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ROBERT HAMILTON WALLACE PARKER: 1916-1994 A LIFE IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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Elaine Cooper began talking to Ham Parker about his life and times in the Autumn of 1992. These wide ranging conversations continued through to the beginning of 1994. Ham contributed his recollections, photographs and also annotated draft versions of this text. He put Elaine Cooper in touch with friends and family, many of whom gave generously of their time. Ham's academic colleagues, particularly Donn Bayard, were most helpful. Errors in the following remain the responsibility of the authors, who can claim only to have done their best.

This is the story of a young man with a rural upbringing and a passion for antiquities. War brought him fortuitously into contact with objects of the past and major Egyptologists. This experience led to employment at Otago University and from that position to involvement in the formative years of archaeology in Thailand. After archaeology became a profession in New Zealand, many amateur archaeology enthusiasts saw the end of their effective involvement. Overseas trained professionals took the initiative and changed the practices of archaeology which had largely been formed prior to the Second World War. Amateur involvement was, however, continued through the New Zealand Archaeological Association.

Ham's career commenced before the first academically trained university archaeologists were employed in New Zealand. His career ended in 1977, long after the departments in Otago and Auckland were fully established.

Robert Hamilton Wallace Parker was born on the 1st June, 1916, in Herne Bay, Auckland. He was the only child of Samuel and Martha Parker. When small he was called 'Hammit', and later Ham by family and friends. Ham received his primary School education in Putaruru and attended King's College in Auckland from 1930-35 where he excelled at History and English. In 1935 he was made a school prefect and won the Stuckey prize for literature for which he was awarded a volume of Shakespeare's tragedies; a beautiful book which remained in his possession.

Ham recalled a happy childhood in Putaruru which at that time was a small township on the Rotorua railway line. Its periphery extended into country which was largely unoccupied, a place where wild horses roamed and outdoor adventure beckoned young men. Ham and his father shared a passion for walking. At holiday times they enjoyed visiting the farm of a family friend where there would be rabbit shooting and fishing. Guests would sit up half the night

talking and telling yarns about the early days in the district, swapping stories or playing poker.

When quite young, Ham developed a lifelong love and enjoyment of reading. He read boys' books such as 'Boys' Own Annual', 'Chums' and a great variety of other books including 'Mr. Midshipman Easy' by Captain Frederick Marryat, the 'Sanders of the River' stories by Edgar Wallace and 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' by Thomas Hughes. He read 'The Count of Monte Christo' three times. Later in life he much appreciated 'The Flashman Papers' and 'The Poldoroy Papers.' Another influential book was 'The Blue Book of British Naval Battles', now recalled as a brilliant study of all naval battles using contemporary accounts. Ham considered this one of the greatest books. His youthful ambition was to join the Navy.

In 1936 Ham enrolled at Otago University intending to study Medicine (Plate 1). He described how he quickly came to the serious conclusion that the Medical School looked too depressing. He found he had no interest in Medicine.



Plate 1. Robert Hamilton Parker, aged about 19 years.

So in 1937 he switched to Arts, enrolling in English, History and Philosophy. In 1938 he took the one year 'Course in Anthropology' taught by Dr. H.D. Skinner who was the first teacher of anthropology in New Zealand. Skinner obtained a Lectureship in Ethnology in 1919. He was made Director of the Otago Museum upon the retirement of Sir William Benham in 1937. Thereafter he had a dual role and only lectured part time. He trained his students through their hands and eyes, encouraging practical experience of a wide range of artefacts (Freeman and Geddes 1959). The Otago Calendar for 1938 lists the fees for this course as £5.5.0.

According to Ham's recollection, Skinner was not a particularly good lecturer; "His lectures were chaotic with no beginning, middle or end. He just talked and rambled on". However, Skinner was also "very inspiring and fascinating" and his influence led Ham into Anthropology, Archaeology and Prehistory. There is a significant prescience here in that Ham's students of the years 1966-1977 developed a very similar view of him.

In 1938 Ham met Sydney Laura Washbourn who was also enrolled in Skinner's 'Course in Anthropology'. She was later to become his first wife. At that time Syd and her friend Lydia Henderson were said to be the two most strikingly beautiful girls at the University.

