

The Household in Historical Archaeology

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This paper commences with an outline of some recent approaches to the study of household activities through the archaeological record. Then follows a summary discussion of my research at the well-known Italian site of Pompeii, to demonstrate techniques for using the archaeological record, not only to present new perspectives on the distribution of household activities in Roman houses, but also to highlight the need for careful assessment of relationships between documentary and material evidence. Finally, I will turn to an, as yet, not so well known site in western New South Wales, the Old Kinchega Homestead, to discuss the application of similar methodology to the investigation of household behaviour on an Australian pastoral estate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

HOW IS A HOUSEHOLD IDENTIFIED ARCHAEOLOGICALLY?

A 'household' is defined as: the people living in a house; the maintenance of that establishment; and all the goods and furniture found in it. Thus, the components which form the dataset for an archaeological investigation of households are not just the structures, or houses, but also all their extant contents, both as primary and as secondary refuse.

Households constitute the bulk of the population in past societies (Smith 1992:30). At the level of the household, 'social groups articulate directly with economic and ecological processes' (Wilk and Rathje 1982:618). Households are a major arena in which social productive strategies are played out (Blanton 1994:esp. 20). For these reasons they are essential building blocks in reconstructions of past societies (Wilk and Rathje 1982). An understanding of the nature of change in household organisation has been believed to provide a bridge for the existing 'mid-level theory gap' in archaeology (Wilk and Rathje 1982:617) - an essential level of inquiry in order to move 'from grand theories of cultural change and evolution to the practical archaeology of potsherds and stone tools'.

However, studies of the internal dynamics and relationships of households from the past have generally been viewed as trivial and insignificant pastimes in the investigation of the patterns of human behaviour. The mechanisms and ideologies which construct the household as a unit of reproduction, contributing to society's production (e.g. Gregory 1984:esp. 14), have been considered of little consequence. To validate a concept of households as productive entities there needs to be a well-founded comprehension of what such entities might be composed of, not as a unit but as a system of membership (e.g. vom Bruck 1997).

ETHNOGRAPHY

However, archaeologists do not dig up households. They dig up dwellings and domestic artefacts, not social units or systems (Wilk and Rathje 1982:618). Households are an ethnographic or historical concept (Smith 1992:29). For this reason Wilk and Rathje (1982:613) have argued that household archaeology must be embedded in a comparative ethnographic matrix to allow archaeologists to draw inferences about past household behaviour. Blanton (1994) has proposed a model for the archaeological investigation of households, which relies on contemporary ethnographic material to interpret households from the past. However, Blanton's concern is for houses and their households as units within socio-economic systems, towards a comprehension of the roles of these units within these systems, not for the internal dynamics and intra-relationships of households themselves. While this is a useful perspective, I believe that its preponderance, across the archaeological

discipline, constitutes a limited use of the archaeological resource. In addition, while Blanton's approach stresses the importance of cross-cultural studies and comparative methodologies to deepen our understanding of archaeological assemblages (Nevett 1994), it does not actually deal with the problem of using archaeological assemblages for the insights which they are capable of providing into households and household activities. He assumes that archaeology is only capable of following an agenda set by anthropology.

The use of ethnographic and ethnohistorical analogy to explain archaeological phenomena can also have the effect of normalising past domestic behaviour and accentuating, or even constructing and superimposing, patterns of household behaviour from different temporal, cultural or spatial situations (e.g. Fletcher's comments in Kolb 1985:592; for the broader issue, Fletcher 1995:part I). Likewise, an archaeologist's use of his/her own domestic behaviour as baseline ethnographic data, stems from the philosophy that assumes the internal dynamics of a household are self-evident. Ethnography should be employed as a 'signifier' of complexity rather than a 'prescriber' of household behaviour.

DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Ethnography and ethnohistory are essential tools for exploring the possibilities for household composition and activities from the prehistoric past, but for households of historical periods we have seemingly better resources. Written documentation provides archaeologies of historical periods with an often very full body of data for the investigation of household behaviours and relationships (Beaudry 1984). But the relationships between the textual and the archaeological record can be as complex and as difficult to grasp as the relationships between archaeology and ethnography or indeed as the inter-relationships of the members of households in the past. While, in many situations in post-Medieval or colonial archaeology, at least some of the members of a specific archaeologically identified household may also be identified through documentary evidence (e.g. Karskens 1997:esp. 156), attempts to relate archaeological remains to extant textual evidence must be sensitive as much to the 'selective and unrepresentative nature of ... texts' (Hijmans 1996:81) as to the specific context and time-frame of the archaeological remains. For example, textual material often emphasises and reinforces the roles of society's élites or stresses the interactions of other social groups or individuals with those élites. Archaeology can frequently provide evidence of household behaviour of inter-relationships within those social groups and across a broader social spectrum. This is not to say that the writers of texts are isolated from social structures (Moreland 1992:116). Rather, attempts to read the archaeological record through direct associations with documentary sources, without regard for the specific social and ethnic contexts of that archaeological record, for the specific agenda of the texts, or for the precise relationships



Fig. 1: Parlour in a late nineteenth-century working-class cottage in Sydney, converted into a study in the late twentieth century (photo by P. Allison).

between these sets of data, can likewise lead to a normalisation of past domestic behaviour which denies its historicity, or its regional or status specificity. Such readings not only serve to perpetuate perspectives of the inconsequence of household dynamics in the writing of history. They also compromise the ability of archaeological data to provide information which cannot be directly associated with textual information.

