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PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

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Public support for looking after and protecting archaeological sites is remarkably high according to the results of surveys undertaken by the Heylen Research Centre for the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. The first survey was a national survey conducted on 26 September 1987 in face-to-face interviews with 1000 people aged 15 years or more. The second survey involved a self-completion questionnaire sent to a random sample of 1000 members of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust in late October 1987. Some 559 of the 616 questionnaires returned by Trust members by November 13 were able to be analysed.

Both questionnaires invited reactions to eleven questions devised to uncover attitudes to historic preservation. The questionnaire said "People have different opinions about preserving or looking after historic sites and buildings. Using the headings (on a scale of five from '1. Strongly Disagree' to '5. Strongly Agree') as a guide please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement." The results below show those who agreed (by ticking boxes 4 and 5) and those who disagreed (by ticking boxes 1 and 2) and miss out those who ticked box 3 in the middle.

Table 1Attitudes Towards Preservation of Historic Places

	<u>Agree</u>		<u>Disagree</u>	
	Public	Members	Public	Members
People make too much fuss about old buildings	22	6	57	76
Government ought to stop people pulling down historic buildings	58	69	21	14
People are pulling down too many important old buildings in our cities	61	78	17	10

Most of our so-called historic sites are not really worth keeping	12	9	69	75
If you own your own archaeological site it ought to be your business, not anyone else's, what you do with it	38	8	45	74
City and county councils should do more to protect historic buildings	75	83	9	7
Historic buildings are important, but if the owner wants to put up a new office or building you can't stand in the way of progress	32	9	47	74
Most of the people who go on about these historic buildings are just old fogies who can't keep up with the times	9	4	81	89
Old Maori sites need to be given protection	67	74	15	8
This country's archaeological sites ought to be looked after and protected	84	83	4	7
Too much money is provided for the preservation of old sites and buildings	10	4	59	86

From these responses it would seem that the levels of public support for the Historic Places Trust's archaeological work would outstrip public support for any other work of the Trust. Even for "old Maori sites", which attract less favourable public esteem than "archaeological sites", the level of public backing for their protection is very high.

While archaeological sites win high public affection, the Historic Places Trust is not generally identified as having archaeological responsibilities, even by its own members. The surveys listed eight Trust activities together with two activities undertaken by other groups - "Providing protection for natural features on privately owned land" (the

task of the QEII National Trust) and "Looking after National Parks" (a task of the Department of Conservation). People were shown this list, together with a list of 13 organisations or types of organisations. From the list of organisations they were asked to identify, for each activity, the organisation which has the most responsibility for that activity. The results for four of these organisations are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Perceptions of Historic Preservation Responsibilities

Organisation mostly responsible for...	NZHPT	Dept of Conservation	Dept of Internal Affairs	NZAA
Deciding if a place is historic	68%	6	5	3
Protecting archaeological sites	7%	6	5	70
Listing/classifying historic buildings	59%	4	6	3
Protecting old Maori pa sites	5%	2	3	6
Giving grants to restore Maori buildings	5%	4	6	-
Running Historic Houses for the public to visit	50%	3	5	-
Looking after national parks	1%	30	2	-
Providing protection for rural features on private land	5%	24	6	3
Putting up plaques to mark historic events places	26%	6	4	1
Teaching and informing about historic buildings and places	36%	5	6	2

Other organisations listed were City/County Council,

Department of Maori Affairs, Other Government Departments, Royal NZ Forest and Bird Society, QEII National Trust, local Civic Trust, local historical association. Among Trust members, 15 per cent thought primary responsibility for protecting archaeological sites lay with the Trust and 20 per cent felt the Trust had primary responsibility for protecting old Maori pa sites.

The public perceptions of historic preservation responsibilities carry over into the reasons Trust members give for belonging to the Trust. The Historic Places wins its members because of its work to identify and protect historic buildings.

Table 3

Main Reason Members Belong to the Trust is:

	Male	Female
Free admission to Trust properties in New Zealand	1%	3%
To join Trust walks, visits and tours	3	4
Free admission to UK and Australian Trust's properties	13	6
General interest in New Zealand history	38	39
Concern about preserving historic places	40	44
Interest in archaeology	1	1
To receive the Trust's Magazine	1	2
Other	2	2

These results should not, however, be interpreted as a lack of interest in archaeology among Trust members. They would seem, from their reactions to the Trust magazine, to be interested in archaeology and archaeological digs - but much more concerned for historic buildings and historic buildings under threat. This ought not to be surprising since Trust members, like the overall population, are largely urban dwellers and face, particularly in the larger cities, daily evidence of the loss of older buildings. Member judgements of the Trust magazine reflects concern at these losses.

Table 4

Members Would Like More or Fewer Articles on:

	More	Same	Fewer
Individual historic buildings	66	28	-
Archaeology and archaeological digs	29	46	14
Maori sites and history	27	48	13
Architects	24	45	17
Threatened historic places	61	27	3
Trust Headquarters news	23	55	8
Photos	52	39	1
Book reviews	15	58	14
Regional news	34	47	7
Local history	54	35	3
Ways of restoring old buildings	35	43	11

Conclusions

Neither archaeology nor the Trust's archaeological responsibilities were main focuses of the two Heylen Surveys but they have both provided evidence of very high levels of support for the protection of archaeological sites. Media coverage, particularly in 1987 over the big archaeological dig at the old jail site in Auckland and over the big dig in Wellington's Lambton Quay when an old hotel site was exposed by building demolition work, indicates high public interest in archaeological field-work and its outcomes.

There is, however, a dilemma between public concern about archaeological sites and the rights of property owners over archaeological sites. Public opinion was divided on the rights of the community to limit the rights of owners of archaeological sites though the balance lay in the interests of protection. Amongst Trust members there was an overwhelming support for public interest to outweigh private right.

It maybe that archaeology in New Zealand benefits from the image of archaeology built up on the romance of Roman ruins and Egyptian pyramids. Regardless of the origins of public affections, archaeologists can take considerable satisfaction from the results of this first research evidence of public support for their work and responsibilities.