anderson and Sutton 1973) over Easter 1966 and at Te Kuri’s Village in the Bay of Islands during May of 1966 (Groube 1965; 1966; n.d.). Foss and Les also did some site surveying on the Otago Peninsula, although no site record forms ever resulted, and together they excavated

the remarkable fishhook collection from the Serendipity Cave in southern Westland (collection now in the Otago Museum). In 1967 Foss graduated B.A. from the University of Otago.

Foss had to earn money in the summers in order to attend University in the following year. For that reason he was unable to attend the 1965 and 1966 summer excavations in the Bay of Islands, which were also directed by Les Groube (1965; n.d.). However, with money earned as a tutor in the Anthropology Department from 1966 Foss was able to proceed with the development of his field work skills and research interests. He enrolled in the Masters degree in 1967, directed the excavation of the Otarehua silcrete quarry in 1967 (B. F. Leach 1969) and was instrumental in setting up and guiding the four season dig at Tiwai Point which took place in 1968 and 1969 (Park 1969).

"Groube's students", Foss Leach, Jean Kennedy and Helen Leach wrote quality Master's theses which were published in a departmental monograph series (Kennedy 1969; B. F. Leach 1969; H. M. Leach 1969).

The Otago archaeologists formed a small and extraordinarily active group from about 1962. Peter Gathercole was Head of Department and taught both social and prehistoric anthropology. He insisted on the use of the latter term, which survives at the Otago department and in few other places, to the present day. As a result of his experience of the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge, he felt strongly that archaeology ought to be located within anthropology departments, which had active teaching and research programmes in social anthropology (Gathercole n.d.). Ham Parker was properly regarded as a very fine excavator and had an important influence on the development of Foss's approach to digging. Linden Cowell was the Department's technician in those years, before moving to the Otago Museum. Dave Simmons was at the Otago Museum and an active archaeologist for much of that period, although never a part of the University department. His debunking of the "Great New Zealand Myth", (Simmons 1969; 1976) had an important influence because it contributed towards the developing emphasis on empirical science, as opposed to genealogy and oral tradition, as the basis of prehistoric studies.

This period of intense, sometimes nearly chaotic, activity ended about the time Foss completed his first degree. Les Groube moved to the University of Auckland in 1967 and was there for only two years before going on to the Australian National University in Canberra. Dave Simmons moved to the Auckland Museum in January 1968. Peter Gathercole left Otago and returned to Britain in December 1968. Foss was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Anthropology in 1969 and became a Lecturer in 1970. The Department of Anthropology at the University of Otago was undergoing change at that time. John Harre, who was a Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology, resigned at the end of 1968 to take up a senior position at the University of the South Pacific after a memorable contest over the succession to Peter Gathercole's headship and the future direction of the Department (Harre n.d.). Several able social anthropology graduate students left Otago soon thereafter. They included Paul Alexander, now at the University of Sydney, and Ian Fraser, who has since returned to Otago.

Charles Higham, who arrived from Britain in 1967, was appointed to the Professorship of Anthropology two years later. He applied palaeoeconomic archaeological methods, developed by Grahame Clark, to southern New Zealand sites, 1967-69, before committing his research time to South-east Asian archaeology. Donn Bayard was appointed to Otago in 1967 and continued his Thai research from there. Ham Parker became involved in South-east Asian research after about 1966, and never excavated in New Zealand again.

By 1971 Foss Leach was the only tenured member of the teaching staff in Anthropology at the University of Otago who was working in Pacific archaeology. Student numbers, and student interest in archaeology, were on the increase. However, fortuitous circumstances do not account for the brilliant successes that followed. From the time of his first appointment, Foss taught to a very high standard courses on the prehistory of Oceania, New Zealand, and East Asia. His forte as a teacher was in research methods in archaeology. He added fieldwork methods as an integral and, in effective ways, compulsory part of the curriculum. Site surveying, plane-tableing, and aspects of aerial photography were included. Then he extended his teaching into laboratory analytical methods, conservation, statistics and computer programming. The last of these was begun by 1969 and is remembered with a shudder by nearly all of those who participated (Graeme Ward has reminded the author that he is not to be included among the shudders).