While still a child Ham's Aunt Sadie, (Sarah Craig-Stewart), had read poetry to him. He developed a special feeling for it and wrote several poems while living in Dunedin. One he recalled vividly is a poem about Abnegar, a name he made up. He wanted a name that sounded vaguely rural and also Biblical but not related to any particular person.

Abnegar

Abnegar rode
down the bright valley
gay with innumerable dew.

That was the morning
and under the sky
a high lark sang
slung between heaven and earth.

In the evening returning
there was richness
over the lark's wing
falling into the grey grass.

Down the bright valley
soft with the promise of sleep
Abnegar rode.

Overseas events intervened when war was declared in 1939. Ham volunteered for service immediately. Because of the effects of bad influenza he was not passed medically fit and was advised to return home to recover. Therefore he missed the 'phony war', when war had been declared but fighting had not commenced. After his recovery he volunteered again in Tauranga, was passed fit and reported to the Papakura Army camp in October 1940. He joined the 6th Brigade of the Second Division of the N.Z. Expeditionary Force and when in Greece was assigned to the 24th Battalion. He spent just over 5 years in the Army, including four years overseas service from the first battles in Greece to just before the fall of Florence.

During the North African campaign in 1942 Ham collected potsherds and developed an interest in Libyan antiquities. At Nag Hanish near Mersa Matruh on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt he found half an unusual pot in many fragments unlike anything he had seen before. The pot was roughly incised and the glaze had a purple tinge. He carried the pieces around for six months in a biscuit tin in his pack. During that period he saw an advertisement in a newspaper regarding lectures on Egyptian Antiquities given to the armed forces by Mr. A.A. Lucas of the Cairo Museum. Lucas was Director of the Chemical Laboratory of the Egyptian Government's Antiquities Service.

Ham took the pot fragments to the Cairo Museum only to find that Mr. Lucas had retired. He therefore showed the pieces to Mr. Guy Brunton, Assistant Director of the Department of Antiquities to the Egyptian Government, who considered the pot to be Pre-Dynastic. Ham had found the pot above and in contact with a small, intensely blue glass bead. The pot was not intrusive but had been deposited on the same level at the same time. The bead was directly underneath the crushed pot. The use of glass was unknown before the Iron Age and Ham concluded that the pot and the bead must be Iron Age artefacts. Soon after his return from the war Ham wrote a paper on this pot which he sent to Skinner for comment. It was published in 'Man' as 'A Pot from Nag Hanish near Mersa Matruh' (Parker, 1951). A further Short Note was published in 'Man' (Parker, 1954). This is 'Notes on Two Marmarican Sites'.

Ham stated that Mr. Guy Brunton's wife, Winifred, observed that he had a special feeling for archaeology and advised him to pursue the study as a professional career. She suggested, however, that it would be unwise to focus on Egyptology because the work was increasingly under the control of the Egyptian authorities who were not recruiting foreigners. At this time Ham was extremely fortunate to have met Mr. Lucas who allowed Ham the use of his personal library. Lucas owned a six roomed flat in Cairo with floor to ceiling books and Ham spent many satisfying hours there when off duty. This was the period between the first battle of El Alamein, which commenced on the 1st July 1942, and the second battle of El Alamein in October 1942.

In the desert campaign with all the slaughter and destruction Ham began again to write poetry to express his deeper feelings about events and the death

of his friends and companions. Many of these friendships under the stress of war became very intense. The disastrous engagement in the El Mreir area could have been prevented. During an attack Ham's Battalion was repulsed by the Germans with heavy casualties. Ham recalled lying in a slit trench under bombardment. Of approximately 450 men of his Battalion, only 23 survived.

British officers were very bitter that they had been unable to assist the New Zealanders. Their guns were loaded and ready but they did not receive the order to fire on the Germans. They were forced to watch the slaughter and no one took the initiative. Ham wrote a poem on the back of an envelope expressing a sense of shame at having survived while others had perished:

After El Mreiz

The voices of my comrades
are whispering like dust
in this sad valley of the fallen.

