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Professional Profiles in Archaeology 1985-2020

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Introduction

Alex Jorgensen's (2020) account of last year's NZAA Professional Profile Survey reminded me that in 1985 the now disbanded Institute of New Zealand Archaeologists (INZA) (Coster 1984, Furey 1984) undertook a comparable survey, the results of which have never been widely distributed. In addition, three other useful estimates of numbers in the archaeological profession have been compiled, by Challis (1995:170), Walton (2005) and, as Jorgensen notes, Walton & O'Keeffe (2004:279). This paper presents the results of the 1985 survey and compares them with those of three later ones, with a view to illustrating changes in the composition and practice of the profession over the last 35 years.

The Surveys

The four earlier surveys were compiled by individuals with a close knowledge of the profession, using a variety of sources, and were reasonably reliable in terms of absolute numbers. Participation in the NZAA survey was voluntary, however, and not everyone practising as an archaeologist in Aotearoa New Zealand responded (Jorgensen, pers. comm.), so it may be assumed that there are currently more archaeologists working in the country than the 113 cited. (This point is discussed further under "Employment Patterns" below).

The NZAA survey was nonetheless the most comprehensive of the four, providing a broad insight into the current makeup of the archaeological profession, expressed as percentages, derived from minimum numbers in each category. The ten categories used are described by Jorgensen (2020) and summarised below in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories covered by individual surveys.

Survey Category	INZA 1985	Challis 1995	Walton 2005	NZAA 2019
Employment status				
Qualification levels				
Annual income				
Gender				
Age				
Ethnic identity				
Source of qualifications				
Geographical areas worked				
Archaeological specialisations				
Professional development interests				

Walton and O’Keeffe (2004) provided an estimate of the total numbers of archaeologists employed in 2003, and recorded their employment status, qualification levels and gender. Walton (2005) repeated the exercise 15 months later, producing a very similar, but probably more accurate, estimate. Walton and O’Keeffe’s 2003 results are therefore not considered in this paper. Challis (1995) looked only at the numbers of those known to be employed by government agencies, but it is possible to supplement his figures to provide an estimate of the total then engaged in public archaeology.

The INZA survey, although it included all archaeologists employed in the country, was less comprehensive than the 2019 NZAA survey in terms of the attributes examined. It covered qualification levels, employment status and annual income, as well as looking at length of time employed, security of tenure and degree of job responsibility (difficult areas to draw useful conclusions from), but did not collect data on age, gender, ethnic identity, source of qualifications, geographical spread, archaeological specialisations and professional development options, which were covered in 2019. The survey recorded a total of 54 people (including 23 members of the Institute) employed in the teaching or practice of archaeology in New Zealand as at 31st March 1985. They included archaeologists with permanent positions, either on salary or contract, and longer-term temporary or part-time field workers or assistants. A number of short-term student summer workers, employed at the time by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) and Auckland University, were excluded, as were museum staff with archaeological qualifications, but not employed directly as archaeologists. Otherwise, the survey was comprehensive and offers a reasonably complete picture of the situation at the time.

INZA Survey – Results

The results for archaeological qualifications in 1985 (Figure 1) are directly comparable to those from 2019, except that honours degrees are included under “BA/BSc”. As in 2005 and 2019, a master’s degree was the predominant qualification.

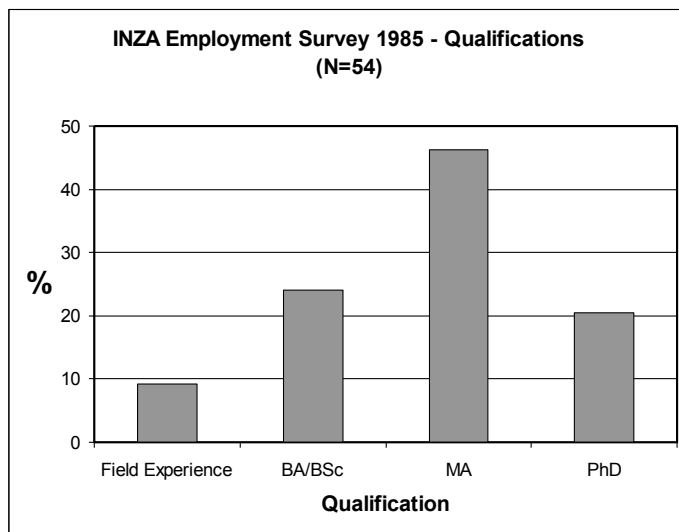


Figure 1. Archaeological qualifications, 1985.