The salient characteristics of Foss's teaching style were established early and strengthened quickly. He taught that one ought to be studiously sceptical. The title of this volume is a phrase he often used when someone was believed to be making an argument on the basis of inadequate research or "mere assertion". As one of those who participated in the Thursday night seminar series of 1972 I remember an occasion when Nigel Prickett, whose paper was under heated attack from Foss, quietly retorted, "Your saying so doesn't make it so, *either*, ya know". There followed a brief but memorable silence.

Foss' own sanctioning use of this dread remark encouraged graduate students to undertake exhaustive bibliographical research and to develop an acerbic, and sometimes inflammatory, scepticism. They sometimes applied the latter to one another; although I am bound to admit that some have done so more than others (e.g., Anderson 1981, 1982, 1988; Sutton 1982, 1987; see also Bullock 1984).

When I met him in 1968, it was clear that Foss had an agenda for New Zealand archaeology. In our conversations through the winter of 1968 there was talk of "not repeating Les' mistakes", of "having New Zealand archaeology taken seriously by the granting agencies" and of getting "some decent laboratory space and facilities". New Zealand archaeology was going to become a research-oriented enterprise based in the Universities. It was to be methodologically rigorous and the results of excavations had to be published fully.

In 1969 Foss and Helen wrote,

There are two Universities in New Zealand (Auckland and Otago) which are actively engaged in prehistoric anthropology, both from the teaching point of view, and in archaeological research. Much of the research conducted by academics from these two institutions has been outside of New Zealand, for the simple reason that financial support is far easier to obtain for working anywhere in the Pacific except New Zealand. These activities have been largely confined to the South Pacific—Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, Pitcairn, etc.—but with the recent addition of Thailand. New Zealand archaeology, on the other hand, has been fostered largely by small and scattered societies throughout the country, and to a lesser extent by professional archaeologists. (Leach and Leach 1969: 15)

This paragraph lists the shortcomings Foss then spent nearly twenty years addressing. He set out, with Helen's invaluable support, to get archaeological research in New Zealand funded, principally by raising the standard of the research and the publications which followed. More than that, Foss built a forceful theory and practice of archaeology of his own out of very diverse sources, including the fieldwork successes and failures of his predecessors at Otago, Walter Taylor's (1948) *A Study of Archaeology* and a philosophy of

science, drawn substantially from Popper (1972). His eclectic approach to historical research and the emphasis on seeking the emic value of items in trade and exchange through specialist analysis owes much to early reading of Collingwood, especially *The Idea of History* (1948), and to Helen's strong interest in the social and domestic realms. Finally, Foss worked extraordinarily hard assembling the necessary facilities.

The books I often saw him surrounded by from 1968 to 1978 persuaded him, above all, of the accessibility of truth through scientific analysis. He maintained, although not always explicitly, through many seminars then and papers since, that reality existed in the immutable essence of things and that this essence could be identified and understood through the pursuit of science based on the construction and examination of falsifiable propositions, all of which owes much to Popper (1972). In short, he became an adamant positivist.

From this heady perspective, interdisciplinary differences, as between geology, physics and archaeology, were understood to be over-emphasised administrative boundaries, rather than divisions founded in epistemology. Foss pursued a strong-willed problem-solving approach to archaeological analysis, which was exemplified at an early stage in his (Leach 1972) review of Green and Davidson's (1969) first volume on Samoan archaeology. Problems were either intellectual or technical and it was axiomatic that the latter could be solved, when and if the necessary technical apparatus became available.