They will wander for ever
down the long
ill-lit corridors of my memory.

For the love of God
let me forget
or let me lie among them.

About half way across North Africa an incident occurred which made a tremendous impression on Ham. He was perched on the spare tyre behind the cab of a truck which was crossing the Wadi Zemzem. Coming over a little rise he looked to left and right and saw the 2nd Division of the N.Z. Expeditionary Force on the move. This was part of a formation approximately fourteen miles across the front and thirty miles deep. He saw line after line of trucks and guns with pennants flying, just rolling on. It was a vast, awesome sight with a sense of almost invincible power which in no way could be stopped. For him it was the most moving moment in all the war.

Ham sustained no injuries from enemy action but suffered a number of minor incidents. One day the men stopped near Sidi Rezegh for an Anzac Day ceremony. The truck in front was blown up but Ham's truck suffered little damage. At another time a new type of German parachute mine was found which was dismantled to discover how it worked and what pressure was required to set it off. There were two pressure mechanisms, one exploded on touch and the other when a vehicle went over it. As an officer reached to touch the mechanism, Ham sensed that the "damned thing" would go off and turned away. The detonator exploded and a spray of shrapnel went down his side. A man standing beside him was blinded by fine aluminium splinters.

On another occasion Ham suffered a more serious accident. He was partially crushed under a Brengun carrier and his collar bone broken. He was dug out, loaded onto an ambulance and sent to hospital. Later he sustained a poisoned hand and had a fingernail removed thereby missing the battle at Sidi Rezegh in 1942 which probably saved his life. This was a confused, furious tank battle in which the Allies lost 18,500 men and the Axis lost 24,500 men.

The Battalion sailed to Italy in October 1943, and moved up to the Sangro River. Between November 19 and December 3, 1943, there was another long and fierce battle. The 8th Army under General Montgomery forced a crossing over the Sangro under heavy fire. Ham lost almost all memory of this event and was always puzzled by this. He could only assume that he was extremely fatigued. At the end of 1943, Ham was posted to Bari on the heel of Italy. He had been appointed Unit Historian because of his long and continuous service with the Battalion. Early in 1944 he rejoined his Battalion and entered the town of Casino shortly after the major battles there which had commenced in January 1944 and ended on May 11 that year. He vividly remembered it as "a fearful sight". The town had been bombed to rubble and there were bodies everywhere. The place stank of death.

Casino

We left Hawaiki
of the hundred wars
and thrust our craft
into the tumult
of an impassable noisy ocean.
Ten days we warred
with all the winds of heaven.
On the tenth day
at moon rise
the great canoe
broke up.
The black seas burning white
ingested our remains
We dined that night
with Taniwha.
He leered at me across the table
Then I saw my father right
about the great white eyes
are ringed with green
(A strange inversion
and the equilateral teeth)
I asked
are we not come
into your quiet grey hall
to find the soul of sleep?

The Battalion advanced to just south of Florence. The whole of central Italy was devastated and some two million refugees were wandering the roads, homeless and sleeping under hedges with nowhere to go. Everything was destroyed, their farms and livelihood. Panic would strike whenever people thought the Germans were returning. Ham found it all quite dreadful. He was sent home on furlough from near Florence.

On his return to New Zealand in November 1944, Ham was awarded three months furlough and was given a free rail pass which enabled him to travel anywhere he wished within New Zealand. This was a wonderful experience and he contacted many old friends. In February 1945, Ham was officially posted on attachment to the Army Archives Section at Army Headquarters, Wellington, to prepare material for the Unit History of the 24th Battalion. This was very interesting work which included reading all the various war diaries. Ham learned many things about where he had been and gained a wider understanding of his experiences. A representative from each Battalion was appointed as an official archivist.

In 1945 the War History Department asked Ham if he would continue writing the Battalion history. He declined and passed all his papers and diaries to R.M. Burdon who published the 'Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45, 24 Battalion' in 1953. Burdon acknowledged Ham's contribution saying:

'I am indebted also to Sergeant R.H. Parker who generously handed me the notes he had made while working on the early part of the Battalion's history.'

