



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS - 1980 - 81

Throughout the country, doubts are being expressed - secretly, silently, even openly - about the future of the New Zealand Archaeological Association. At a time of increasing interest in our past, membership of the Association is almost static - there is a slow increase, but total membership still remains very low.

Like all small societies we are hard hit by increasing costs. Yet members' activities seem to be increasingly restricted by legislation, by a growing awareness of the scarcity of a valuable scientific resource, and by other restraints. One result of this is that the section of the community that was happily digging up prehistoric sites a generation ago, is now digging up bottles and other early European cultural material on historic sites today.

This has met with mixed reactions. Some of us are thankful that the fossickers' attention has turned from our precious Maori sites. Others of us are appalled at the destruction of historic sites, dug unmethodically in the search for "curios". We talk of the terrible problem posed by the increasing interest in bottle hunting, or that of salvaging interesting bits and pieces from shipwrecks.

At the same time there is a surprising lack of concern at the continued ransacking of pre-human faunal deposits - mostly of moa and other extinct bird bones. Archaeologists have broadened their interests to include not only man and his culture, but also his environment. Yet bone collecting is looked on favourably while bottle collecting is not.

Now it may be that the aims of the New Zealand Archaeological Association have not kept pace with changing attitudes and interests in the community. It may be that the Association no longer caters adequately for the bulk of its membership - or for its potential membership. Is there too great (or too little) a dependence on the Historic Places Trust? Are investigation reports getting too complicated for the average reader to be bothered with? Is archaeology in New Zealand being controlled by too few people?

How ever the problems may be defined, what ever they are considered to be, the solutions must lie with the membership. It is possible to effect changes - either internally in the direction that the Association is going, or externally by way of public education and legislation.

In the past the New Zealand Archaeological Association has played a very active part in continually improving the methods and standards of

archaeological research and in obtaining protection for archaeological sites; its site recording scheme is now the basic register for all archaeological sites in New Zealand. For over a quarter of a century the Association has provided a platform for discussions between amateur and professional, and its Newsletter has been the principal means of communication and the dissemination of information on the research scene.

Today the Association has a no less important role to play in providing the means of communication between the prehistorian and the man - or woman - in the street, between the professional archaeologist and the interested layman, the Arts graduate and the scientist, the Association itself and the Trust.

I know some members tend to think of the Trust as a bureaucratic headache; others resent our not-inconsiderable dependence upon it. But let us remember that the New Zealand Archaeological Association was largely instrumental in setting up the Archaeology Section, and that the Trust does have both the power and the money so necessary if we want archaeological sites to survive and research to continue.

Rather belatedly archaeologists are now having to recognise Maori opinions and feeling about the past - the past of their ancestors - and here too the Association can help in promoting a better understanding between these sections of the community that appear to have widely differing attitudes on matters of common interest.

There has been talk of the Association quietly fading away, and there have been rumours of a breakaway group being formed. Neither of these courses will do the cause of archaeology any good. We must all co-operate to strengthen the Association. Increased membership will not only alleviate our financial problems, but will also give us a stronger voice with Government, local bodies and general public opinion.

The New Zealand Archaeological Association is the only organisation which caters for the needs of all interested parties in the field of New Zealand prehistory - there is a place in the Association for everyone who is prepared to abide by its principles. In the interests of understanding and co-operation, its survival is not only desirable but essential.

Michael M. Trotter

18 May 1981