



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## AMATEUR–PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FOUNDING YEARS

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In the first years of NZAA I was a child and young adult in a family with an interest in archaeology. When the Association started archaeology was largely an amateur interest and some published in the field. My father, Bob Law, was a founding member. While well-read and an avid book collector, he was not a writer. Amateurs like him dominated the early membership of NZAA and the local archaeological societies, even if the leadership mostly came from the few professionals.

Unlike some professions, few children seem to follow archaeologist parents into their ranks. Unusually then perhaps, I caught the bug from my father, to at least his amateur extent. His interest had been sparked on a 1920s holiday from Glasgow to his mother's home town of Wick in Caithness, where he had watched a National Museum of Scotland excavation of a Celtic village. Moving to Dunedin from Wellington in the year of my birth, 1945, as the manager of a life insurance company, he was in a job where he was expected to both meet clients (his gregariousness I did not inherit!) and to travel in his territory. Through this work he found he was meeting farmers who had collected Maori artefacts, usually adzes, often found in the days of following horse-drawn ploughs. He also found the wonderful coastal landscape of Otago, where there were archaeological sites being exposed by wind erosion, to a much greater extent than today. He became a collector of artefacts from those sites—largely by surface collecting—and an agent in the transfer of farmers' collections to the Otago Museum.

I am not sure how he came to be connected to the Otago Museum, but I surmise it was through next-door neighbour Mrs Emily Forsyth, daughter of Willi Fells, a great benefactor of the museum. I suspect it was the success in transferring farmers' adzes that had the Museum Director, H.D. Skinner, appoint him its Honorary Archaeologist in 1952. One childhood recollection is of a particular haul of cartons full of artefacts being unloaded from the company car to line the hallway of our Constitution Street house and the contents being

inspected on the kitchen table. I think it was the fabulous Willetts collection from Waitaki River Mouth that Duff (1956: 73) records as being found in ploughing in 1953. My father must have been instrumental in arranging its loan to the museum.

Weekends and holidays often included visits to the sites. I had a childhood introduction to the sites of coastal Otago: Shag River, Pleasant River, Warrington Spit, Long Beach, Murdering Beach, Pipikaretu, Allens Beach, Little Papanui, Kaikorai Lagoon, False Island, Pounaweia, Papatowai. My father had an eye for worked bone, particularly fishhooks. He kept some of his finds in a private collection that eventually went to the museum. The Law collection in the museum will mostly be hooks, marked in indian ink with an abbreviated location. Expanding the collection was a large part of Skinner's archaeology.

I made a few finds in this activity of "Maori relicking." My father made a point of my presenting them to the museum. One, a neat residual core in brown flint, surface collected from Warrington was duly passed by me to Les Lockerbie and subsequently appeared in a display case with a typewritten sign, "Collected and Presented Master G. Law." My pride then, was embarrassment by 1969, when it was still there at an NZAA conference in Dunedin.

Steven Edson and Murray Bathgate were classmates at George Street Normal School, Ray Harlow at Dunedin North Intermediate, where Atholl Anderson was a then unknown contemporary. Another collector, a Mr McCarthy, was a teacher there.

Les Lockerbie had a quartzite flake on his desk in the museum, delivered to him several years before by some local, reporting a site high on a range in "Central." Les had not followed it up. My father, exasperated by this, visited the site accompanied by family friend, Fred McElrea and reported back to Les on the famous Hawksburn site, excavated in 1954 and 1955 by Les and later by Atholl. I must have been too young to have gone with them.

In January 1958 a family holiday was combined with the Moa Bone Point Cave excavation at Redcliffs to which NZAA members were invited, "directed by Dr. Duff, with Jack Golson in charge of interpretation of stratification, and so on" (Scarlett 1958: 1). Those two personalities impressed themselves on me at the age of 13, as did the notorious Selwyn Hovell. The Law family had afternoon tea one day at his house and were shown some fabulous nephrite artefacts of heaven knows what disreputable provenance. Chris Jacomb has briefly covered the activities of Hovell's youth research group in his Panau volume (Jacomb 2000: 8–9). They were busy at the cave and I tagged along for the time the dig ran. My father excavated the godstick head mentioned in Ron Scarlett's account in the Newsletter (1958: 1). He was filmed in a re-enactment

of the find by the National Film Unit, for its monthly cinema newsreel, *Pictorial Parade*.

The family moved to Auckland later in 1958, to a landscape with very a different archaeology. We walked over beaches and pa sites but the artefacts were not there to be picked up as in Otago. There was also for me the experience of finding real Polynesians in my school class at Auckland Grammar.

In Auckland my father's interest declined but mine had been awakened. As a teenager I read the Newsletter, which he had from the first issue and the old bound *JPS* volumes he had bought at Skinner's instigation.

Starting my engineering degree with the intermediate year at Auckland University in 1963, I joined the Auckland University Archaeology Society. Despite its name it had many non-student members. It was incredibly active, with fortnightly meetings alternating talks and sessions training budding archaeologists in techniques they might use. There were monthly site recording field trips at weekends. Anne Leahy introduced me to site recording on Motutapu on one of these. The Easter excavation was at Taniwha Pa, run by Roger Green, with a mixture of students and other members, including Janet Davidson and Bob Jolly, to take two extremes. The pits we were excavating were to me an entirely new way of seeing the past. Roger kept insisting these were houses but I never quite believed him. I helped Roger get Taniwha off his backlist of unpublished excavations a decade later (Law and Green 1972). Roger's Auckland sequence monograph came out that year (Green 1963). It was challenging reading.

The Newsletter was then a rotating responsibility with successive regional issues. A weekend task for the Auckland society members was collating, stapling and envelope stuffing volume 6(1), 1963, the local issue, including the first substantial account of the extraordinary Kauri Point Swamp site that Wilfred Shawcross had excavated. Being editor and publisher then was very hands-on. It was either in this year or the next, I joined the Association as a student member, nominated and seconded by Messrs Shawcross and Jolly.

I spent the 1963/64 summer as a fitter's mate in the Tasman plant at Kawerau but I took a Christmas break at Wilfred's first excavation season at Ongare Point. Ron Scarlett was also there, with his extraordinary habit of collecting dead birds and keeping them in plastic bags under his stretcher.

I arrived at Christchurch in 1964 for the first professional year in civil engineering, my parents wisely thinking a move away from home to the more distant Canterbury University Engineering School would be character building. I joined the Canterbury Museum Archaeological Society and worked on its regular weekend excavations—the Bromley site was the first I attended, riding through the morning frost on my motor scooter. Amateur member Mark Johnstone was the club field leader and ran that excavation. Ron was a regular and Roger Duff

occasionally appeared and worked on the sites. Owen Wilkes was still the ethnologist at the museum, before his falling out with Duff. In my first term there he gave a masterful evening talk in the university on science and archaeology. He was succeeded in 1965 by Michael Trotter. Hovell was by then persona non-grata at the museum and I saw no more of him, but listened to Duff's accusations as to his character. Back in Auckland in late 1964 I helped at Roger's Castor Bay Pa excavation. I personally excavated the house floor under the defensive bank that was instrumental in converting Roger from believing pits were houses.

My father and I in following an amateur interest in archaeology had great encouragement from professionals and wonderful opportunities for participation. But they were peculiar to the times. I hope NZAA will continue to welcome and encourage amateur members but in our more constrained and correct world the attraction is now much less. The opportunity for a return from that encouragement is likewise diminished.

## References

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