Ham was discharged from the army with the rank of sergeant in 1945. Soon thereafter he wrote to Syd Washbourn asking her to marry him. She accepted and they were married in the Chapel at King's College in Auckland, on the 14th November, 1946. The newly married couple moved to Samuel Parker's dairy farm near Tauranga where their 'dream house' was built for them. Here their children Julian (1948), Gerald (1949), Richard (1952) and Gabrielle (1954) were born.

However, farming did not appeal to Ham. He was more interested in studying Ancient Egypt. While on the farm he taught himself to read and understand hieroglyphics using Sir Alan H. Gardiner's 'Egyptian Grammar' (1950) which set out graded exercises moving on to complex grammar. Kathy Prickett (pers. comm.) recalls being told by Ham while she was a student at Otago in the late 1960s, that he once ordered the 'Wilbour Papyrus' in four volumes by Gardiner (1948) from Mills, Peacock Ltd. booksellers in Tauranga. Mr. Mills, the owner of the bookshop, had never handled such special volumes before, and he personally carried the books out of the shop to Ham's car and shook him by the hand.

According to Syd Parker, the family spent nine happy years on the farm.

In September 1955, with Syd's encouragement, Ham left for Auckland and completed a one year 'Pressure Cooker' course at the Teachers' Training College, Epsom. This course had been especially arranged for returned servicemen who wished to become school teachers.

The Parker family left the farm to join Ham in Auckland in 1957. The house on the Tauranga farm was sold and a home acquired in Te Atatu Road, Henderson. Syd took a number of jobs and was for a time employed as a librarian at Rutherford High School. Ham spent 1957 working as a Probationary Assistant at Belmont Primary School before the teaching certificate could be awarded. Until 1964 Ham was employed as a relief teacher at a number of different schools.

When Jack Golson arrived at Auckland University in 1954 there was already an established practice of archaeology in this country. Golson found that field recording and site protection were virtually non-existent with low standards of excavation. He taught basic skills of turfing, shovelling, trowelling, brushing and sieving. Golson was considered to be great fun by his loyal workforce, called 'Golson's Gang'; many songs were written and some recorded, during his digs (Groube 1993).

Ham enrolled in 1957 in Golson's course, Papers No. 178 and 179, 'An Introduction to Anthropology'. He worked part time for four years at a degree in Arts. The degree was not completed but more importantly Ham participated in digs on the Coromandel at Sarah's Gully, Skipper's Ridge, Opito, at Kumara-Kaiamo in Taranaki, Pig Bay on Motutapu Island and Kauri Point in the Western Bay of Plenty during that period.

Ham was given his first breakthrough by Golson who allocated him the job as Director at the Skipper's Ridge dig. This work was published as 'Aspect and Phase on Skipper's Ridge', (Parker 1962). Ham was well trained by Golson and gained much valuable experience from those excavations. Groube comments that Golson delegated responsibility to others; 'from this emerged the fine excavation team of Laurie and Helen Birks and the introspective intensity of Ham Parker, who became the Director of the Opito excavation' (Groube 1993:12). Golson's last dig in New Zealand was at Kauri Point which is in the upper reaches of Tauranga Harbour. Many of the people who had worked with Golson were there including Ham Parker, Wal Ambrose, Les Groube and Laurie Birks.

For a time during 1960-63 Ham led a rather unsettled existence with "no particular goals". He loved primary school teaching and enjoyed the vitality young children displayed. An inspector told him he was too highly qualified for primary teaching and that he should move to secondary schools. Ham compromised and moved in 1963 to a District High School in Maramarua, not far from Pokeno on the Auckland to Tauranga highway. Here he found the older students like "thirty sacks of potatoes" just waiting to leave school. He

was bored by secondary level teaching and so divided his time between teaching during school terms and excavating at any digs offering during the holidays. Consequently he was away from his family and home for extended periods. Eventually Syd and the children left Auckland and moved to Golden Bay, near Nelson, where many members of her family had lived for five generations.

