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OTAGO 1958 - 1968 (PART 2)

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Gambling on Growth

In many respects 1963 was an unusual year for the Anthropology Department. One reason derived directly from a casual conversation at one of those modest, probably illegal, 5 o'clock drinking get-togethers which, before the law was changed in 1967, convened itself with wondrous ease in the Staff Common Room every Friday. At a gathering in mid 1962 I was drinking at the bar with that ally of Anthropology, Guy Manton, Dean of Arts, when the matter of a nomination for the William Evans Visiting Professorship for 1964 came up.

Ruminating into his glass on possible nominations, Manton turned to me: 'Any ideas, Peter, from archaeology or anthropology?' Off the cuff I said: 'Grahame Clark, if he'd come. He's interested in prehistory worldwide, you know; his book on the subject was published only last year' (Clark 1961). Guy acted at once. The nomination was endorsed by the relevant committee and the University. Grahame accepted for the first term 1964.

Developing the department, therefore, suddenly acquired an additional objective of having in place a functioning unit where Grahame and his wife, Mollie, would be welcomed by staff teaching beyond Stage 1 (Stage 2 was to begin in 1963), everyone involved committed to their subjects, with a programme of research in hand. All in 18 months? I had been mad that Friday evening.

Then occurred a stroke of luck. Permission to appoint a lecturer in social anthropology from 1963 meant a carefully fashioned advertisement, appropriately circulated, especially within New Zealand. John Harré, an Auckland graduate then working for his PhD under Raymond Firth at the LSE, was appointed. But he could not come for a year. So in December 1962 I asked

the Vice-Chancellor if I could appoint a temporary assistant lecturer for one year. With that show of reluctance common to all vice-chancellors (he knew that I would be back asking for an extension) he agreed. That night I rang Les Groube at Hawera offering him the job for 1963. It was a risk, I said, but I would gamble on student numbers increasing sufficiently to get his appointment extended for at least another year. Les rang back in a day or so saying he and his wife, Rosemary, would come. He was the first New Zealander appointed to a university position in prehistory in his own country.

I was delighted. More or less on the spot we agreed that he would teach archaeology for both Stage 1 and our first Stage 2 class. I would teach social anthropology, which meant rapidly putting together a Stage 2 course on Pacific ethnography, certainly the most amateur piece of teaching I have ever done. Eventually Rosemary took over the Stage 1 practicals. Though very underpaid, she and Les taught very well. Part of the Vice-Chancellor's deal was that Les would publish, and subsequently the department issued his study of Maori settlement patterns, based on his MA thesis (Groube 1965). We had 50 students in 1963, including 15 at Stage 2. It was clear we would grow. The curse of development was that it hinged on student numbers, but sometimes this outrageous principle could be used to bargaining advantage. Of those 15, some (more, no doubt, from the following year) would wish to take Stage 3 when available. But growth might well be slow. And we had no accommodation, no equipment. In 1963 Les and I used rooms in the Otago Museum by grace and favour.

What sort of department did I want that would accord with university requirements? As staff, I wanted New Zealanders whose competence would be recognised not only within the department but equally in the University. I wanted good teachers, with sufficient personal touch to infuse students with a belief in their subject, and, in equal measure, a zeal for research. Staff and students would have to accept that, for the time being without a professorial head, the department's future, its *style*, would be uncertain. Facilities would remain modest, because it was more important to have staff than hardware. Finally, without being too pretentious about it, the department's teaching and research would have to be, and be seen to be, relevant to the needs and aspirations of both the University and New Zealand society at large.

In mid 1963, Les's appointment was extended for a year, which meant that, with John Harré coming the following January, I could take sabbatical leave from May 1964, John, later promoted Senior Lecturer, in charge in my absence.

On my return, with the necessary authority, we planned to introduce Stage 3, with options in both social anthropology and archaeology. This meant that, given more staff, eventual permission to offer higher degrees, though not inevitable, was likely. But there was no talk of a Chair in any quarter.

More Fieldwork

In the meantime, I pressed on with fieldwork. By 1962 I had realised that to confine attention to early sites was wrong. So, with Michael Trotter's agreement - he had dug there in the 1950s (Trotter 1961) - in January 1963 the Otago Anthropological Society organised a training excavation at Huriawa Pa, Karitane, concentrating on the occupation terraces and bank and ditch below, adjacent to Trotter's exploratory trench, though the site record form covered a wider area (Gathercole and Knight 1964; Knight 1964).