Employment (Figure 2), as presented by the INZA and NZAA surveys, is more difficult to compare directly, since the categories used differ. Outside the universities, the major employers in 1985 were state agencies – the NZHPT and the central government land managers, the NZ Forest Service (NZFS) and the Department of Lands and Survey (L&S). No local authorities employed archaeologists directly.

The INZA survey distinguishes between “permanent” and “temporary” employees, reflecting a relatively small number of staff on salaries or long term contracts, and a larger number of wageworkers. The biggest group of these “temporary” employees was an assessment and investigation unit working at the time under the then NZHPT Auckland regional archaeologist. Overall, the results emphasise the relatively small proportion (37%) of permanent staff, contrasted, except in the universities, with a much larger group of temporary and part-time wage-workers, a situation analogous to that of the present time.

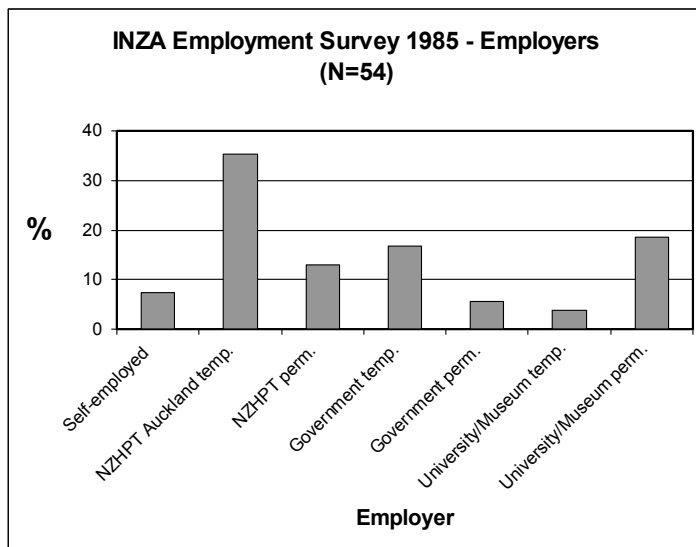


Figure 2. Employment status of archaeologists, 1985.

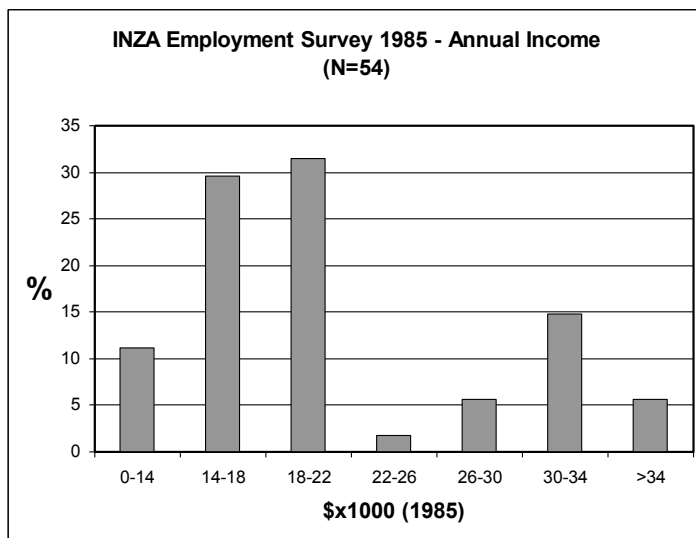


Figure 3. Annual income, 1985.