BUILDINGS

Not only are perspectives of past household uniformity often derived from inappropriate associations of the archaeological record with often extraneous ethnographic or textual material, but studies which have concerned themselves with the archaeology of households have often been dominated by investigations of the remains of buildings (e.g. Kent 1990; Blanton 1994). Investigations of the physical structures of dwellings from the past are frequently assumed to be investigations of domestic behaviour in the past. But houses are only physical units, not households (i.e. not social units). Investigation of structural remains may lead to an understanding of cultural patterning of space but does not, necessarily, lead to an understanding of the perceptions of those who built the buildings, still less to an understanding of the behaviour of those who inhabited them.

Rapoport's concerns (1990) with the cultural information provided by 'Nonverbal Communicators' provides a useful model for the study of the household behaviours of complex societies through the analysis of archaeological material. He has argued (1990:15-20) that designers and users of the built environment are a far from homogeneous group and that 'designers tend to react to environments in perceptual terms' whereas 'the users react to environments in associational terms'. While some buildings are built by some of the subsequent occupants, users of buildings frequently inhabit spaces designed by the builders of an earlier period or by other, more dominant, social or cultural groups who may have imposed the structures on them. Also a belief that most will build the house in which they will dwell (Rippengal 1993:93) essentially stems from a belief that the head of the household is the only important member of it. While cases may exist where all household members are involved in the building of their dwelling, many household members live in dwellings which were constructed by close relatives or associates during their lifetime, but into whose construction or decisions about form they had little or no input (Blanton 1994:8). Many others live in houses built by

unrelated individuals or distant ancestors. It would, therefore, be truer to say that the vast majority of individuals did not build the house in which they dwell. Even when members of the household have contributed to the building of their own dwelling, these members can often be more concerned to outwardly imitate other socially dominant groups in the construction of their dwelling, than to conform to the expected life-style of the household members. In such situations 'buildings [can act] as repressive mechanisms and authoritarian representations' (Miller 1987:164). However, while such dwellings can serve to constrain those lifestyles (Fletcher 1995:esp. 18-60) they can never completely reformulate them (Pader 1993). To view architecture as a prescriber and dictator of household behaviour is to bias analysis towards the perspectives of the builder or the head of the household as the signifier of domestic behaviour and to undermine the significance of the activities of the other inhabitants in the structuring of dwellings as social spaces.

In archaeology, notions that the built structure provides the main key to comprehending the activities carried out therein and that the artefacts deposited in them are manufactured and traded objects, rather than used or functional objects, still persist. Lack of appreciation of the often minute scale but, at the same time, significant social meaning of change within this built environment, without alteration to its fabric, creates a fairly myopic perspective of domestic life. While a dominant culture, class or gender might dictate the nature of these structures, the activities occurring within them can vary considerably over time, as with a parlour in a late nineteenth-century working-class cottage in Sydney converted into a study in the late twentieth century (Fig.1). Or, they can differ considerably in space and in relation to the cultural background of the occupant, rather than that of the builder, as is evidenced in the location of furniture in out-door living spaces of Charlie Kadjibut's family's mid-twentieth-century European-style bungalow in Queensland (Taylor 1988:148).

ARTEFACT DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of artefacts in relation to a building is more usually governed by the traditions of the local and/or current inhabitants, rather than by the dominant powers who might have imposed the buildings on them, the previous inhabitants, or the architects of an earlier period. Rapoport proposed that the non-fixed feature elements (the people, their activities and behaviours and their material objects) are very important sources of evidence and offer more meaningful insights into household behaviour.

The reading of the types and combinations of nonverbal communicators as proposed by Rapoport - fixed, semi-fixed and non-fixed feature elements - is relatively straightforward when dealing with contemporary houses and households. However, this reading becomes more problematic when dealing with archaeological remains.

A major problem is a technical one, relating to data collection methods of past and present archaeologists. The investigation of households, through non-fixed feature elements is a fairly recent development in archaeological research. To do it often requires a large inter- and intra-site sample to investigate meaningful patterns of domestic behaviour but the acquisition of such a study sample is by no means easy. A not insignificant reason for this is the traditional perspective that the interpretation of domestic behaviour at archaeological sites is reliant on the interpretation of architectural remains through documentary and analogous evidence. For a study of household behaviour, in many branches of the archaeological discipline, not only has the evidence of activities invariably been removed from activity areas, but the empty spaces are frequently filled with external evidence, such as re-creations derived from literary sources (e.g. Clarke 1991:esp. 2-12). Since the first intellectual forays into the archaeology of literate periods, the investigators, often trained in textual methods, have sought illustration of fragmentary textual information through the fragmentary excavated remains. Nomenclature from documentary sources have been used to ascribe activities to excavated spaces and artefacts, without rigorous validation (Leach 1997). In some cases, where the material culture does not conform to the documentary evidence, the interpretation of the material record has been adapted to match the written reference. For example, the excavators of Pompeii have used their sound knowledge of ancient texts to move artefacts (e.g. marble tables and statues) from their original findspots to ones which more closely resembled the furnishings purportedly 'known', from the written evidence, to have existed in Roman houses (Allison 1992a:50-54, Figs 1-2). Such reconstructive activity stems from, and reinforces, beliefs that Pompeii was a 'typical' Roman town and that the texts present a more accurate and more readable record of the past, than does the material evidence, which can be confused and confusing. The actual artefact assemblages which were excavated from such structural remains have often been disseminated and removed for commodity-oriented studies (e.g. pottery manufacture and trade, stone tool technology etc.). The provenance information required for household studies is invariably unpublished and therefore not generally available for consideration, without a detailed and time-consuming study of the original excavation notebooks and databases, and the compilation of the necessary data from scratch. However, more suitable data is not necessarily available from more recent excavations. Given current funding restraints and the nature and objectives of many modern excavations, particularly in a rescue situation, it is also difficult to acquire a large enough sample to make any statements concerning patterns of household behaviour.