The United States National Science Foundation made a grant to Roger Duff to make a field survey in Rarotonga in the summer of 1962-63. Roger Duff, as Director of the Rarotonga expedition, invited Ham to go. It had been stipulated by the Foundation that a qualified excavator had to be included in this excavation, and Ham was appointed Field Supervisor. Michael Trotter (1974) states that the expeditions were to investigate field archaeology and other aspects of the prehistory of Rarotonga. This work is reported in the Canterbury Museum Bulletin, No.6:54-70 (1974).

Ham remembered that Roger Duff made a special trip up to Kaitaia to persuade him to make a further trip to Rarotonga. In 1964 Ham excavated with Duff's two sons, Robin and Ian, on a rescue dig of Rarotongan house sites. Ham did a complete circuit of the island along the sacred, ancient road, the Ara Metua. He charted all the main maraes and did a quick survey which was used as a guide by later workers, especially Peter Bellwood (Bellwood 1978). Ham concluded that the settlements were not very old, not more than 500-600 years.

Ham considered Rarotonga to be a charming and fascinating place. He found the people friendly but subtle, playing politics all the time and manoeuvring for advantage. There was an undercurrent of intrigue. They were always capable of pulling the leg of anthropologists for their own amusement, and did so very effectively.

In 1965, Ham was teaching at Broadwood District High School near Kaitaia. Bill Mabbett was then a teacher at a local school. He recalls that a series of lectures on archaeology were held at Kaitaia College given by Wilf Shawcross and later by Roger Green. A small group including Derric and Sally Vincent, Rod Foster, Bill Mabbett and Viv Gregory decided to form the Mangonui Archaeological Society. It was based in Kaitaia and took the county name. Ham was asked to be their technical director. Mabbett said that initially Ham produced a list of necessary equipment that seemed to be more appropriate for a dig in Mesopotamia than 'scratching' a hillside in Mangonui county. Ham taught the group stratigraphic archaeology techniques. A small house terrace excavation on a pa site was carried out. Drainage gutters, a fire-site, post holes and a couple of small artefacts were uncovered but never reported. The location of the site cannot now be recalled.

Mabbett says it was a privilege to know Ham who was a marvellous raconteur and could smoke and talk for hours, mainly about the war and archaeology. He was fascinating company. According to Mabbett: "He had

an excellent mind, he was a great talker, and a man who could make eccentricity seem the most normal and logical thing in the world." Mabbett goes on to say that it was probably owing to this interest and publicity that when the Mt. Camel site at Houhora was disturbed, word was sent to Auckland University, and an important excavation resulted.

An international aid scheme was proposed to make a series of records and to help preserve ancient treasures in Egypt which would be flooded by the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Dr. A.J. Spalinger of Auckland University (pers. comm.) said that UNESCO solicited money from all interested countries for salvage work in Nubia. As an inducement, Egypt promised that all groups would be allocated a site of their choice. New Zealand agreed to provide £1,000 towards the cost of this enterprise. Egypt requested that New Zealand send an archaeologist. Ham was one of the very few people in New Zealand with knowledge of Egyptology, hieroglyphics and archaeology who was free to go. However he had no academic qualifications. A position was created for him in 1965 as Special Assistant at Otago University. Unfortunately the Government was unable to find the necessary money and the trip to Egypt was cancelled, much to Ham's disappointment.

In 1965 Ham was teaching at Te Kao District High School in the far North. He was very happy there and the Education Board built a house for him on the school grounds. He had just obtained a new microscope and was most interested in protozoa, which swarmed in the nearby lake. Ham was asked to supervise a dig at Mt. Camel and he was keen to oblige but withdrew from this project. On the advice of Jack Golson, Les Groube invited Ham to take part in rescue excavations in Thailand. He accepted this and immediately resigned from the Education Board. Ham wrote to Otago University and asked if his appointment could be delayed for a year. In a great hurry he packed up and met Mabbett for the last time in Kaitaia. Mabbett says:

"he had very few possessions with him, the most valued one was his microscope which was wrapped in a (the?) spare shirt".