Annual income patterns (Figure 3) are easier to compare, even though the levels, in dollar terms, have more than quadrupled over the 35 year period. While the 2019 distribution is relatively even, with a modal value somewhere between \$60,000 and \$100,000 dollars, the 1985 distribution is strongly bimodal, reflecting the higher rates of pay of permanent salaried staff. The disparity was an issue that INZA took up in representations to employing agencies. The proportion of self-employed and private sector consultants and contractors is much greater now than it was 35 years ago, and they seem to be rather better paid.

Changes Over Time

The estimates compiled in 1985 (INZA), 1995 (Challis), 2005 (Walton) and 2019 (NZAA) provide four sets of data, 10, 10 and 14 years apart respectively. Although inconsistencies in the criteria used and the methodology of compilation (varying from an absolute count to formal questionnaire with voluntary response) make them not directly comparable in all categories, the data can be rearranged to provide two time series, illustrating changes in qualification levels and employment patterns (Table 2). Although not always absolutely accurate, or necessarily complete, the figures cited provide a good indication of the general situation at each point in time.

Table 2. Condensed categories and individual survey results. Note – for 1995, the number of consultants is an estimate and for University/Museum staff an arbitrary extrapolation. Numbers for the 2019 NZAA survey are a minimum, and in most cases under-represent the real numbers.

	INZA 1985 N	INZA 1985 %	Challis 1995 N	Challis 1995 %	Walton 2005 N	Walton 2005 %	NZAA 2019 N	NZAA 2019 %
Qualification								
Doctorate	11	20	-	-	38	33	23	20
Masters	25	46	-	-	63	55	64	57
Other	18	33	-	-	14	12	26	23
Total	54	100			114	100	113	100
Employer								
Consultant	23	43	(30)	(44)	64	56	76	67
Central Government	19	35	18	26	21	18	8	7
University/Museum	12	22	(18)	(26)	23	20	16	14
TLA	0	0	3	4	5	4	5	4
Other (incl. retired)	0	0	0	0	2	2	9	8
Total	54	100	69	100	114	100	113	100

Qualifications

Table 2 combines the results for “no formal qualification”, “field experience”, “bachelor’s degree” and “honours degree”, used variously by the INZA, NZAA and Walton/O’Keeffe surveys, into a single category – “other.” Qualifications were not recorded by Challis, but the arbitrary assumption is made that the relative percentages in 1995 were midway between those for 1985 and 2005. On this basis, as illustrated in Figure 4, master’s degrees are consistently the main qualification presented, with the proportion rising slightly over the period. Doctorates are now at much the same level that they were in 1985, but the proportion of practitioners with qualifications at honours level or lower has fallen significantly. It can be assumed that these changes reflect, as Jorgensen notes, the minimum requirement for approval for an archaeologist to carry out work under section 45 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) Act 2014, namely “a Masters degree (or equivalent) degree [sic] in archaeology or an associated discipline with an archaeological component” (HNZPT 2017:9).