There is another more theoretical problem in using archaeological sites to identify households and household behaviour. As Smith (1992) has pointed out it is extremely difficult to isolate the remains of a single household archaeologically. If one is concerned with the concept of a household then one is generally concerned with those people alive within the span of one generation only. Such a phenomenon is almost untraceable in most archaeological sites. Because archaeologists are normally examining a sequence of households which have successively inhabited a given structure, Smith proposed that household series and not households are the relevant and detectable unit in archaeology. He argued that this is the case for most archaeological sites, but that at sites which had a catastrophic abandonment event (and he specifically refers to Pompeii) it might be possible to identify a single household. I have been more cautious and argued that even at Pompeii, the

archaeological record is much more complicated than is proposed in the debate about the 'Pompeii Premise' (Binford 1981; Schiffer 1985). In my view, at all archaeological sites, including Pompeii, investigations of domestic behaviour are concerned with household series. One should not see the archaeological record as deficient because it cannot isolate individual households. Rather it should be used to trace the fluid nature of household behaviour within and between both households and sites.

HOUSEHOLD STUDIES IN POMPEII

The main purpose of my study of the distribution of house contents in Pompeii was to produce the first systematic assessment of artefact assemblages for the analysis of the spatial patterning of household activities at this site (Allison 1992b; Allison n.d.).¹ This patterning suggests normal or habitual activities in particular spaces, as well as activities which could be related to disrupted behaviour during seismic events (see also Allison 1995b). I also assessed the relationship between the activities identified through this artefactual investigation and those ascribed to these spaces by the application of textual nomenclature. By this I mean the labelling of excavated spaces in Pompeian houses with terms such as *atrium*, *triclinium* and *cubiculum* etc., based on the use of such terms in Latin literature. Thus, the study provided a useful body of evidence for assessing the relationship between the documentary and the archaeological information, a relationship which has generally been taken for granted (e.g. Shelton 1988:60; Clarke 1991:esp. 1-23; Wallace-Hadrill 1994:esp. 1-61).

It is important at this stage to stress that a study of Pompeian house contents is not bounded by a moment which begins and

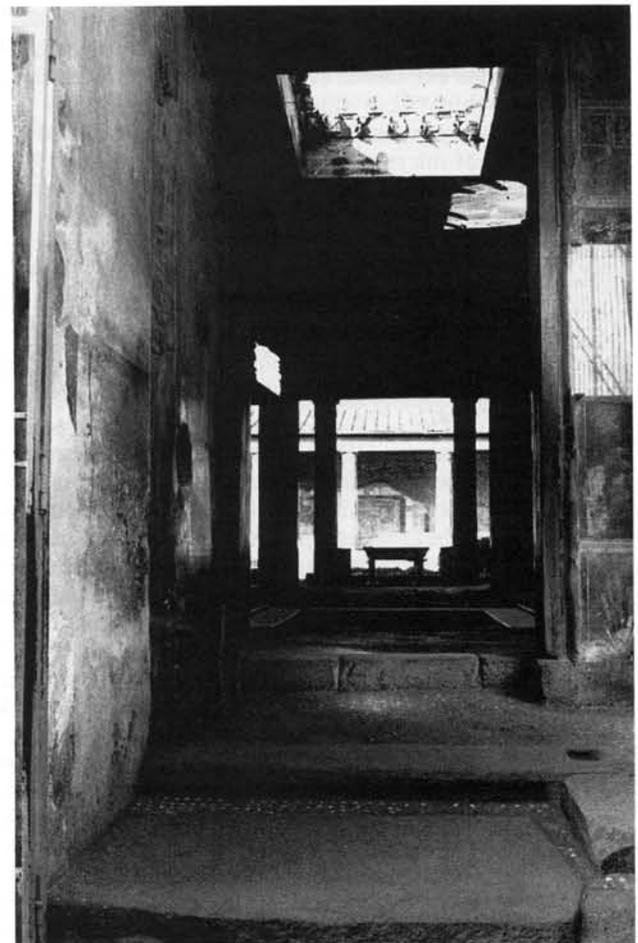


Fig. 2: Front hall of the Casa dei Vettii in Pompeii. (photo by J. Agee).

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Table 1

Houses	FrontHall	Lararium painting/ Aedicula	Table/statue supports and fountain fittings	Statuary, tables and basins	Puteals or cistern covers	Cupboards & chests with domestic contents	Weaving equipment	Bulk storage	Utilitarian fixtures
<i>Casa di Iulius Polybius</i>	N	•			•			•	
" "	O				•			•	
<i>Casa della Venere in Bikini</i>	02		•			•			
<i>Casa del Menandro</i>	b	•		•		•?		•?	
" "	41					•			•
<i>Casa del Fabbro</i>	03		•			•	•		
House I 10, 8	01					•	•		
<i>Casa dei Quadretti Teatrali</i>	b					•	•		
House I 6, 8-9	c							•	•
<i>Casa di Stallius Eros</i>	b					•			•
<i>Casa del Sacerdos Amandus</i>	l					•	•		
<i>Casa dell'Efebo</i>	A'	•				•			
" "	A"			•					
House I 7, 19	p			•					
<i>Casa di Trebius Valens</i>	a			•		•		•	
<i>Casa dei Ceii</i>	b			•	•	•	•		
<i>Casa del Sacello Illiaco</i>	b				•	•	•	•	
House VI 16, 26	B	•		•	•	•		•	•
<i>Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto</i>	02			•		•			
<i>Casa del Principe di Napoli</i>	d			•		•?		•	
House VI 15, 5	02	•				•			
<i>Casa dei Vettii</i>	c					•		•	
<i>Casa delle Nozze d'Argento</i>	d			•	•	•			
House VIII 2, 14-16	bb			•?		•			
House VIII 2, 28	d	•						•	
<i>Casa di Giuseppe II</i>	b			•		•		•	
House VIII 2, 34	c					•			
House VIII 2, 29-30	k'	•					•		
" "	m'						•		

Table 1. Contents of front halls in Pompeian houses.

