



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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VIEW OF THE MINISTRY OF WORKS.

A. McG. Peart (Planning Engineer, M.O.W.)

THE STATE AS GUARDIAN OF THE PAST.

Most people think of 'State' as a nebulous sort of monster which has an inexhaustable supply of funds for a wide variety of purposes. In this paper I shall confine my comments to the interpretation of 'State' as a State Department. After all, it is the State Departments (or the personnel employed by them) which physically carry out the Government works which have an effect on archaeology and change the face of the countryside.

Before one can expect a sympathetic understanding of archaeology from a layman (and the vast majority of Departmental officers are laymen), one must be sure he knows what archaeology is, what its meaning to New Zealand is, and particularly how important its pursuit is. This goes much further than persuading some Departmental officer that the State should support archaeology. State servants must also be imbued with a realization of its importance, and this means education. The first point of view that I should like to stress, then, is that the average Departmental officer is probably very sympathetic to the views of archaeologists, but for him to be active in assisting archaeology the archaeologists must sell their interest - a sort of public relations exercise.

State Departments generally have closely defined functions to perform and in the case of the Ministry of Works, one of its main functions is to carry out works for a number of other Departments. Quite obviously some of these works must affect archaeology, and the effects can be either beneficial or destructive. Some major schemes have opened up country and actually assisted archaeological finds; other schemes have resulted in the loss of archaeological evidence, but very often because of a lack of information of archaeological knowledge in the area. The Ministry of Works does try to preserve natural scenery and features as far as is possible, and would certainly do the same for archaeological features if it had the necessary information in advance. Because of the many thousands of different types of works undertaken by the Department it would seem more practical for archaeological advice to be given rather than solicited, where a scheme is going to affect archaeological features. The most logical approach would be to send the necessary information to the local organization responsible for the works.

There are, of course, some very real problems involved for the officers charged with carrying out works: with the best will in the world they cannot always avoid damage. When it is realized that modern earthmoving machinery has tremendous capacity and that one bite from a large scoop can disturb a lump of rock the size of a big house, then one can understand the difficulties involved in proceeding with earthworks in a manner least likely to upset prehistoric remains. Personal supervision by an experienced and interested supervising officer would be essential, and the importance of the archaeological interest in the site would have to be sufficient to warrant such personal and senior supervision.

There is now the vexing question of slowing work down to permit archaeological investigation. A major public work, such as a hydro-scheme or a motorway, is begun after a long period of investigation and design, often involving a number of different and unrelated sites. Because of the complexity of the work and the cost it is not always possible to make a decision to proceed until a start becomes urgent, and there is usually great pressure to have the work completed at the earliest possible moment. To slow progress at this stage in the interest of archaeology would need considerable justification. True, the answer seems to lie in advice to archaeologists in the design stage of prospective works, and this will be done

wherever it is possible and reasonable. At the same time it is likely that a certain amount of 'wild-goose chasing' will result from too-early notification of public works. Public notification entitles people to assume that basic decisions on location and so on have been made. A later change to these basic decisions could be extremely disruptive to people who have relied on the accuracy of announced decisions. It is not always, therefore, in the public interest to make hasty announcements.

The Ministry of Works supports the suggestion that an accredited staff archaeologist should be appointed to a Government sponsored institution. But it would still be necessary for him to sell his subject and to maintain cordial relations with the men on the job. Dr. Green mentioned the United Kingdom Ministry of Works' responsibilities to archaeology. Until its reorganization in 1961 the UK Ministry bore no resemblance to the NZ Ministry of Works, and even now tends to be an administrative rather than a construction organization. It certainly has a responsibility for antiquity under the Ancient Monuments Act and is advised by locally appointed Councils and Boards. But the similarity to the NZ Ministry seems to be allied more to building and architecture, which forms only a part of the NZ Ministry of Works activities.

Finally there is the perennial question of finance. The investigation of prehistory obviously costs time and money and it has been argued that as the State disturbs prehistoric remains the State should pay for their preservation and investigation. This has been accepted to the extent that the Government has made 1,500 pounds available for archaeological investigation into areas affected by the Tongariro power proposal. Consideration is also being given to similar assistance in other areas if current proposals are to proceed. Each of these has, of course, been treated on its merits, but finance in the form of a percentage cost of all works has been suggested. This system does apply in some countries, but it seems that considerable justification would be needed to merit a blanket type of additional cost on public works here.

In this short paper I have tried to outline the views on assistance to archaeology likely to be held by a major Government Department, and some of the problems likely to be met in providing suitable assistance. I should like, in conclusion, to mention one or two matters raised during the

Conference. First, the Public Works Act 1928 necessarily provides for all contingencies, so that the powers contained in it may seem extreme. It is the administration of legislation which is of great importance to archaeology, and in general this is done sympathetically. Secondly, the film on salvage archaeology may have given the impression that early consultation is an easy matter. This could apply to some major works where planning is centralized, but for countless other works which could be equally damaging to archaeological sites, their initiation, design, planning and execution can be spread from one end of the country to the other. The solution here is an appreciation by the public and state servants alike of the needs and importance of archaeology and a knowledge of who to contact locally. Thirdly, members of the Archaeological Association are not always aware of where they may obtain information on public works. Local authority district schemes would give a wealth of information, and Government is trying, where possible, to include current and future public works in these planning schemes.

Finally I should like to acknowledge the efforts of the Historic Places Trust in placing before my Department the case for rescue archaeology.