

NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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THE ECONOMICS OF THE NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGIST

By Wilfred Shawcross

During the past year, about £5,000 was spent upon Archaeological excavations in New Zealand. Some may wonder who supplied this sum while others may wonder who used it. To the former question the answer is neither a wealthy foundation nor a benevolent Government, but the voluntary work and subscriptions of the members of local Archaeological Societies. The answer to the second question is that both the Archaeologists who initiated the various excavations, and the volunteers who helped to make them possible, used this money.

£5,000 is only a very crude estimate and is based upon the approximate number of working hours spent by the Auckland Society in excavating, multiplied by the rate per hour and a factor covering overhead costs per hour. An estimation was made for the quantity of work done in the other major centres of research and was treated similarly, the sum coming to about £5,000, which is probably on the low side for the total amount of work done last year. This can be only a very approximate measure of the quantity of work, because, whereas the number of hours completed could be accurately determined (they are here thought to be about 8,000), the value put upon an hour's work is very much up to individual interpretation. A good and conscientious excavator is beyond value, whereas a bad excavator is a severe liability and could, under certain circumstances, make an excavation worthless. In these calculations the rate per hour is eight shillings, which is just about at the bottom of the New Zealand wages scale and can hardly compare with the regular incomes of some of the excavators.

It will be seen that the £5,000 is made up entirely of the voluntary contributions, in money and work, of individuals. To this may be added relatively small sums consisting of grants for the purchase of equipment, such as those made by Auckland University and Students' Association, also some funds made available in special instances by the National Historic Places Trust. But it is plain that there would be virtually no active research in this country were it not for the enthusiasm and generosity of individuals and, if this activity did not exist, New Zealand would fall into the ranks of the so-called "backward nations", which provide fields of research for their more advanced neighbours. This would be a particularly humiliating fall in view of the outstanding work of a generation and more ago.

The reference to the work done by earlier generations suggests the need for a brief review of the development of Archaeology in this country.

Archaeology was vigorously developed in the 1860's in New Zealand, and appears to have been the spare-time pursuit of a small group of men who were trained or practicing as scientists. These men were typical of the scientists of their age, interested in the latest developments in a wide variety of fields of study. For example, von Haast's excavation of the Moa Bone Point Cave and his interpretation of the finds almost certainly reflects the influence of the publication, in 1863, of Sir Charles Lyell's "Antiquity of Man", which was a synthesis of the latest results at the time of research

in Geology, Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology. Archaeological research at this stage was looked upon as a proper diversion for a small number of highly-educated men and an activity which was to be financed out of the individual's own pocket.

By the end of the 19th Century a new, far more personal and New Zealand-centred stage is to be seen developing. This change is concurrent with the process of alienation of Maori Lands, when a great quantity of oral history was recorded by the Lands Court judges, while at the same time surveyors were sent out into the field, working in areas previously unpenetrated by Europeans. The effect of this greatly increased contact with the surviving culture, combined with the recording of its oral history, seems to be associated with a loss of emphasis on the evolution of the material part. It is also likely that this change of emphasis may have been increased by the discrediting of some of von Haast's interpretations; the result being an underlying idea that New Zealand's past was too recent and too shallow to yield evidence for material evolution, which is an objective of the techniques of Archaeological study. Strangely enough, this change of emphasis is reflected in the men who become prominent at this time: For example, Elsdon Best, who was not trained as a scientist, but spent most of his life in such a wide variety of activities as soldiering, ranching in Texas, surveying in the Urewera Country, and as a Maori Health Inspector. It was during these two latter activities that he, in effect, carried out his field-work. Thus, during this stage there was little direct outlay of money in research; the greatest obvious expense consisting of the publication of material and the finding of time to write, though this was often done in retirement, while the field research had been an intellectual activity developed out of a practical, physical, day-to-day life.

Following the end of the First World War there is a further development, illustrated in the diagram on page 8.