(Agee).

ends on 24th August AD 79. This study provides us with a substantial body of archaeological data for analysing the period leading up to the AD 79 eruption of Mt Vesuvius, but which has also been affected by cultural and environmental disturbances in the period after the eruption. In other words, Schiffer (1985:18) was mistaken in assuming, firstly, that analysed 'systemic inventories of house-floor assemblages' already existed for Pompeii and, secondly, that they represented a 'frozen moment'. The patterns of deposition at this supposedly 'ideal' site display all the diachronic and post-depositional disturbance characteristics - the formation processes which 'contribute variability to house floor assemblages' (Schiffer 1985:22) - from which Schiffer and many of his colleagues have assumed it to have been free (Allison 1992a).

Because of the variability in the deposition of the house contents, as well as the variability in the excavation and recording procedures of previous archaeologists, my study used a large sample of a specific Pompeian house type, the so-called 'atrium house'. I collated the contents from a sample of 30 such architecturally-defined houses into a database - some 860 internal spaces and some 8000 artefacts. Assemblages were selected and studied on both a room by room and house by house basis. The first procedure systematically tested allocations of room use, as claimed by archaeologists and historians on the basis of a combination of the documentary and architectural remains, against the contents as listed on the database. The second tested each house for a model of a single phase of occupation from the documented earthquake of AD 62 until the documented eruption of AD 79. In the first instance, the activity patterns indicated by the artefact assemblages did not correspond precisely to the traditional concepts of room use in Pompeian houses. Neither did they correspond with the ideal model of a single phase of occupation, from AD 62 until AD 79. Rather, they showed that a single house floor assemblage, reputedly dating to AD 79, included layers of deposition indicating various and changing activity within the preceding period.

Thus, the assessment of the spatial distribution of household activities through artefact distribution showed that the use of the nomenclature, borrowed from the textual evidence as a guide for establishing the use of space in these houses, should be more critically assessed. It also demonstrated that the functions of rooms in Pompeian, and probably Roman, houses did not conform to the assumptions we make about the spatial distribution of domestic activities, based on present day analogies, particularly those of the middle class and the élite in modern western cultures. For example, the front hall in Pompeian houses (Fig. 2) has traditionally been equated with the *atrium*, as described in ancient texts (e.g. Vitruvius VI,III,1; Varro V,161-162). Previous scholars have concentrated on the discovery of luxury furniture, sculpture and household shrines to illustrate that this was the public space for the patron of the house, the place where the owner and his clients carried out their business (e.g. Dwyer 1982:113-115; Clarke 1991:4; Wallace-Hadrill 1994:11-12). The concept of this front hall as a public space which was a neat, sparsely furnished display area, allowing easy circulation has parallels with, for example, the foyer of a Georgian house. Such houses were seen by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century excavators as suitable bourgeois residences for important Pompeians, or Romans.

However, the distribution of contents in the front halls of the Pompeian houses in this sample indicated that a variety of activities had been carried out in this area (Table 1). Of the 35 front halls in the sample (five houses each having two front halls), only seven had household shrines and ten the type of luxury furniture (marble statuary, tables, and basins) which have been considered the requirements for this reception area of the house. By contrast, up to 21 had evidence of domestic storage in this supposed display area. Eight, including six of those with domestic storage, had evidence of domestic industries or what might be termed commodity production. Up to 11 had evidence of bulk

storage. Thus, the most pronounced pattern for front halls in Pompeian houses was that they had been cluttered with domestic storage in wooden cupboards, with little evidence for elaborate containers for household valuables. A less significant proportion contained display furniture in the central area. While such display furniture might have been attractive to post-eruption intruders, the complete lack of any trace of it in over 60 per cent of the sample, much of which appears not to have been substantially disturbed, indicates that utilitarian activities had been fairly normal in this area.

The front hall of a Pompeian house was likely to have been the main circulation and meeting place for the whole household - men, women, children and slaves. In fact, textual descriptions of early *atria* (i.e. from the Republican period, some 150 years earlier) indicate that they had indeed been the focus of the household, with a bed and a strong box and that spinning, dining and display of the household gods took place there (Salza Prina Ricotti 1978-80:249 n. 9; Wallace-Hadrill 1994:117). It is believed by many modern scholars that by the first century AD, and with the development of houses with large colonnaded gardens as are many of those in this Pompeian sample, the activities in the Roman house had become more separate with family and domestic activity taking place in the rear of the house. But at Pompeii, at least, the house contents indicate no such change in living patterns. Such concepts for the separation of public and private activities within the domestic context might be seen to be based on analogy with nineteenth-century 'separate spheres' frameworks. Similarly, while documentary sources suggest that the Roman house owner met his clients in the *atrium* early in the mornings we have no specific evidence of any further temporal division of the activities in this area. Any such conclusions are, again, often drawn through nineteenth- and twentieth-century analogies.