At the same time, I had to fulfil an obligation to Kenneth Emory of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, to undertake an exploration of the archaeology of Pitcairn Island, as part of a pan-Polynesian programme financed by the U.S. National Science Foundation, for which the money had now become available. The programme involved a team consisting of Murray House, a former Island schoolteacher, Hardwicke Knight, Lin Phelan, Bob Carter, a geologist who had taken our Stage 1 (for his excellent report on the Island's geology, see Carter 1967), Linden Cowell, and Garth Rogers, another former Stage 1 student who then pursued his studies at Auckland, eventually taking a PhD. We left just before Christmas 1963. The work was intense and productive, but, although I have recently taken up work on the material again, it has resulted so far in no more than interim reports (Gathercole 1964; Cowell 1965).

Looking for a Home

Linden Cowell also played an important part in setting up the department. He had come to a temporary post at Otago Museum in 1962, having cut his teeth at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and lived in Japan. Talented in a range of museum ways, he was also a photographer with a strong interest in archaeology. By doing a deal with the Classics Department, I was able to recruit him from 1964 as our departmental technician, also working 1/4 time for the Classicists. However, approaches to the University Buildings Committee had led nowhere; we were still homeless. The solution, like so many relating to departmental problems at that time, was partly accidental, in this case also sheer comedy.



Figure 1. 648 Cumberland Street, Dunedin. A home for the Anthropology Department, 1964. (Photo: P. Gathercole).

One day in October 1963 I lunched with Linden in the University Union. Afterwards, as we walked by the Staff Common Room on Cumberland Street, I asked him what was going to happen to a nearby house, No. 648, a substantial turn-of-the-Century structure, which stood empty (Fig. 1). 'Oh,' he said, 'the Ministry of Works is pulling it down'. 'They can't do that,' I replied. 'It's brick and quite sound. Why don't we take it over from next year?'. He laughed: 'Why

not?' We tried the downstairs front window. It was unlocked. We climbed in, exploring the whole place, finding not much more than some love letters from 2nd World War US servicemen on the floor of the front room. We allocated rooms to next year's staff, and that afternoon I wrote to the University suggesting the house be assigned to us, being done up with the minimum of internal modification. To its credit the Registry (its senior staff were invariably sympathetic to our problems) agreed more or less by return of post.

When we left for Pitcairn we had nothing. By the end of the following February, the house was ready. We all, including a part-time secretary, had rooms, and there was one awaiting Grahame Clark, when he and Mollie arrived in early March (they came from Christchurch by bus, better to see the country, a style they maintained throughout their time in New Zealand). Those fortuitous whiskies of mid 1962 had paid off - just.

The first term of 1964 was endlessly busy. Preoccupied with sorting dig material, shaking down the department in its new home, planning sabbatical leave, ensuring Grahame Clark had what he needed, and getting approval for Stage 3 in 1965, I was, so Les said some years' later, on edge all the time. But some good students were emerging, with the chance of 100 on the books the following year.

Grahame was enjoying his new archaeological environment. He was much interested, in the pre-European context, 'in the contrasting ways of life of the Maoris of the North Island and those of the South Island, due in good measure to the cultivation of introduced food plants in the North, and the implications therefrom for exchanges in materials and commodities' (Coles 1997: 377; cf. / Clark 1974: 54-55). Moreover, as Helen Leach has recently recalled, he had many conversations with students of the following year's Stage 3 class 'about seasonality, meat weights, Maori middens and other topics that were relatively new issues in the long history of archaeology in New Zealand' (Leach 1995). Though his open lectures were somewhat disappointing, because of his international standing Grahame's visit was very good for the department. He talked to the right people, including the Vice Chancellor, and he liked our even-handed approach to archaeology and anthropology, though he kept stressing to me how far we had to go in research. Judging from papers on Australian topics (e.g. Thomson 1939; Mulvaney 1961), which he, as editor, published in the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, Grahame had a long standing interest in Australian Aboriginal history. He and Mollie went on to Sydney and Canberra after their New Zealand stay. Not surprisingly, knowing the way he

worked, these, and later, visits were reflected in increased attention given to the area, as well as to Oceania, in later editions of *World Prehistory*.