It followed from the positivist approach that archaeological method had to be modified. Some modifications were imperative. First and foremost, New Zealand archaeological research had to be directed at archaeological landscapes, rather than individual sites, and well-organised on a project basis, not centred on short-term single-site excavation-only fieldwork which was very much the *modus operandi* of the time at both the Auckland and Otago Anthropology departments. Second, archaeological research had to be conjunctive, in Taylor's (1948) sense of that term. Following the approach taken with Groube at Mapoutahi and in the Bay of Islands during 1966 and at Oturehua in 1967 excavations must be areal and spatially controlled in order to gather meaningful data. Finally, identifications, whether in faunal analysis, lithic sourcing and characterisations, or whatever, must be made positively not negatively. Therefore, excellent comparative collections and statistical methods capable of leading to positive identifications had to be generated.

Foss often expressed the belief that New Zealand and Pacific archaeology could and ought to be contributing to the construction of world prehistory. Therefore, the channelling of funds and personnel towards research in South-east Asia, which appeared to occur at the expense of Pacific studies, was to be resisted. Foss fully understood that the excavations Roger Duff, David Teviotdale, Sonny Hovell, H. D. Skinner and others ran, in some instances at least until a decade after the the Second World War, were disastrous. This was because those "diggers" worked as if they were unaware of methodological advances in archaeology in the rest of the world. The products of their mighty labours were artefacts. These "pieces" are pretty but, because of the ways in which they were recovered, they are devoid of historical context and therefore, largely useless. The work of those "diggers" was, in both methodological and ethical terms, decades behind the best of archaeology elsewhere, particularly in Western Europe and North America. Foss argued that the natural place of New Zealand archaeology was as a sophisticated contributor to world archaeology and prehistory rather than as a research *cul de sac*, a career starter, a salary base for research elsewhere or for an early retirement home.

These were amongst the ideas upon which the Wairarapa project and the development of Pacific archaeology at the University of Otago from 1969 were based. Those who were involved in the excavation of the Makotukutuku 1 site in the summer of 1970–71 and 1971–72 will remember the long and sometimes sober fireside discussions of archaeological methods and the purposes of archaeology. The students who were involved in that project became the second cohort of professional archaeologists to be trained in New Zealand.

In my view, the Makotukutuku excavation was technically the best piece of excavation-based archaeology undertaken in New Zealand, at least until the time at which it was done. What was achieved in the Wairarapa project should be recognised as a major shift in the quality of data collection and analytical methods in New Zealand excavations.

Foss sought to reproduce the success of the Wairarapa project in the Chatham Islands. Applications for funding were written in the spring of 1975. They were successful and when the Royal New Zealand Navy very generously offered to transport male members of the expedition to the Chathams free of charge, the project became viable. However, Foss was by then committed to finishing his dissertation before going on long leave in 1976 so, after a long afternoon in the Carey's Bay pub, it was resolved that I would take on the Chathams research. Atholl Anderson went on to further studies at Cambridge. Nigel and Kathy (nee Walls) Prickett had by then already moved to the Taranaki Museum. Steve Bagley, always the calmest member in the "rich mixture" of that masters class had moved to the directorship of the Nelson Museum.

From 1972 Foss supervised a large proportion of the M.A. and Ph.D. students in archaeology who passed through the Department. Their fields of interest ranged very widely (see Appendix). No one escaped the assiduous and sometime problematic energy with which he assisted in thesis design and completion.