So why should the Pompeian material culture not act as a mirror for the perspectives represented in our reading of the documentary evidence? In the first instance, our readings are frequently imbued with analogy without a critical assessment of the suitability of its appropriateness. But it is also important to highlight that Latin texts were written predominantly by male élites, usually from the Roman capital. As Gibbs and King have pointed out in their study of seventeenth-century homelots in the Chesapeake region (1991), the written record depicts 'perceived proper behaviours'. Pompeii was not Rome. It had been a multi-cultural market town, possibly with a Greek foundation, six centuries before it became a Roman colony. As Beaudry *et al.* (1991) have stressed, a full knowledge of the relevant history, including a grounding in historiography, is an important aspect of any analysis of the material cultural record of an historical period. But it is also important to develop a precise understanding of the relationship between the documentary and archaeological record. This is not only true between the documentary and material cultural records but also relevant to associations within the material culture record. Gibbs and King (1991:128-129) stated that the range of men and women's activities and their spatial organization are related to household wealth. In his book on houses and society in Pompeii and Herculaneum, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1994) has drawn a direct association between house size and household wealth. The results from my research suggest that house size and, by extrapolation, wealth, had not actually been a criterion for differentiation in the spatial organization of household activities. The houses in my overall sample ranged in ground floor area from about 300 sq.m (Casa di Stallius Eros) to about 1800 sq.m (Casa del Menandro). The houses in the sample which showed evidence of domestic storage in the front hall did not include the largest nor the smallest house in the sample but did include a variety of house sizes covering most of the range. In other words, one should be very wary of making assumptions about direct relationships between social status, house size and household activities, or between more mobile material and large durable

features. Studies which rely on architectural remains to interpret the spatial distribution of household activities risk doing this.

Gender in Pompeian households

As well as providing insights into the spatial organization of household activities, this brief glance at my Pompeian research also serves to demonstrate that identifying household activities according to gender is nigh impossible without bringing related documentary evidence to bear on the archaeological. For example, evidence for weaving in the domestic context is generally perceived to indicate female activity areas. While Latin texts indicate that spinning had been carried out by women in the *atrium* in the Republican period, who was actually doing the weaving there in the first century AD (early Imperial period)? Greek vases and Roman sculpture portray women weaving, but did women always do the weaving? Roman texts and sculptural reliefs indicate that men were also weavers. When a large quantity of loomweights were found in one front hall in a Pompeian house (House I 10, 8), the excavators assumed that this quantity was more than that required for a domestic loom. They, therefore, argued that this front hall had been given over to weaving as commodity-production, which would have been carried out by males - rather than home-production. For this reason the house has been called a '*textrinum*', a weaver's shop (Elia 1934:317). The construction of such occupational divisions in the Roman world seems to be based more on analogies with modern industrialised societies than with an accurate reading of the textual evidence and an assessment of its relationship to the archaeological.

HOUSEHOLD ARCHAEOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA

Emphasis on the household in Australian historical archaeology has, until very recently, been limited. Bairstow (1991) argued that this is because we lack the necessary documentary sources, such as are available to historical archaeologists in North America. I agree with Beaudry (1984:27) that 'models applied to the study of prehistoric societies are not immediately transferable to historical archaeology'. However, at the same time, I feel that Bairstow's view reflects an Australian attitude that expects to find an ideal analytical framework from an historical situation outside its own documentary and archaeological dataset.

Connah (1988:xv) lamented that much of Australian historical archaeology has been concerned with conservation and lacks research publication. The lists of unpublished excavation reports cited in most articles on Australian historical archaeology bears witness to this. This limited approach and dissemination stems, to no small degree, from the fact that the majority of excavations of domestic sites in Australia have taken the form of rescue excavations which provide a restricted time frame and impetus for detailed and comprehensive data collection and detailed analysis of the totality of the archaeological material. As Murray and Allen (1986:85-93) have argued for Australian historical archaeology in general, this limited approach is also because appropriate theoretical frameworks and methodologies, which are needed to extract meaningful information on household behaviour from archaeological data, have not been fully utilised in these excavations. When I began my research of Pompeian houses (most of which were excavated in the nineteenth century!), I was confronted with similarly limited material, but developed methodologies and approaches to that material which I felt were appropriate to it and which would potentially provide meaningful results from it.

The 1990s are seeing the emergence of more concentrated efforts for research designs which take more analytical and holistic approaches to the excavations of sites of households in Australia.² Of particular note in this regard are the current analyses of the material from the Little Lon excavations in

Melbourne, where data collection had again, regrettably, been restricted by the constraints of rescue archaeology (Mayne and Lawrence 1998). Less restricted were the excavations commissioned by the Sydney Cove Authority at the corner of Cumberland and Gloucester Streets in the Rocks (Godden Mackay 1996). The concern of this excavation for a comprehensive research design and the pending publication of some of its reports points to a way forward for historical archaeology in Sydney. However, despite the apparent wealth of artefactual material from this site, there is little evidence in the reports of any detailed quantitative and specific contextualised analyses of this material (cf. Allison 1997). Artefact studies consist merely of specialist reports of decontextualised and classified material with little attempt to analyse them in their contexts and assemblages. Explanations of the social significance of this material culture consist of somewhat simplistic and populist associations between certain isolates or classes of finds and documentary information (cf. Orser and Fagan 1995:26). The essential intermediary process, the rigorous analysis and interpretation of the contextual, archaeological evidence for these 'households' appears to be missing (cf. Birmingham 1992). This lacuna is further highlighted in Karskens (1997), whose integration of material evidence with documentary has been critiqued because she 'does not draw on these [archaeological] data with the exactitude she does documentary sources' (Mayne 1998:91; see also Lydon 1998).