There is greatly increased interest in the material culture of the Maori and, particularly, interest in cultural evolution. Two parallel lines of approach exist at this stage. On the one hand, there is that based upon the principle that the past may be reconstructed through the study of essentially contemporary ethnographic survivals. This approach is typified by P.H. Buck's "Evolution of Maori Clothing". On the other hand, there was the application of the technique of systematic excavation, which is to be seen in the series of excavation reports published in the Journal of the Polynesian Society, particularly those coming from Otago and showing the influence of H.D. Skinner. On the theoretical side these approaches reflect the development of Anthropology as an academic subject in Britain and America, while, practically, it is to be associated with the creation of Ethnographic posts at museums and the appointment of a Lectureship in Anthropology at Otago University. Thus, a position was found for the active excavator D. Teviotdale, who, at the age of 59 joined the staff of the Otago Museum. It is between the two World Wars that Archaeological excavation started to develop in New Zealand and the organization of the Otago excavations, consisting of parties of interested volunteers led by a full-time archaeologist, created the form of subsequent work.

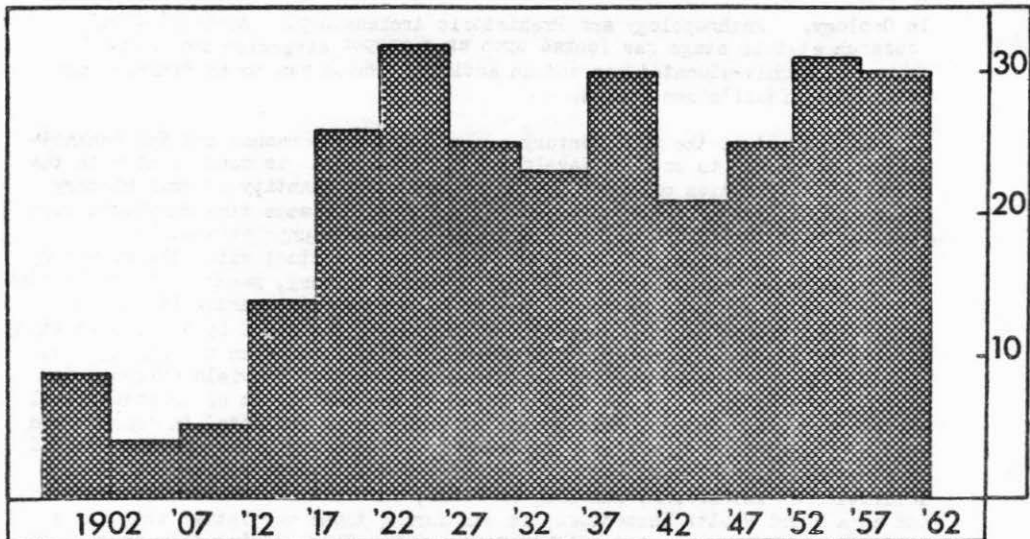


Diagram illustrating increase in interest in Archaeological material following the end of the First World War. The evidence is the number of articles, published in the Journal of the Polynesian Society, upon excavations, field monuments and material culture in New Zealand.

The latest stage may be assigned to the last decade and is an extension of the previous stage, distinguished by expansion in the North Island, by the addition of several more permanent positions for Archaeologists, and the introduction of advanced techniques of study and also by the formation of the Archaeological Association with its NEWSLETTER as a record of increasing activity.

The four stages just described have been constructed using a variety of criteria and may be summarized in the following way:

During Stage I, Archaeology was practised as a diversion by a small group of individuals who were able to finance their work out of their own resources. Stage II, while associated with a definite reduction in Archaeological research as it is now understood, was also a period during which great advances were made in the complementary study of the surviving records of the Maori Culture. However, this work involved little or no direct expenditure upon research. The feature of Stage III is the revival of interest in Material Culture, especially portable artefacts; associated with this is the creation of positions, particularly in museums, for

specialists to carry out research. The institutions were insufficiently endowed to enable them to carry out their own research, but this was overcome by the formation of groups of interested volunteers - for example, the Archaeological branch of the Otago Institute. Stage IV, which is the present one, is marked by technical developments, particularly those connected with the excavation of structures which have resulted in an adjustment of theoretical ideas. Other obvious features of this stage are an increase in general interest as well as in the numbers of specialists. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in the funds made available for research, indeed, this aspect of Archaeology seems to have evolved little since the days of von Haast. It appears that those who control public and private money still retain the 19th Century idea that individuals should be able to support their own research, after the manner of a gentlemanly pursuit. Wealthy gentlemen no longer exist or, if they do, they do not join the ranks of Archaeology. The processes of social change during this past century have resulted in a redistribution of wealth while other developments have created an increasing number of necessities to absorb this wealth. Archaeology runs certain risks under these conditions because, on the one hand, it lacks the technological value which has led to so much money being channelled into Physics, while, on the other hand, it cannot be treated as a potential investment in the way in which painting and sculpture retain public and private interest.