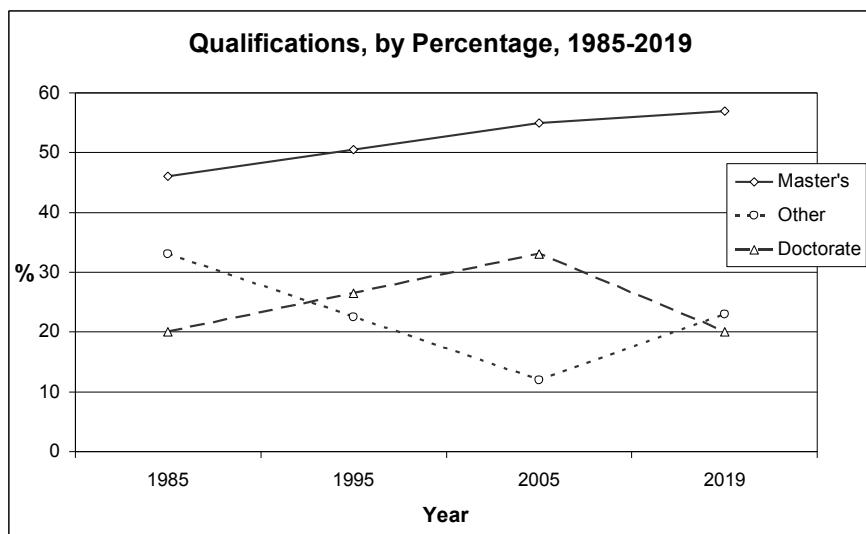


Figure 4. Changes in qualifications 1985-2019. Note – 1995 data for qualifications is unavailable and is here represented by an arbitrary extrapolation, midway between the 1985 and 2005 figures.

Employment Patterns

Employment categories differ significantly between the four sets of data. The 1985 INZA survey distinguished between “temporary” employees (untentured) and “permanent” ones (on salaries or long-term contracts). Challis’ 1995 estimate is focussed on central and local government employees, excluding museum or university staff and self-employed consultants. The 2004 and 2019 figures do not distinguish between NZHPT/HNZPT employees and those of other government agencies as the 1985 and 1995 surveys do. These disparate categorisations may be conflated to four, as in Table 2 and Figure 5 –

- Central government staff (at various times NZHPT/HNZPT, Department of Conservation (DOC), NZFS, L&S);
- Territorial local authority (TLA) staff (principally the former Auckland Regional Authority and now the unitary Auckland Council);
- University or museum archaeological staff; and
- Consultants and contractors, either freelance or employed by private companies and funded directly by developers under the terms of an archaeological authority or requirement for an archaeological assessment.

The relatively high number of “consultants” in 1985 results largely from the activities of the then NZHPT Auckland regional unit who were funded, not directly by Government, but by developers or development agencies, through archaeological authorities, that is, under comparable circumstances to those prevailing now. That unit was largely absorbed into DOC in 1987, along with most of the NZHPT salaried staff and staff from the other government departments.

For 1995, where figures for the number of independent consultants or contractors are absent, an estimate has been made from the authorship of reports submitted in 1995 and 1996 and held by Heritage NZ in their digital library, returning a figure of at least 30 individuals. For the number of university/museum staff in 1995 (also not considered by Challis) an arbitrarily extrapolated figure of 18, midway between the 1985 and 2005 estimates, is inserted.

The 2019 NZAA survey figures, as shown in Table 2, under-represent the numbers of archaeologists employed in both private and public sectors, as a result of the less than 100% return rate. A more accurate estimate of the total number of individuals in paid employment in archaeology may be made using criteria and methodology similar to those of Walton (2005:151-2). Enquiries within the state agencies concerned suggest, with a reasonable degree of certainty, that at least 20 archaeologists with a significant archaeological component to their jobs are

currently employed by central government agencies (HNZPT and DOC), about the same as in previous years, and that the figure for TLAs (Auckland Council) has risen to at least 6. Inspection of online university staff lists reveals at least 17 staff with an archaeological function, while a further 3 are believed to be employed in museums, a total within the public sector of at least 46.

Numbers of consultant/contract archaeologists can be partially estimated from the online NZAA (2020) “Member Consultant Directory”, which lists 79 individuals. This can be combined with online staff lists from archaeological consulting firms, which add another 21, bringing the minimum number of archaeologists employed in the private sector to 100. (A similar result is reached by counting the authors of reports from 2019 held in the HNZPT digital library, although these include a number of individuals not on the consultant directory and whose status is unclear. The true figure for those employed in archaeology may therefore be significantly higher than 100.)

Consequent alterations to the 2019 NZAA survey data in Table 2 are presented in Table 3 and Figure 5. They show a conservative total of at least 155 archaeologists employed in 2020, implying a maximum return rate in 2019 of 73%.