The 1990s are also seeing an increasing interest in investigations of relationships between gender and space in Australian historical archaeology and material culture studies (e.g. Hourani 1990; Lawrence 1993, 1999; Lydon 1995a, 1995b; Young 1998). These studies likewise serve to demonstrate that the archaeological investigation of household activities is an area which needs more concentrated attention.

In summary, there is a need for a more rigorous investigation of archaeological data with research questions that are archaeological in nature and that acknowledge fully that the reading of material culture, and of documentary evidence concerning material culture, requires different methodological approaches than does documentary analysis for more particularly historical perspectives. There is also a need with regard to the excavation of household sites in colonial Australia for more attention to be paid to the formulation of well-prepared research designs and suitable archaeological and historical methodologies to fully investigate household units as sites of material consumption.

THE OLD KINCHEGA HOMESTEAD

An Australian site where such approaches are being explored and developed is the abandoned homestead of the former Kinchega Station, some 100 km southeast of Broken Hill and now within the Kinchega National Park (Fig. 3).

The Kinchega Archaeological Research Project is taking the archaeology and history of the homestead area as a focus for investigating the impact of colonisation on the original owners, the colonists themselves and the landscape (Rainbird *et al.* 1997).³ The project consists of three parts which are both independent and interdependent: the environmental impact of colonisation and its wider economic implications; the socio-economic impact of colonisation on the indigenous inhabitants; and domestic practices at the homestead. This paper is concerned with this final part which is using documentary analysis, archaeological survey and, ultimately, excavation to produce baseline data for the investigation of the material culture of households in rural colonial Australia. In particular, this data will be used to examine current assumptions concerning consumption patterns, gender roles and spatial divisions of household and related activities in such contexts. In turn, this will demonstrate the important roles of archaeology and material culture studies in providing perspectives on domestic behaviour

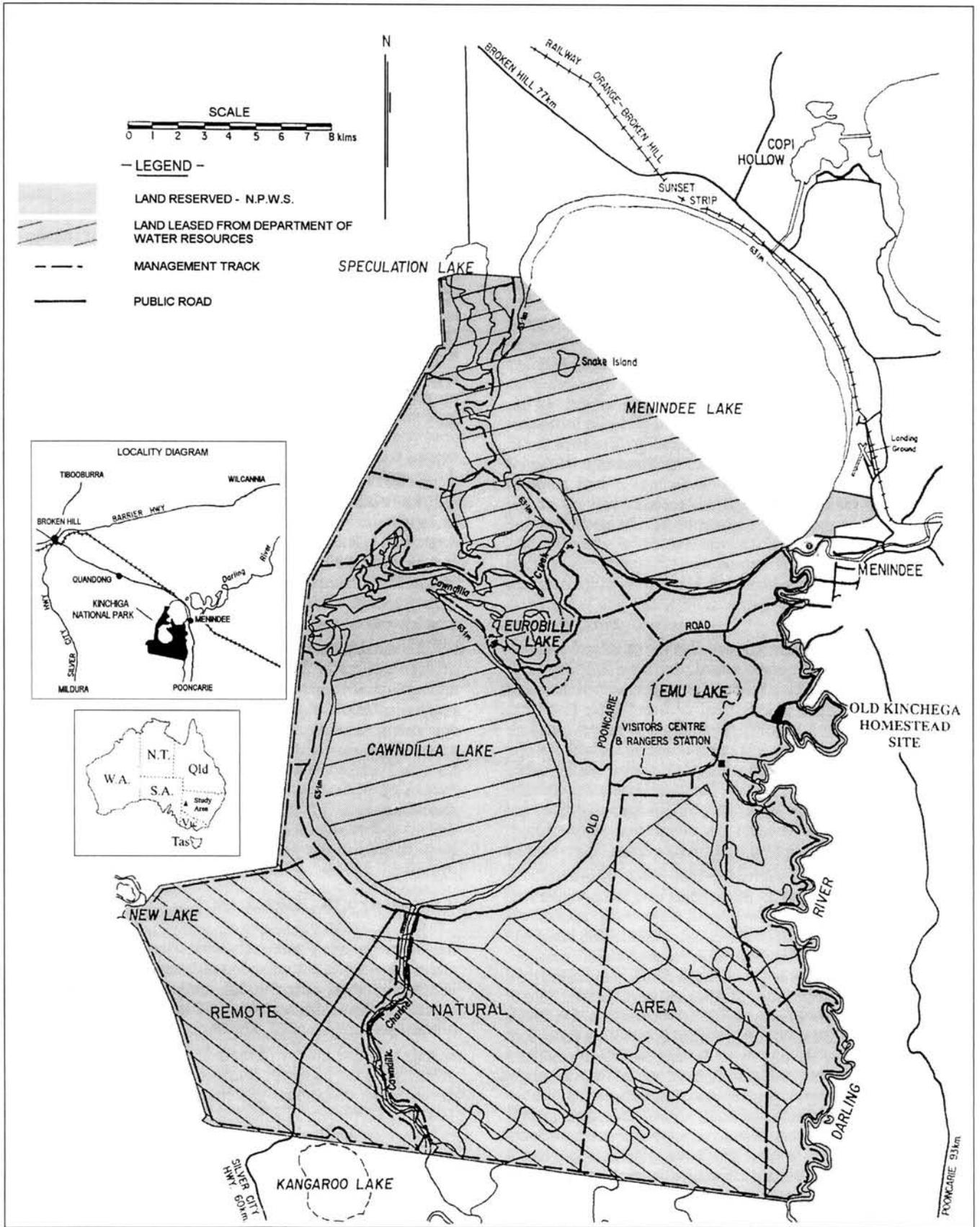


Fig. 3: Plan of Kinchega National Park
 (adapted from Kinchega National Park, New Plan of Management - N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service 1996).

which both complement those resulting from analysis of the documentary and oral sources and are largely independent of them.