In 1968, the archaeologists at Otago had an old army shed as their only laboratory. This "facility" was used for all purposes necessary to archaeological research. These included Angela Calder's (1977) renowned, if not always positively regarded, faecal analysis, as well as the preparation of specimens for the comparative collection. The stench which resulted from the recovery and processing of an elephant seal skeleton in about 1970 was such that the late Professor Smithells, then Head of the nearby School of Physical Education, joined the enthusiastic ranks of those who were trying to get Archaeology more space—elsewhere. We were moved in 1972 to a large two storey building on the edge of the campus which had been vacated recently by J. and A. P. Scotts, a firm of engineers. This provided something like ten times the floor space of the "old lab". The many tables we requisitioned were soon covered with assemblages being analysed by a rapidly growing number of graduate students. When the Works Department of the University wanted to move into Scotts, the archaeologists found it impossible to move out until equivalent space, in areal terms, was provided. So in 1973 we were moved into the building just vacated by the Works Department. We were spaciouly accommodated between Pharmacology and the Dental School. Those of us who were graduate students then enjoyed the belief, probably apocryphal, that it was the dread of foul odours which led to our being granted the substantial funds needed to renovate our new quarters and construct a defleshing room, complete with air tight chambers, a high exit chimney and powerful venting fans.

The last step in the process came with the move in 1979 into the new Hocken Building. The Department of Anthropology was allocated space there commensurate with its then current holdings of laboratory space, on the basis of plans assiduously prepared by

Foss, Graeme Mason, the late Greg Cameron and others. As a result, the archaeological laboratory facilities at Otago are the best I have encountered.

Foss' research after I left Otago in 1978 is less well known to me at first hand. We last worked together on fieldwork in the Chathams, just before Katie was born, in December of 1974. He worked on Norfolk (1976); Taumako in the Outer Eastern Islands of Solomons group (1977-78), Kandrian District of Southwest New Britain (1979), Kapingamarangi (1979-80), Yap (1983) and, most recently, Singapore (1987).

In effect, Foss maintained three parallel and concurrent career level commitments. These were to archaeological fieldwork and publication, the interrelated fields of archaeometry and archaeozoology, and facilities acquisition and development. The list of his written work, with which this chapter concludes, is testament to the success he continues to enjoy with the first two. The archaeological facilities at the University of Otago are witness to his achievements in the third.

This volume is a celebration of strength and determination. It is our modest tribute to a remarkable man who has done much to establish New Zealand archaeology as a systematic and constructive discipline. Volumes such as this, comprising essays "written in honour of ...", are typically written late in the career of the recipient. Happily, the present case does not oblige that general rule. As some of those who have taken Foss away from his research work to have him help with our individual research projects, the contributing authors wish Foss all the very best for his next 25 years of research and publication, without those innumerable interruptions.

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#### APPENDIX 1

##### THESES SUPERVISED 1972-1988

Park, G. S. MA 1972. The classification of prehistoric stone implements by factor analysis.

Ward, G. K. MA 1972. Obsidian and New Zealand Archaeology: a paradigm for sourcing assemblages using x-ray fluorescence spectrography.

Jones, K. L. MA 1972. Prehistoric Polynesian stone technology.

Anderson, A. J. MA 1973. Archaeology and Behaviour: Prehistoric subsistence behaviour at Black Rocks peninsula, Palliser Bay.

Prickett, N. J. MA 1974. Houses and house life in prehistoric New Zealand.

Sutton, D. G. MA 1974. Resurrection of the prehistoric dead.

Walls, K. E. MA 1975. The prehistoric exploitation and knowledge of geological resources in Southern Wairarapa.

- McIlwraith, M. A. MA 1976. Archaeology, middens and people.
- Ritchie, N. A. MA 1976. New Zealand greenstone sources.
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- Till, M. BA 1980. Experimental freeze-drying of the New Zealand hardwood *Metrosideros robusta*.
- Gillies, K. B. MA 1981. Prehistoric use of obsidian in Murihiku. Holdaway, S. BA 1981. Fluorine profiling: a new method for the relative dating of bone.
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- Intoh, M. MA 1982. The Physical Analysis of Pacific Pottery.
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- Intoh, M. Ph.D. 1988. Changing prehistoric Yapese pottery technology: a case study of adaptive transformation.
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- Horwood, M. MA 1988. Trace element levels in human bone and prehistoric diet in New Zealand.
- Four students are completing Masters theses under Foss' supervision in 1989.

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