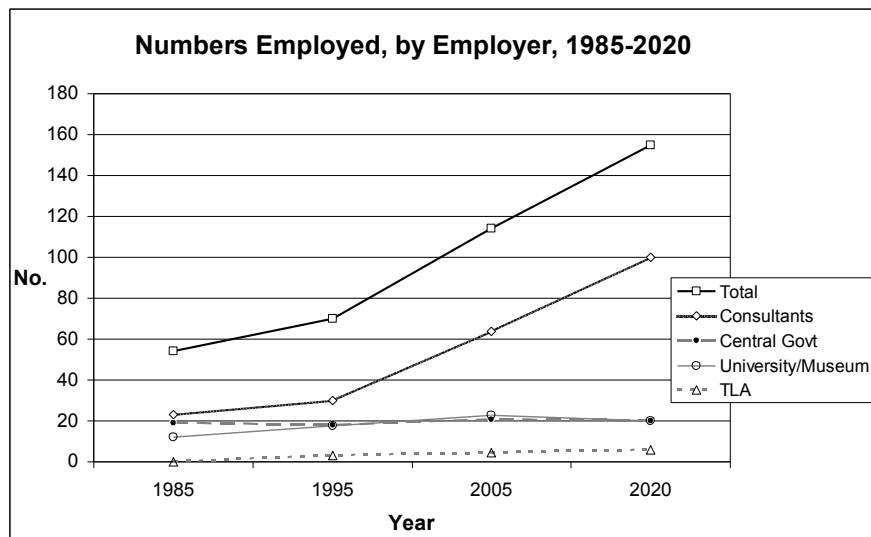


Figure 5. Changes in employment status and total employed 1985-2020. The “other” (undefined) employment category, shown in Tables 2 and 3, is excluded from this graph.

Table 3 Archaeological employees 2020 (estimated).

Employment category	2020 N	2020 %
Consultants	100	65
Central Govt	20	13
University/Museum	20	13
TLA	6	4
Other	9	5
Total	155	100

Conclusions

In the last 35 years, the number of archaeologists employed in Aotearoa New Zealand has tripled, from 54 to over 155. They are now better qualified than formerly, their incomes are probably spread more evenly, and more (indeed most) of them are women (Jorgensen 2020). There are three times as many consultant and contract archaeologists, increasing from 34 temporary and contract workers in 1985 to more than 100 in 2020, and they now comprise some two thirds of the archaeological work force. In the same period, numbers in the public sector (central government, local government, universities and museums) have increased by less than 50%, from 31 to around 46, and their share of the workforce has nearly halved, from 57% to around 30%.

Discussion

Challis (1995:169-173) describes the effect on archaeological staffing and practice of the dissolution of the state’s major land management agencies (NZFS and L&S) in 1987 and the splitting of their functions between the newly-formed Department of Conservation and commercial interests, together with the absorption of NZHPT staff into DOC. This was followed in 1995 by the re-creation of the NZHPT as an independent entity and the restriction of DOC’s archaeological function to the conservation estate. Both Challis and Walton & O’Keeffe (2004:279) point out that this series of changes, together with the introduction of the Resource Management Act 1991 and amendments to the Historic Places Act in 1993 provided “a big impetus to growth” in freelance consultancy, with “increasing opportunity for consultants to provide specialist advice.” These predictions have been borne out. The changes are illustrated in Figures 4 and 5 by the ongoing rise in the number of consultants and the relative increase in higher academic qualifications after 1995. In contrast to the rise in consultancy, the number of archaeologists working for public institutions

(government, universities and museums) has increased only a little and the proportion has fallen dramatically.

Challis (1995:172) points out that the increased role of consultants “raises the very complex inter-related issues of standards, qualifications and impartiality.” Walton & O’Keeffe (2004:280) similarly note “the need to extend professional codes of conduct, and to provide guidelines for best practice.” While Heritage NZ publishes a number of professional practice guidelines, one of which (HNZPT 2017) prescribes minimum technical standards and academic qualifications for archaeologists to practice here, they do not address the wider issues of professional standards and ethics. As O’Keeffe (2020) argues, the concerns raised by the rapid growth of contract archaeology, or consultancy, as a major focus of archaeological effort in New Zealand, remain unresolved.

Acknowledgements

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