Documentary and Oral Evidence

The earliest records of European presence in the West Darling area are those of Major Thomas Mitchell's expedition to explore the course of the Darling River in 1835 (Mitchell 1839). In the 1840s there followed a number of 'overlanders' and the ensuing establishment of sheep and cattle camps in the area. The earliest recorded camp at the block which came to be known as Kincheha was in 1851 (Hardy 1969:65). After a number of short-term holdings, Herbert Bristow Hughes purchased this block in 1870. It remained in his name until 1967 when the Kincheha National Park was established.

It is as yet unclear whether the extant homestead facilities were all built during the Hughes' leasehold or whether, as seems probable, at least some were built during earlier holdings. Michael Pearson, in his 1976 report for the N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service postulates that the homestead was built in the 1880s but provides no source for this information. It is also still unclear who actually lived in the homestead, although the residents seem to have been mainly managers and overseers - with their families, single station workers, gardeners, grooms and cooks - rather than the leaseholders. Currently available information indicates that Harold White was the last manager who occupied the homestead. His successor, Ronald Allison who managed the station from 1915 until 1951, lived at the nearby Kars homestead (Kearns 1970:6). The overseer, Albert Robert Beven, and his family lived in the Kincheha homestead from 1943 to 1949, and then two bachelors, Sunny Barraclough and Moss Smith were its principal residents (Peter Beven, pers. comm.). In her 1988 report for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, historian Joan Kent commented that little is known about the homestead except that it was occupied until about 1955.

Valuable information on the identification and function of many of the structures and spaces within the homestead area during the 1940s has been provided by Peter Beven, of Sturts Meadows, who lived in the homestead as a child while his father was overseer. His labelled sketch map, drawn in 1996 (Rainbird *et al.* 1997: Fig. 4.1), and the transcript of his conversation in 1998 with Lisa Menke (Kincheha National Park ranger) have served to broaden our knowledge of the spatial arrangement of and adaptations to the homestead during his family's residency. However, his memory is less useful for understanding the earlier occupancies of the homestead. Neither are documentary sources alone likely to have the potential to produce a comprehensive understanding of the growth and demise of this homestead; of the static and changing functions of the various parts of the complex throughout their relatively long history of occupancy; of the internal dynamics of the household itself; or of its relationships to the garden area, the outlying buildings and evident nearby Aboriginal occupation.

The Physical Remains

Prior to the Kincheha Archaeological Research Project, investigations into the physical remains at Kincheha have been concerned mainly with the pre-colonial Aboriginal occupation of the area (e.g. Tindale 1955; Hope 1981; Balme and Hope 1990; Martin, Witter and Webb 1994; Rainbird *et al.* 1997:5-14). For the colonial period, attention has largely been concentrated on the documentation and conservation of the woolshed (e.g. Freeman 1980:223-225). Little attention has been paid to the homestead area (Fig. 4) which lies some 3 km to the northeast of the woolshed complex. However, reports commissioned by the N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service in the 1970s and 1980s provide some information on the condition of the remains of this complex. Colour photographs, taken in the late 1960s and held at the Kincheha National Park,

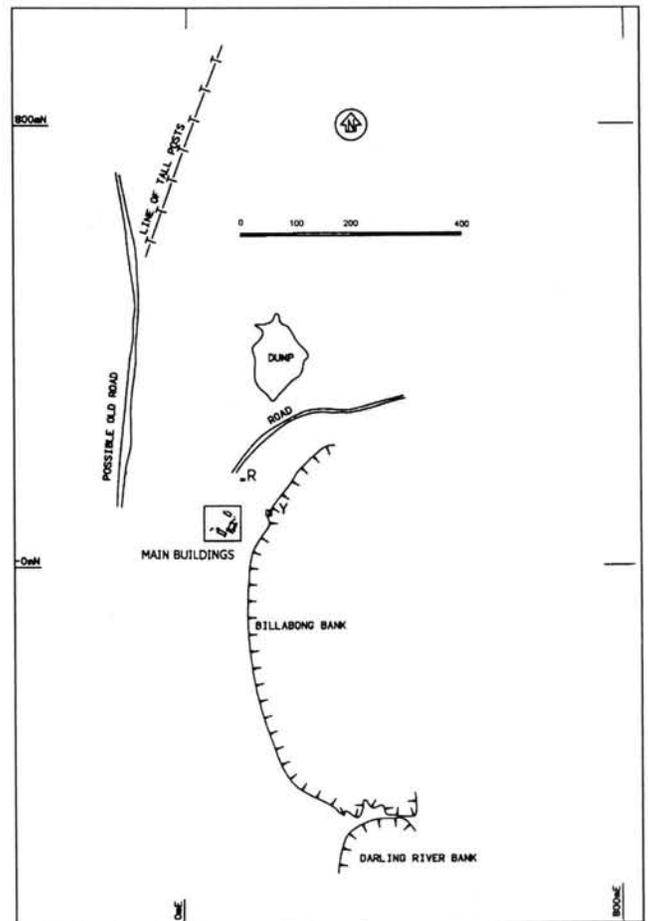


Fig. 4: Survey of Kincheha Homestead (compiled by M. Barry).

indicate that 30 years ago the walls of the homestead stood to some two metres and that many had been plastered white. Pearson's photographs and descriptions indicate that, while the walls may have stood a little higher in 1976 than they do now, the structures were in much the same state. However, he also noted items, such as a wheelbarrow and a grass reed fence, which are no longer evident. Elizabeth Rich's 1985 recordings of the extant remains also contained information concerning the buildings and the exotic plants in the homestead garden, which is no longer evident from the present remains.

