



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

BOOK REVIEWS

Connah, G. (1988) 'Of the hut I builded': The Archaeology of Australia's History. Cambridge University Press, Melbourne. 176pp. \$A35.00.

[This review is reprinted, with permission, from Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology 6:176, 1988.]

If you can 'get past' the implication in the title that Australia's 'history' began in 1788, this volume, published for the Australian Bicentennial, will prove a timely and most useful addition to the literature.

It is, as the title suggests, a book about archaeology; more specifically a synthesis of the scope and findings of archaeological investigations on sites created in the main since the establishment of European settlement in Australia 200 years ago.

One of the stated purposes of the book is to provide an introduction to the discipline of historical archaeology in popular terms, to both inform lay readers and encourage their interest and participation. It does this admirably via the presentation of a 'round up' of archaeological projects which highlight the scope, diversity, direction, and unrealised potential of the discipline. As such, the utility of the book stretches far beyond its stated audience - it will be of interest to historians, students, archaeologists, and anyone who wants a concise readable summation of the state, achievements, and direction of the discipline as it has developed over the past two decades in Australia.

Although the historic era of Australia's history is comparatively brief, as the author notes, its impact, in terms of the introduction and production of artefacts, machines and structures, and modifications to the landscape, has been far greater than that of the thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation that preceded it. Consequently there is a tremendous scope for historical archaeology. The author responds forthrightly to those who question its utility, by presenting practical illustrations of what has been achieved by historical archaeology studies. These show that the discipline has the potential to embellish the documentary record, shed light on "forgotten, ignored, or neglected history", and generate new cultural/historical information that could not be obtained by any other means.

The author chose to use only published studies as illustrations, on the grounds that readers could then obtain the reports and publications and indulge their interest further

if they so desired. While it is, of course, no fault of the author, that the results of many projects remain unpublished, it would have been of interest to know a bit more about them, particularly if some of the unpublished work differs from that documented so well in the book.

Some readers will be surprised at the scope of historical archaeology as it appears to be developing in Australia. The author rightly points out that historical archaeologists draw (or should draw) on every data base at their disposal - written and pictorial documentation, oral history, detailed studies of artefacts, machinery, structures, and landscapes, both obsolete and still in use. As he states "it would be foolish to limit ... studies merely to the remnants that have survived beneath the ground while ignoring complete structures that are still standing? Houses are artefacts ... why confine oneself to broken or buried examples when there are complete ones around?" Related to this philosophy, there is an emphasis on the importance of ethnohistorical studies; the need to document techniques and machines which are still in use so that the information can be used to interpret the past. Examples he presents include studies of traditional limemaking in Western Australia, brickmaking in northern New South Wales, and a study of the last factory (now demolished) in Australia which produced pressed metal ceilings.

The book is divided for convenience into thematic groupings, e.g. the historical archaeology of: precolonial contact (a most interesting chapter on Indonesian trepangers and Dutch shipwrecks); early Sydney (the first settlement); failed settlements; the penal settlements (which highlights the significant role these involuntary immigrants played in the initial settlement of many parts of Australia); maritime sites; the efflorescence of the Australian house(s); the rural landscape; mining; and other industries. The author stresses that no one element existed in isolation and that each aspect is an integral part of the history of Australia and amenable, depending on the condition of the sites, to archaeological documentation and study. He particularly stresses (p. 127) that "industrial archaeology is but *one* aspect of Australian historical archaeology", and that the archaeology of past industries (or any other aspect) should not be considered in isolation but as an integral part of the whole range of material evidence available for the periods in question.

Perhaps unwittingly, the book reflects certain directions or biases (strengths and weaknesses?) of historical archaeology as it has developed in Australia. There is constant emphasis on social and economic changes as reflected in structural remains and changing landscapes. On the other hand, detailed comparative studies of (excavated) items of material culture and faunal remains, which some regard as one of the traditional

touchstones of archaeology, barely rate a mention. Why these studies are neglected is not addressed. It is certainly not for lack of suitable sites/assemblages. Another aspect which is neglected (the author probably considered it beyond the scope of the book) is some comment about particular site types which the author considers to be poorly represented amongst those which are protected. Such comments would have been of interest to the layman and the cultural resource manager alike. The last chapter is a useful summary of 'ignored' site types and specific areas where the author sees potential for productive research.

The book concludes with an excellent summation of sources of information, contacts, and a comprehensive selected reading list, for anyone aspiring to be an historical archaeologist, wishing to assist in the lab or the field, or just learn a bit more about some of the areas discussed. In summary this book clearly achieves far more than the stated objective of introducing historic archaeology to the public at large. It is a readable informative account which reflects the state of historic archaeology in Australia at present, and will be an excellent benchmark as to progress in the future.

Neville Ritchie

- - - - -

Foster, Russell and Brenda Sewell (1988) An Open Settlement in Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand. Excavation of sites R11/887, R11/888 and R11/899. Science and Research Series, 5. Department of Conservation, Wellington. 71pp. \$24.00.

This report is to be welcomed for three specific reasons. First, because it is published in an accessible series, rather than the "grey literature" which emanated from the Auckland Unit when it was within the N.Z. Historic Places Trust. Second, because it contains information on domestic sites, which have until recently been at once the most common and arcane component of prehistoric Maori settlement patterns. Third, because it is a well presented and business like piece of work. Russell Foster, Brenda Sewell, and the others who were involved are to be congratulated.

Salvage archaeology often involves fieldwork in unlikely and even unattractive areas. Whereas, as contract archaeologists have pointed out for years, research excavations have tended to occur, fully justified of course, in balmy bays on sheltered coasts. The Fisher Road site was no exception. It was a stony slope, set between areas of light industrial "development", sloping down to the Tamaki River. Initial reconnaissance found little and it was really only after the turf was removed from substantial areas using a machine

scraper, folklore has it that this occurred at Bruce McFadgen's instigation, that major finds were made. These consisted of a nested series of small domestic structures built along a low spur, and evidence of large scale food preparation, although much of that was found before machine turfing began. The small structures were invisible from the surface and obscure enough stratigraphically to have been missed or misinterpreted by any but an areal excavation. All is made very clear by Sally Maingay's illustrations which are outstanding. This find sets a benchmark by defining what is probably the most obscure form of the Maori domestic settlement. It will have to be kept in mind because New Zealand archaeologists now share an interest in fine grained settlement pattern analysis intended to define all components and the relationships between these. Because it is a benchmark work this report will be widely read and cited.

Without wanting to be negative I note that there is an irregularity in the attribution of authorship. People who did the identifications or analyses reported in the appendices are not cited as authors, unless they are Russell Foster (midden analysis), Clayton Fredericksen (obsidian artefact analysis) or Brenda Sewell (stone analysis). Rod Wallace (charcoal identifications), Frank Climo (landsnails) and Reg Nichol (shellfish and fish species) are acknowledged. I see no point in this discrimination, perhaps wrongly.

Finally, I doubt the interpretation that "sites R11/887, 888 and 889 formed parts of a single hamlet". This seems to be another instance in which excavators have yielded to the temptation to make a single whole out of the sum of the parts which were contained per chance within their excavation squares. What is preserved by that interpretation is the sanctity of the term hamlet and its connotations as spelled out by Les Groube a quarter of a century ago. Our dating methods, chronometric and seasonal, are simply not sufficiently accurate to justify the construction of that whole from those holes. With or without it this reports stands as a substantial contribution.

Doug Sutton