Maybe I exaggerated, but even by early 1964 I felt the department carried a definably open, bustling flavour, keen to get on with the serious business of learning, but with more than a touch of irreverence. The latter, if anything, was Les's hallmark, shared, with a different manifestation, by Linden. John, writing up his PhD for publication (Harré 1966), had firm ideas that anthropological methods were self-evidently applicable to contemporary political as well as cultural problems, and, more controversially, because some of our university colleagues considered it beyond accepted academic norms, a relish for using television to put over this message. Some months later, in a move heralding new political realities, he was appointed Maori Student Liaison Officer by the Maori Education Foundation.

Sabbatical Leave

Long awaited by the family (now six; Adrian had been born in September 1963), leave, begun and ended by long sea voyages, was wonderful. At the Moscow Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in August I gave a paper on Pitcairn, and made contact with Pacific specialists from the USSR and the Eastern Bloc, useful for years afterwards, especially when working on museum collections. Another useful contact was Bill Solheim, from Hawai'i, of whom more later. Based in Cambridge, I worked hard on my Pitcairn report, lectured on the Pacific, gave supervisions to some of Edmund Leach's students, and began to learn the Pacific collections there and at Oxford. In March 1965 I visited museums in Continental Europe, including Czechoslovakia, extending further my knowledge of Pacific collections. In Prague, Viktor Krupa, whom I had met in Moscow, organized an audience of philosophers and linguists for a lecture on Childe as a philosopher, which became the genesis of a later paper (Gathercole 1971).

Leave re-established family links in a country now caught up in car ownership and fascinated by motorways. Now was the time to catch up with the Pacific literature, to visit sites (the children increasingly groaning with unassuageable boredom), and to sound the pulse of current research, especially when combined with conversations with Raymond Firth, Meyer Fortes, Charles MacBurney, Beatrice Blackwood, Glyn Daniel, Margaret Stacey, and, especially valuably - when teaching Pacific ethnography I had made students read *Sorcerers of Dobu* - Reo Fortune. One day Edmund Leach gave good

advice. 'Build your department around *people*, not a syllabus. Get good people, and let *them* develop things co-operatively. In anthropology you cannot teach everything, so let people teach what they are good at. And bring method in there'.

Returning from leave in mid 1965 was not easy. Homesickness prevailed. But there was no gainsaying the department's achievement in my absence. There were 120 students, including some wishing to take MA papers in 1966. John had been able to appoint another social anthropologist, P.G. Ganguly, who came with strong recommendations from Canterbury. Good with senior students, he was coping with a referred Canberra PhD. He liked Otago, but, unable to settle, moved to Canada in 1968.

Working for the Chair

Now there was a simple objective: the appointment of a professor. One did not have to be a university politician to appreciate its importance. Otago's Geography Department was still labouring under the disadvantage of being headed by a senior lecturer; an excellent, very experienced man, whom the University was getting on the cheap. Without a professor in charge there was no certainty that a department would have access to the administration on equal terms with professorially - headed equivalents. Sardonicly I noted that in late 1965 the University appointed its first professor of Psychology, who, other staff yet to come, was able to spend nearly a year planning his subject's development. Such omens suggested my task would not be easy.

Part of any argument for academic growth was the need to demonstrate the quality of one's students. For our first (1965) Stage 3 class, therefore, we had to have a rigorous outside examiner. Unanimously we chose Roger Green, who was very complimentary about the standard achieved. A nice touch was that Paul Alexander, though intending to pursue social anthropology (cf. Alexander 1969), did the best Pacific archaeology paper.

I was now on the University Senate, one of several useful platforms for putting the case for the Chair. The argument I put looked good, given that MA teaching was planned from 1966, with no shortage of suitable thesis topics. The Vice-Chancellor, who had got on well with Grahame, was sympathetic, the Chairman of the Appointments Committee more equivocal. If this account reads as retailing anachronistic attitudes, one must remember that at Otago in the 1960s there was no perceived political or cultural case for any accelerated development of anthropology, to say nothing of Maori Studies. The approach

was much more academic, the needs of subjects being weighed against each other with polite formality.

A change of Vice-Chancellor in early 1966 led to the re-establishment of such administrative orthodoxies that I joined three professors (of German, Classics and Psychology) in an informal *cabal* aimed at getting the Senate to pay more attention to the needs of Arts rather than Science and the powerful Special Schools. But the case for the Chair went down again, this time in the face of three new Chairs in Mathematics. Disappointed, I became active once more in AUT, the Lecturers Association, the Arts Faculty Standing Committee, a lobby for the teaching of the sociology of medicine, and the Friends of the Museum. A public face continued to be important in the world of university politics.