This is not intended to be a prophecy of the extinction of Archaeology in New Zealand. On the contrary, the wide and deep interest is worth more than research grants, while there are promising signs of change, such as the assistance given by the Mount Roskill Borough Council last year. (Shawcross 1962:81). But it is obvious that this interest will sustain itself better if it can attract more support.

To give some basis for comparison a brief description of the expenditure upon Archaeological research in Britain and America will be given here. In Britain, excavations are carried out by the Universities and Museums, by the Government, through the Ministry of Works, and by societies - both National and Local - or by combinations of these. There are no available figures for the expenditures made by the various institutions and societies upon this work, but the funds available to Universities include Government grants and private bequests, while many students are supported on excavations by their County Education Authorities. The available figures for expenditure are those of the Ministry of Works which show that during the year 1958-59, £35,350 was spent upon excavations. (Fifth Report from the Select Committee on Estimates. 1960:6). While it is stressed in the report that the greater part of this work was "rescue excavation" and not primarily research, the results are, in the long run, almost identical. Here it may be added that much of the work is done by part-time Archaeologists, particularly teachers, and that a thorough report is required to be made available for publication, from all of those so supported.

It is impossible to estimate how much is spent annually upon excavation in Britain, but, at a guess, it must be about £50,000. This may be set against the annual expenditure voted for the recording and preservation of Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments, which was £822,000 in the year 1959-60. (Fifth Report from the Select Committee on Estimates. 1960:19).

Finally, some evidence may be drawn from the United States of America. There Archaeology is supported both by the Government, through the National Science Foundation and through the encouragement of patronage either of wealthy individuals or corporations. This latter has been developed by museums and universities and is on a private basis, the patrons deriving certain taxation concessions as well as the satisfaction of patronage, while the institutions are able to support extensive research. In addition, as has been mentioned, the National Science Foundation makes large grants towards individual programmes lasting up to three years. (*American Antiquity* 1963:413). The sum provided this year is about \$982,600 (£351,000) of which \$507,000 (£181,000) will be spent upon specifically American research this year and, for example, \$77,000 (£27,500) will be spent during the next three years in the Pacific. It may be added that a considerable proportion will be used by New Zealand Archaeologists working among the Islands.

It may be argued that the comparison between New Zealand and such great nations is unfair, but against this the following points must be made. A comparison with the smaller European nations, such as Holland and Denmark only makes the absence of support in this country more obvious for both have State-supported Archaeology. While it is unreasonable to expect much development of the American form of patronage here there are other possibilities, such as that evolved in America, whereby a corporation will set aside a percentage of its total expenditure for the Archaeological study of an area about to be destroyed through civil engineering works. It should also be possible for the Government to maintain a small group of full-time Archaeologists and a larger number of part-time researchers, after the manner of the Ministry of Works in Britain. Finally, it seems likely that the problem here is not so much one of relative wealth as of attitude. Firstly, there is the belief that an activity such as Archaeology should pay for itself: secondly, there is the assumption that the relics of the past may be expended and destroyed at will. The first belief belongs to the 19th Century and does not accord with the changed society of the 20th Century. The answer to the second is that no Archaeologist desires the entire preservation of the past, which would lead to a strangling of the development of the present. But Archaeologists are alarmed at the capacity for rapid and entire destruction of the records of the past which has been developed by recent technology. It may be the feeling that succeeding generations might not be as impressed as the present one with the harsh alterations now being made to the face of the Earth that prompts so much desperate archaeological recording. It is to be hoped that this recording and intellectual curiosity is to be sustained in New Zealand.

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