



NEW ZEALAND
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ARCHAEOLOGY ON BANKS PENINSULA

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Okains Bay Maori and Colonial Museum

Archaeology to me, as a child at primary school, was watching an old chap dig on local sites of past Maori habitation and collecting up the fish hook barbs, bird spear points, greenstone chisels, gouges and adzes, plus the odd pendant. It was an hour's ride on my horse over to the next bay where he lived alone, and a wonderful way to spend the weekend. I also collected the odd piece, plus items of my own family's Pakeha past, following my grandfather and great uncle who in the late 1800s had formed Maori collections of their own.

In January 1951 I cut cocksfoot grass with a reaphook for three weeks to earn the money to buy that old chap's collection to add to my own. Fred Waldron was his name, and he lamented the fact that he didn't have the chance to display the collection properly, so I promised him I would.

So it was in New Zealand with early excavations or digs in Otago and Canterbury paid for by those museums. Firstly, it was for the artefacts to make comparative collections, and secondly for the knowledge gathered from the site. It seems this was accepted practice up to about 1950. I think we should not now downgrade or belittle the efforts of those fossickers because of our changed attitudes and responsibility to gain all knowledge from a site, and the vastly improved technology available to us now.

My first introduction to archaeology with a professional was with Roger Duff of the Canterbury Museum. My cousin and I had rowed our dinghy around the coast to Pa Bay to net moki and butterfish. We landed for lunch and climbed up to the end of the spur where we found numerous greenstone artefacts scattered over a cattle playground. We later rode our horses back and made a plan, and excavated a small area. One particular find was a broken whalebone club with a fish hook worked on its butt. Duff was then keen to become involved and arrived with a grubber made from the spring of a tram. I was horrified as I had by then progressed to a trowel and brush. However Duff wasn't a good horseman and didn't like the hour and a quarter ride. One of the great things to come out of his visit was the help and advice of Rhys Griffiths, who also made a plane table

survey of the site. This led to some years of detailed archaeology which was later published in the *NZAA Newsletter*.

Jack Golson's emergence on the New Zealand archaeology scene was as timely as it was profound. We did have our own experts such as Les Lockerbie of Dunedin, but Jack's focus and drive in bringing professional and amateurs together for the improvement of archaeological methods for the sake of us all, was great.

I applied to become a member of the NZAA but was turned down as I couldn't get past the influence of the Canterbury Museum's director. Thankfully, Dr Skinner of the Otago Museum nominated me a year later, and had a colleague second my nomination, and so I was permitted to join like minded enthusiasts. The NZAA sponsored dig at Redcliffs Cave, Christchurch, was exciting and informative. I learnt a lot and met great people. We trowelled and sieved through masses of rubble left from an earlier Canterbury Museum dig, of the late 1800s. This later dig was all because of artefacts found in a corner of the cave by Selwyn Hovell, a collector. Were we there because of the artefacts Canterbury museum was hoping to get, or the knowledge which would be gained? The whole thrust of the NZAA was then, as now, towards education, but it seemed to take some time to get disengaged from the established museums' control.

In 1975 I was privileged to work with a group from the University of Otago on a site on the Chatham Islands. It seems the islanders had been promised that artefacts excavated would be returned to the island museum after they had been studied and recorded. Having family connections with some of the islanders, and being by far the oldest in the group, I was under some pressure to stress this would happen. I wonder if it did?

Starting in 1954, I studied and recorded the Maori waka still being used or stored on the Whanganui river. I had been involved from an early age with a waka still being used on the Wairewa Lake, Little River. My dad was a keen dog trialist and took me along to learn the trade, but my interests were eeling and paddling waka so that is where I went. Whanganui Maori were still using waka daily when I first saw them, but towards the end of the 1960s they had become out of date and left to be washed away or sometimes cut into lengths and boarded up to make pig troughs. As a youngster I knew every totara log in the district and adzed out several over the years, copying the styles of the old time Maori.

My last and biggest is called *Ko tuku ma Rangi* which is based on the river side here in Okains and used each year to be part of the Treaty of Waitangi commemoration. Commemorating the treaty at Okains annually has given us a practical role in bringing Maori and Pakeha into contact with their culture and their treasures. Items recovered from archaeological sites, and which are part of displays, have a vital role in spanning the generations and mingling with present

day protocol as it is performed on the day. Perhaps the greatest pride on the day comes from involvement with the restored war canoe, *Kahukaka*, when it is paddled up river to a traditional welcome.

Scenes which I had the privilege to witness, of Maori couples paddling their waka along the Whanganui with firewood stacked in the middle, or waka being used to simply transport Maori across river to go to work, are no longer with us, but need to be recorded just as carefully as middens. We cannot measure the feelings such as those of Bill Tini when he paddled his family's waka across Lake Wairewa to hand it on to us to look after for his tribe.

The Antiquities Act was a great plus for the preservation of archaeological sites, but it brought in some negative aspects as well. The most negative effect as far as the NZAA was concerned was the change to Jack Golson's original thrust whereby it saw the relegation of all amateurs to being paying members only. The universities pumped out the required number of qualified people to administer the Act, as well as fill all the necessary professional positions in New Zealand. At present we have so many eroding foreshore sites from which much knowledge could be gained by welcoming and involving genuinely interested amateurs. Being an amateur archaeologist and a collector hasn't always been an easy burden to carry. Fossickers and collectors were always of another grade of human society—greedy, untruthful and befriended by the major museums only for what could be gained. This has been the case even though most of museums collections have been gained through fossicking. Some professional archaeologists were also sceptical of my honesty and integrity, unable to accept my skills gained by a genuine interest and sacrifice.

Sales such as last year's Wagener Museum show a typical theme among collectors, where one enthusiast starts collecting with a good intent, but the money value becomes all important. However, I take issue with comments by one of the team cataloguing the collection for sale, when they say the collection is being lost to private collectors. Why don't they purchase the collection themselves and donate it to a public institution?

Now, 50 years on, perhaps the greatest achievement of all has been the change to the public's perception of Maori life of old. In displaying Maori treasures I strive to impress both Maori and Pakeha of the achievements of those early settlers. Both races can be astounded and yet proud of their skills as providers for their people.

The respect and love for the Maori people I had as a child has continued to grow as my studies and involvement with their treasures continues. Those two feelings have always made it impossible for me to value taonga as money, even when purchasing items, instead they have become somewhat spiritual and a link to the people of the past. Archaeology should, I think, be closely connected

to displays of the lifestyle of those past people, Maori and Pakeha, to enhance our pride in our collective ancestors' achievements.

I congratulate the NZAA on attaining its fiftieth birthday and regard with pleasure my involvement, and the friendships made, with people of like interest.