



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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EDITORIAL

I have been editor of the Newsletter for five years now, so it is probably time I wrote an editorial. Also, I did mention in the last issue (Notes and News) something of my ambitions for the magazine, so that it occurs to me that it might be worthwhile to expand on these. Perhaps readers might write in and say how they agree/disagree with these ideas.

The Newsletter is the main thing that most members of the Association get for their money. Only a third or a quarter of members come to the annual conference. The rest rely very much on the Newsletter to keep them informed on what is going on in New Zealand archaeology. Does the Newsletter achieve this?

During my time as editor I have tried to encourage amateur members of the Association to write for the Newsletter. It must be said, however, that almost all contributions do come from professional or professionally trained people. While many of these contributions are excellent and I am very grateful to all contributors for maintaining the flow of articles, it could be argued that many, perhaps most, papers are directed by academically trained archaeologists towards other academically trained archaeologists.

Such articles are, of course, essential. The Newsletter is for everyone and it must continue to provide an outlet for the interests of students and professionally trained people (and others who are interested in the more specialised aspects of archaeology). For many students the Newsletter provides for a first foray into publication which is not too demanding or unattainable. I often wonder, however, if the language and interests of many of these articles are not a little off-putting to other people who would like to contribute but feel just a little out of their depth.

The type of article which I have long felt was in short supply are those which describe, or put into some sort of context (archaeological, historical, or whatever), something of our marvellous historical landscape and the superb artefacts come down from the past. We have an enormously exciting subject matter, but I don't believe this is always obvious from the Newsletter.

One type of article that I have attempted to con and cajole out of people in recent years is the preliminary report

on fieldwork. Excavation in particular interests people; the same can be said for much survey work which is carried out in districts known to readers. So often, however, the Newsletter appears to fall between two stools. Survey work is (rightly) reported at length in detailed internal reports, but there is seldom any publication in any wider outlet of the more interesting and salient results. Excavation may be reported in detailed manuscripts or published in scientific journals (when it is reported at all). Both unpublished reports and scientific journal publications, however, are directed largely towards the professional community and publication is often ungettable - and sometimes decidedly difficult and uninteresting - for the general reader.

All levels of publication are important: the detailed internal report or manuscript, full journal publication, and, I believe, the briefer preliminary report or outline of interesting results for a wider audience. The Newsletter, I would add, must surely be the outlet in New Zealand best suited to keeping people interested in archaeology in this country informed about what is going on. Members of the Association are interested in archaeology - that goes without saying; I think they deserve to be kept in touch, and given something of an opportunity to share in the excitement of fieldwork and discovery. So, please ... can I urge people doing fieldwork to write brief accounts of the most interesting results and send them in to the Newsletter as quickly as possible - when the work is still news.

Can I also appeal for more photographs and other illustrations? When I began to run photographs in the Newsletter I did not realise how difficult it would be always to fill up the available pages. Archaeology is surely a very visual subject - historic places and their settings offer pictures worth far more than just a thousand words. Pictures help bridge the gap between the scientific or theoretical abstraction of so much of today's archaeology and the people and landscapes we are fundamentally interested in. So let's actually see those lovely sites, artefacts and archaeologists at work!

In the last issue I introduced the new format that begins now. This format is, of course, virtually the same as the last except that we have gone metric (and saved ourselves about \$1000 a year in printing costs). Clearly, however, it is no improvement from the old shape for archaeological publication. I would like to have a complete change in format. The double-column A4 presentation impresses me as

the most suited. It is very flexible and copes well with maps and plans (being of a large size), as well as allowing photographs and other illustrations to break up texts close to relevant discussion.

But we come back to cost. To achieve an A4 format we need access to a word-processor, which allows corrections on a visual screen and recording on disc for the printer. The printer then simply programmes his machine to the required format, pops in the disc, and we have a proper printed magazine rather than a typed up copy as now. (This is a simplification, there is a lot of other work involved, including pasting up illustrations and text). The technology required for an attractive new magazine format is expensive, and editorial and production continuity becomes more necessary than ever. Future editors may not have access to in-house typing and other services which have always subsidised our Association to a very large degree.

This is just thinking aloud, but it might help members appreciate some of the difficulties involved in planning for a better magazine in a small Association such as ours. It does, however, point to another question (which relates to the plea above for more articles of general interest), and that is that we need more members. The main thing most of our members get for their money is the Newsletter. Just what sort of Newsletter do members want? I had hoped in making a bigger brighter Newsletter to play a part in increasing membership. We have always had a big turnover, with many people joining and leaving the Association each year. Perhaps a better Newsletter would encourage the leavers to stay? Our turnover of members, however, remains very much the same and membership is essentially static. Is this 'catch 22' - we need more members to pay for a better Newsletter, but first we need a better Newsletter to enlist more members?

My own strong feeling is that much of the work and interests of modern archaeology do not enthuse many people outside the academically trained community. I am usually howled down when I say this so I won't really pursue it here, except to make one or two points. Firstly, it does seem that amateurs have yet to find an outlet for enthusiasm within the restrictions of the Historic Places Act and alongside the more scientific objectives of the professional community. Secondly, we are not alone in increasing specialisation at the expense of general interest (the Polynesian Society has suffered a near extinction of amateur members in recent years). Thirdly,

would even a bright new format Newsletter attract the kind of membership we need without a deliberate attempt to cater for a more general archaeological interest in its contents? And fourthly, does the Association need to offer more to its members. It has never provided more than a national umbrella: local societies are moribund or university centred - might they not be active branches of the Association?

To return to the Newsletter, it does seem to me that in asking the question, "what sort of Newsletter do we want?", we cannot avoid the question, "what sort of Association do we want?", and even, "what sort of archaeology?". I have tried here to outline something of my ambitions for the Newsletter (for which, many thanks to everyone who has talked out the various issues with me in the past few years), and I have gone on to suggest that this is not a question that just stops there. What do you think?

Nigel Prickett