In the summer of 1965-6 Les turned his attention to another area at Huriawa Pa. At Easter he worked at Mapoutahi Pa (see Anderson and Sutton 1973). But he was restless, with little immediate prospect of promotion, and in May he was appointed to a lecturership at the Auckland Anthropology Department, an eminently sensible move. His influence on staff and students, especially his power in generating analytical ideas, had been remarkable. I owed him and Rosemary a great deal for the way, three years before, at short notice, they had come south, with no certainty that their stay would last more than one year.

Their going created a problem. Our numbers were shooting up and we had started MA teaching. So, with help from Jack Golson and Bill Solheim, the latter on the lookout for competent fieldworkers for Thailand research, at Les's suggestion I began moves to get Ham Parker on the staff, and also to have the replacement for Les appointed at the Lecturer level, proposals eventually agreed to by the Administration.

I took over the Stage 1 Practicals, and, along with other teaching, began a new Stage 3 course on the ethnography of British societies, an interest sparked while on leave. Meanwhile, Dave Simmons of Otago Museum and I continued to encourage Skinner to put together the book of reprinted essays which eventually appeared as *Comparatively Speaking* (Skinner 1974). Publication was due entirely to Foss and Helen Leach, who, with Linden redoing the drawings, took over editorial responsibility after I returned to England in 1968, and Dave to Auckland.

Ham arrived in August 1966. A prewar student of Skinner's, who had pursued archaeology when in the New Zealand Division in North Africa, I saw him,

among other things, as a means to extend our research interests to south east Asia. The deal with the University on his coming included agreement that he would complete his degree, which unfortunately he didn't. Equally, we needed Les's replacement quickly, so, with John and Ham's approval, I took up a sounding letter I had received from Charles Higham, then finishing his Cambridge PhD and working as a CUP editor. Enquiries to Cambridge brought encouraging responses. He was reported as a strong environmental archaeologist, with a vigorous personality and a capacity for work. Aware of possible risks, I got authority to offer Charles the lectureship without advertising. The upshot was that he and his wife Polly arrived (bringing along their own English car) in January 1967. By this time, the first MA students were into their theses (cf. Kennedy 1969; B.F. Leach 1969; H.M. Leach 1969).

Charles's arrival was important. Looking around for fieldwork opportunities, he followed Les (who had been there in summer 1964-65) in going to Riverton (Higham 1968, 1976), later turning attention to Thailand, where Ham, mastering the material (Parker 1968), had already done one season, and was to do another. Meanwhile, John, who had done sociological research on Pitcairn in 1964-5 (Harré 1968), was following up his work on mixed marriages and extending his television reputation.

By then I was very tired. Beginning to think of tidying things up (for who might be appointed once the Chair was approved?), as Otago and southland filekeeper I put more work into the site record forms, including those of sites I had examined, bumping up the numbers by adding records, with supporting historical data, of those dug or prospected by Skinner and others. Dave. Hardwicke, Lin, Stuart Park and others contributed to the programme.

In April 1967 the University again turned down the Chair. Sardonicly I began to identify with Ron Mason's 'Song of Allegiance':

Though my voice is cracked and harsh

Stoutly in the rear I march

Though my song have none to hear

Boldly bring I up the rear.

Such persistent rebuffs must have affected staff and student morale. Uncertainties persisted. The only course was to work harder for success the following year. Tiredness increased, though I felt it important to go to the New Zealand Archaeological Association's meetings at New Plymouth in 1967 and the ANZAAS meeting in Christchurch the following year.

In 1967 I Chaired the Management Committee of the University Union. This led to an unusual experience, bringing home to me how much the Administration had become out of touch with students, who that year became militant over the issue of mixed flatting. Discontent culminated in a well organised lengthy occupation of the Union building. Our senior students were much involved, our tea room, so I understood, the campaign centre, and our duplicator in action. Privately delighted, I kept the Management Committee neutral, and was even asked informally by the Registrar if I would mediate if necessary. This proved unnecessary, as the students won their demands. At Cambridge, Edmund Leach had said that one should listen to one's students, a maxim I tried not to forget.