Ham flew to Canberra to obtain a visa and went on to Bangkok. The dig was one of a group of sites in North East Thailand found in 1963 by Chet Gorman, who under the direction of Bill Solheim wished to find out more about local prehistoric sites (Higham 1989:95). Solheim was running a survey of sites which were to be flooded by dam construction for hydroelectricity and irrigation. Donn Bayard, now at the University of Otago, assisted Ham at Non Nok Tha in 1964-65. A bronze casting mould proved to be the most exhilarating find. Bayard found the first of several stone moulds for bronze working. Ham remembered that when this find was made he had gone back to camp to fetch some notebooks. When he returned to the edge of the excavation he found Bayard excitedly shouting "Come and have a look!" They stood looking down and could not quite believe what they saw.

The sandstone bivalve mould was about 15 cm. square, and was intended

for casting a crescent-shaped socketed axe. But the really exciting thing about this find, and the other moulds and bronze objects found later, was the evidence provided for a lengthy period during which bronze alone was used in Thailand before the appearance of iron. It had previously been thought that iron and bronze entered South East Asia together at the relative late date of 500 BC or so. Non Nok Tha provided the first evidence for an early, discrete Bronze Age in the region. Ham and Donn were naturally very elated by this discovery.

At the end of the season Ham was so exhausted he had to be assisted onto the site. He suffered from a liver infection, maybe a form of hepatitis, which made it very painful to stand upright. A humorous situation arose when for a joke some Thai men of small stature carried Donn Bayard, who was also unwell, onto the site. Bayard is six foot four inches tall.

The archaeologists rented a house in the village of Ban Na Di and along with everyone else in the village suffered from chronic dysentery. The village had only one source of water, the local pond. All drinking water was carried from there to the houses, and of course was very unhygienic. Bayard saw the cook collecting drinking water ten feet from where he washed himself. Next to her a farmer was washing his water buffalo which was defecating into the pond. The charcoal stoves used in the village were simply not powerful enough to sterilise the 4 gallon tins of water. Therefore the archaeologists together with the 800 villagers, had to make forays about four times a day into the bushes. The living conditions were harsh.

At one time while excavating, a whirlwind moved close to the site. There are often violent changes of temperature and these whirlwinds appear suddenly. Ham spoke to it in English and threw some twigs into it. The whirlwind growled and moved away and the workmen roared with laughter.

Fortunately Ham and Donn Bayard got on extremely well together. Bayard says that Ham was a meticulous excavator and he learned much from him. They spent many evenings discussing not only the site, but archaeology in general and Ham's digs with Golson in particular. Ham was a wonderful storyteller and they shared many jokes. Ham and Donn were isolated for about five months and they developed a series of jokes which gave them much enjoyment. They quickly ran out of English language reading material and were forced into reading the multi-lingual instructions which came in boxes of film. They had a great deal of amusement constructing tales from this material. Anyone listening would have thought them quite demented.

At that time Ham and Bayard expected great things to result from their work but it is now twenty six years since the excavations. Many articles on the site have been published but the final report has not yet appeared. Bayard has finished the final revisions of that report. It will be published by the University of Hawaii press, hopefully by the end of 1994.

It was Ham's opinion that bronze was independently developed in mainland South East Asia. His reason for this assumption is that classic bronze is a tin and copper alloy. In South East Asia it is a triple alloy of tin, copper and lead which has a lower melting point and casts more easily. Ham stated that "this was not a deliberate mix, but was fortuitous as the ore was already mixed." The ancient Egyptians also cast lead bronze but at a much later date. In Egypt lead was deliberately put in the mix to lower the melting point for easier casting, but only after they had used bronze for several centuries. Furthermore, Ham theorised that the factors involved in the development of civilisation were present in North East Thailand. In his opinion the production of bronze was only one factor and that widespread bulk trade of commodities such as salt and timber also contributed.

When Ham returned from the heat of Thailand in 1966 to take up his position as Assistant at Otago University, it was freezing cold. Ham told the story that he went into his office, closed the door and turned on all the heaters. Any student who wanted to see him had to talk through the door! The Anthropology Department was quite small and was located in an old converted private house at 648 Cumberland Street, Dunedin. The department was just beginning to grow and develop and was run efficiently by Peter Gathercole. Ham recalled that one wet day Gathercole rushed into the building, skidded on the newly waxed floor and slid right down the hall crashing against the wall in a tangle of arms and legs!

