



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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FURTHER NOTES ON THE CONSERVATION OF ANTIQUITIES

Park, Sutton and Ward

These comments follow the replies by Dr Green, Professor in Prehistory at Auckland, and Mr McKinlay, Archaeologist of the N.Z.H.P.T., to our original paper. Both commentators have had considerable direct experience of archaeological legislation, and we are grateful for the discussions had with them both before and after the writing of the initial 'Notes', as we are to Dr Buist for encouraging the publication of their replies. Our comments also take into consideration responses from other and diverse sections of the community.

Firstly, we must point out that the primary aim of the original article was to prompt the reconsideration of some fundamental issues that were being assumed or neglected in other discussions. We considered that the proposals of the N.Z.A.A. Council to the discussions held under the auspices of the Department of Internal Affairs (although they incorporated several of our own submissions) fell far short of what was needed and could be accomplished. Other prehistorians, including Dr Duff in his submissions on behalf of AGMANZ, have expressed a similar view. A body with as varied a membership as the N.Z.A.A. has difficulty coming to any sort of consensus of course; certainly it did not represent a majority of younger members. An effort to have university employed archaeologists represented at the meetings was rebuffed. Thus we seek to give a change of direction to N.Z.A.A. arguments in the hope that the deliberations of the Internal Affairs meetings will result in something less than a sop. However, the article was designed to stimulate; it was written as opinion, not as a comprehensive resume of efforts towards, or as a practical strategy for effecting legislation.

Nonetheless, it detailed some proposals new to New Zealand, such as that for a Department of Antiquities, in order to provide some concrete ideas for discussion at committee level. It also contained a couple of appeals to sentiment. We tried, however, to write a discussion of aims for our fellow archaeologists as distinct from an emotive appeal appropriate for a more general audience. This should follow a discussion of strategy which must await the clarification of aims. In this respect we agree with Professor Green's suggestions,

and hope that his experience in organising the Hawaiian legislation (which McGimsey calls 'the most revolutionary and far fetching') will be available to assist the promotion of adequate protection in New Zealand also. Pamphlets and leaflets used by McGimsey in Arkansas to promote public awareness and legislative change have recently been sent to us; these contain excellent examples of what is required for wide distribution.

Copies of the original paper, however, were distributed to several interested organisations and to Members of Parliament. Response has been overwhelmingly in favour of our proposals. There appears to be considerable sympathy and support abroad waiting to be drawn upon.

McKinlay's advocacy of a pool of artefacts in private ownership appears to us to be mistaken. As he himself has pointed out, the connection between the publicity given to high prices at artefact sales and continuing looting of sites, is undeniable. If internal trafficking is to be carried on, such destruction must continue. We think that public opinion has been underestimated and that there would be little objection to the progressive restriction of the rights of ownership of artefacts. The taking over of collections on the death of the owners and tax exemption on gifts to museums will encourage the progressive adoption of principles of public ownership. The special licensing of dealers mentioned as a temporary measure has already received favourable comment from the dealers themselves. Several areas of public opinion remain untested, but support has come from various quarters; strong interest in our endeavour to prohibit export of antiquities has come from vintage car enthusiasts, for example. We have discussed the necessity for control of the traffic in artefacts and some of the problems involved, including that of heirlooms, is developed in an issue of Te Awatea, to appear shortly.

While the registers of artefacts and sites are basic to the proposals, Green is right in seeing the Department (or whatever) of Antiquities as pivotal: it is indeed the most tangible of the hoped for gains, and already the Prime Minister has commented on the attractiveness of the proposal. To seek a full ministerial portfolio in the present climate may be as far from Utopia as it is from timidity. Whatever its status, we consider it imperative that immediate steps be taken to establish such an agency. Even with the present inadequate legislation, members of a Department of Antiquities, together with archaeologists in the Historic Places Trust and other government departments could achieve a widespread measure of protection until such time as more comprehensive legislation is enacted.

Further, although we see it as most important, it would be mistaken

to interpret our discussion of the educational role of the department's staff to mean that no-one else need be concerned in this respect. The emphasis is made that an archaeologist whose full-time concern is with protection of antiquities (rather than with museology or lecturing) is better placed to reach a more general audience. At the present time many opportunities for developing public awareness of the destruction of information about the past are lost for want of people able to make these their primary concern, for example through newspaper publicity, addressing meetings and discussing collections.

After many years of inconclusive discussion it is time to sort out what exactly is wanted, detail the best strategies, and to get everyone involved in the organisation necessary to achieve greater awareness of the need to protect our past cultural heritage.