The Professorship Achieved

In February 1968 I was promoted Associate Professor. Naturally this pleased the department, but a personal anomaly remained. When the Chair was approved, where would I stand? The outcome was not to be long coming. In April, almost as an anticlimax, the approval arrived, to take effect from 1969. I presumed the University thought I would apply, also others in the department. At the level of personal relations, it looked as if we might be in for a difficult time. But things didn't turn out like that.

That January an advertisement had appeared in *The Times* concerning a Lectureship in Ethnology, attached to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. I applied. Oxford asked why I wanted to take a post at a lower level. I replied that I felt I had completed the job I had set out to do, and there were personal as well as professional reasons why I wished to return to England. Appointed in mid June, I called a staff meeting to explain the situation. Clearly now there would be competition within the department for the Chair, but I was too tired and preoccupied to worry over much, and shortly after sent in my resignation.

We left in the loaded 1951 Jaguar on 18 September, sad over many farewells in Broad Bay as well as Dunedin, wondering how the move would affect the children's education. After seeing Michael and Mary Trotter in Christchurch, we took the night ferry to Wellington, there left the car for sale, and travelled by the night train to Auckland. We saw the Groubes, Peter Bellwood and others at the wharf before boarding the *Oriana* for Sydney, where it turned round. To reach Oxford on time, I had to leave the ship at Suva and fly to England. This meant that Falmai, sheet anchor of the decade, had sole responsibility for the children during the long voyage.

The Pitt Rivers Museum was a different environment, not least because it was assumed I knew about Cook collections, and therefore could organise a special Cook exhibition in 1970, as one of the bicentennial commemorations of his voyages. I dare not say that the only significant Cook collection in New Zealand was in Wellington, of which I knew little. Another world began to open up, though over the years links with Otago have been maintained (Fig. 2).

A letter arrived from Jock Hayward, the Otago Registrar, asking for an assessment of both John and Charles, the two most likely candidates for the Chair. I replied in detail that if the University wanted a certain sort of department, then John Harré was the man; if a different sort, then Charles Higham. Charles was appointed, taking over from John, who had been Acting Head in the interim.

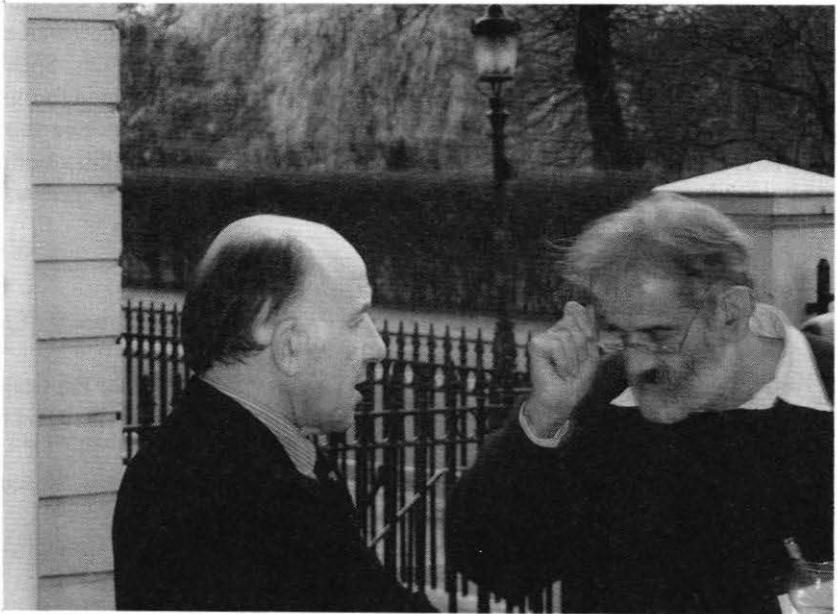


Figure 2. Intense discussion? Charles Higham and Peter Gathercole at the memorial meeting for Sir Grahame Clark, British Academy, London, 22 November, 1997. (Photo: John Coles).

Driven by personal ambition as much as by the exigencies of the situation, I had been clear for a decade that Otago had to have a proper Anthropology Department, given not only a history that went back to 1920, but also changing

cultural and educational needs at large, an objective eventually achieved. But I do not forget that it was also respect for our subjects shown by members of the Arts Faculty, the support of individuals in the Science Departments and Special Schools, and the steadfastness of a group of students who believed in what we were doing, that helped bring success. I did the politics.

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