From 1966 to 1970 Ham taught full time at Otago University in Prehistory. His subjects included South East Asia, Bronze Age in Mesopotamia and Egypt. He also covered all the work he had done in Thailand. He lectured for the second and third terms. When all the exams were finished, marks awarded and the necessary papers signed, he packed up and went to Thailand about Christmas time. While in Thailand he directed his own digs.

A result of his going overseas so often to dig in Thailand was that Ham occupied many rented houses in different parts of Dunedin. He felt he should have gone round putting up notices saying "Ham Parker lived here!" For a time he rented a cottage at Broad Bay on the peninsula where he had a cat called Magnificat who used to wait for him and welcome him home. Nigel and Kathy Prickett, who were Ham's students, also lived in this little street. Nigel and Ham used to play chess together.

Nigel Prickett understands that Ham was the first New Zealand born archaeologist to be fully employed in a university. According to Nigel, Ham considered his reputation as an excavator was first established by the writing of "Aspect and Phase on Skipper's Ridge" in the N.Z.A.A. Newsletter (1962). Nigel states that Ham was a well organised lecturer and knew his subject thoroughly. He walked up and down the lecture theatre and just spoke freely. He comments that Ham had a distinctive habit of flicking ash over his left shoulder and the students were always amazed that he never set his clothing alight! Ham

would half smoke a cigarette and then light another from the butt.

Kathy Prickett (nee Walls) was another of Ham's students who recalls that Ham used to lecture in a beautifully modulated voice with good diction. She says that Ham fitted her preconceived image of what an archaeologist should be - a highly individualistic, even slightly eccentric character. She found him a humane and understanding person. His lectures were larger than life and exciting. They had the added advantage that he had actually visited the places he was describing. Ham usually abandoned his lecture notes and followed a train of thought, amidst a great cloud of cigarette smoke. His lectures were much admired and many students held Ham in high regard and great affection.

Both Nigel and Kathy stated that Ham was much loved by his students and was considered a most stimulating personality. He was always willing to take time talking to students and getting to know them. They also have vivid memories of Ham sitting in the students' cafe surrounded by students listening to his stories and recollections.

Atholl Anderson (pers. comm. 1994) also recalls that smoking was Ham's "heroically prodigious activity." He remembers Ham's Stage III lectures in the Hutton Theatre. Under a large "No Smoking" sign, Ham lit one 'fag' and placed it on one end of the front table, wandered absentmindedly to the other end, lit another and simply left the first to burn a long scorch mark on the edge of the table. That this was a common event was apparent from the row of cigarette 'tally marks' along each end of the table. This procedure was observed with considerable fascination by the students.

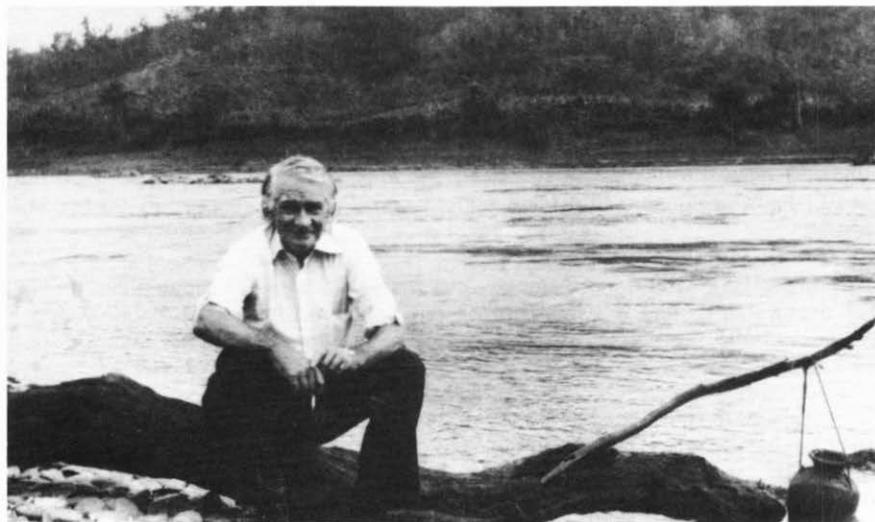


Plate 2. Ham Parker photographed on the banks of the Mekong River.

Bayard and Ham were close friends during this period. Most afternoons at about 5.30 p.m. they went over to the Captain Cook Hotel for a beer. Ham lived this kind of life for a number of years, teaching for eight months and working in the field for four months. Gathercole left the Anthropology Department in 1968 and Charles Higham was appointed professor and new Head of Department. In 1970 Ham was appointed Lecturer at Otago University, a post he held until 1977.

Finding salt was one of the most exciting events in Ham's Thailand experience. In 1969-70 Ham and Charles Higham investigated the site of Bo Phan Khan in central North East Thailand. This had been an early salt-producing site which for Ham was one of the most fascinating places in Thailand. In the ancient sites there were intermittent layers of salt workings followed by layers with no evidence of activity, then again more salt workings. The sites were very complex and deeply stratified. There are a great many similar sites all over the country. Ham and Charles Higham published an account of this dig in 1970. In Ham's opinion the manufacture and trade of bronze goods and salt production were complementary. Traders required salt to preserve food for long distance travelling.

A dig was undertaken in 1975 on the banks of the Mekong River in Thailand. Ham and Donn Bayard organised a training school in modern excavation methods on behalf of the United Nations and the Ford Foundation, for professional students. The archaeological trainees came from all four nations in the Mekong Basin, namely: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam. This was the first such international programme ever carried out in the region. The students lived in the Suk Sombun Hotel situated on the bank above the site. There were 39 wooden steps down to the river bank. Naturally the house became known as the House of the 39 Steps. It was here that Ham met Vo Ngoc Minh who later became his second wife. She was a member of the staff at the National Museum in Saigon. Ham was very impressed with the way Minh excavated. She was superb at a dig, very quick, very sensitive, never missed anything, saw the tiniest, most minute piece of evidence and picked it up right away. Ham suggested that Minh should come to New Zealand to do her M.A. degree.

Minh went to Otago University and wished to work on Hoabinhian material but as unable to find a supervisor. Ham contacted Professor Roger Green in Auckland who agreed to take Minh as a student when he returned from sabbatical leave.

Ham and Minh were married in 1975 at the Registry Office in Dunedin. In 1977 Ham resigned from the University of Otago. He and Minh drove to Auckland. Minh studied Chinese for a year and then commenced work with Professor Green. For a time Ham obtained an unpaid job at the Auckland War Memorial Museum where he examined articles in the Egyptian collection. He wrote an unpublished paper on two Egyptian mummies, 'Ancient Egyptian

Until his death Ham lived quietly in retirement. He read widely, particularly books about the Second World War. Ham felt that much of his success as an archaeologist lay in his habit of looking at the wider aspect of an excavation. He maintained that a site does not exist in a vacuum and must be placed in the context of the district. One must observe the cultural context, related sites, ecology, environment and the terrain. He studied the seasonal effects of weather for the whole year. He also looked at pottery. Ham endeavoured to understand likely trading patterns and the nature of goods exchanged. He felt that all these things are important to archaeology.

From discussions with his former colleagues and students it became clear that Ham had a special flair for archaeology. His skill lay in his meticulous, sound, excavation techniques. Ham had a varied and interesting life having been a student, soldier, teacher and an academic. He pursued his lifelong fascination with archaeology with relentless determination, even at some family and personal cost. Ham could look back with pride at the publication of a number of papers (Bibliography attached). He had an important influence on his students, many of whom are now making their names in the academic world. He is often remembered with fondness and loyalty by former students and colleagues. Ham has made a notable contribution to the advancement of archaeology, firstly by directing and participating in excavations in New Zealand; secondly, by his influence on his students; and thirdly by his work in Thailand. He deserves our congratulations and thanks.

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