Nevertheless, archaeologically speaking, the Old Kincheha Homestead is a relatively well preserved site (Fig. 5). The extant remains of the brick buildings indicate up to six visible courses of double brick, with one fireplace preserved to 21 courses (1950 mm). Many other components of the complex are also identifiable. The fieldwork and research programme for this homestead is still in its preliminary stages but its potential for household studies is promising.

In April 1996 fieldwork was carried out by a team of students from Charles Sturt University, directed by Dr Paul Rainbird and Sam Wickman (both from Charles Sturt University) and myself. This involved an initial survey of the homestead and environs for evidence of both pre-colonial and colonial activity. It also involved the commencement of a detailed surface plan of the main homestead building (Rainbird *et al.* 1997:31-41). In July 1998, this work was continued by a team of students and volunteers from the University of Sydney, directed by myself, with the valuable assistance of Michael Barry (surveyor), Robert Pullar (architect) and Penny Crook (recording). Barry carried out a comprehensive survey of all the main structures and other significant remains in the homestead area, from a weir at the bend in the Darling River 610 m south of the main complex, to a domestic dump 280 m to the north, to evidence of a road and a

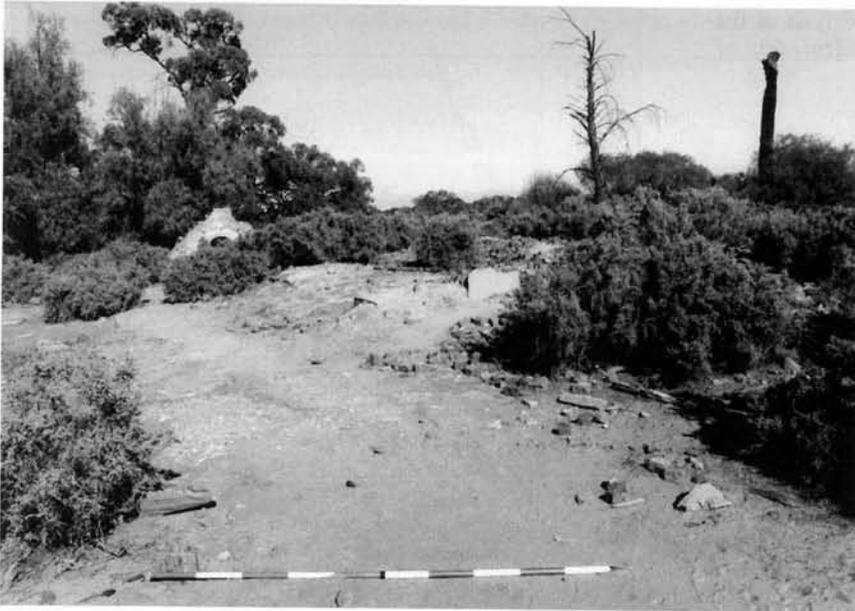


Fig. 5: View of Kinchege Homestead remains from north-east (photo by P. Allison).

line of telegraph poles up to 870 m to the north. The main brick buildings; other timber, brick and corrugated or cast iron structures; the fences of a number of holding pens; the weir; and the dump, have been digitised and shown to cover an area of some 1500 m x 500 m.

A written and photographic record of all the remains identified through this survey was carried out. Detailed plans of the surface evidence for building A and building D were also completed. There is not the space here to discuss all the structures (Allison 1998).⁴ Rather, the reputedly residential structures, which are most relevant to this discussion and whose construction has been analysed by Robert Pullar, will be summarised.

Detailed planning and recording of building A has shown that it consisted of some ten rooms, with at least six fireplaces (Fig. 6). Evidence from an early photograph indicates that originally it had been single-storied and bare brick (Fig. 7). According to both Pearson and Rich, these soft and unevenly fired bricks were of local manufacture.⁵ At some stage the lower portions, at least, of the outside walls were cement-rendered and some internal walls were lined with fibro. The rooms to the north (rooms 1 and 2) were built with a different type of brick (with a diamond frog) from the southern part of this building and conceivably at a different date.⁶ Room 3 may have been built into a pre-existing verandah. According to Beven, this area had been adapted for a kitchen for his mother during the 1940s. However, its brick construction appears to be of the same type as the rooms to the south. Excavation, and particularly removal of the collapsed brickwork, may shed more light on the chronology of the construction of this building.

As noted by Pearson in 1976, the brick walls of building A have, in places, fallen inwards and onto wooden floors, potentially sealing deposits both above and below these floors. The floorboards of room 2 are the most visible and appear to have been of tongue-and-groove construction. While only the floor joists remain in room 9 and possible floor posts in room 1, the mounds of collapsed brickwork in rooms 4, 5, 7 and 8 may still conceal *in situ* flooring. Detailed excavation in these rooms, in particular, may also throw more light on the history of their uses.

Building B, to the north-west of building A, seems to have consisted of four rooms, with brick walls preserved to two to three courses (Fig. 8). The building had one fireplace, in the easternmost room, still standing to a height of about one metre. The interior of the brick walls in the westernmost room were painted blue. Some of the bricks from this building have a

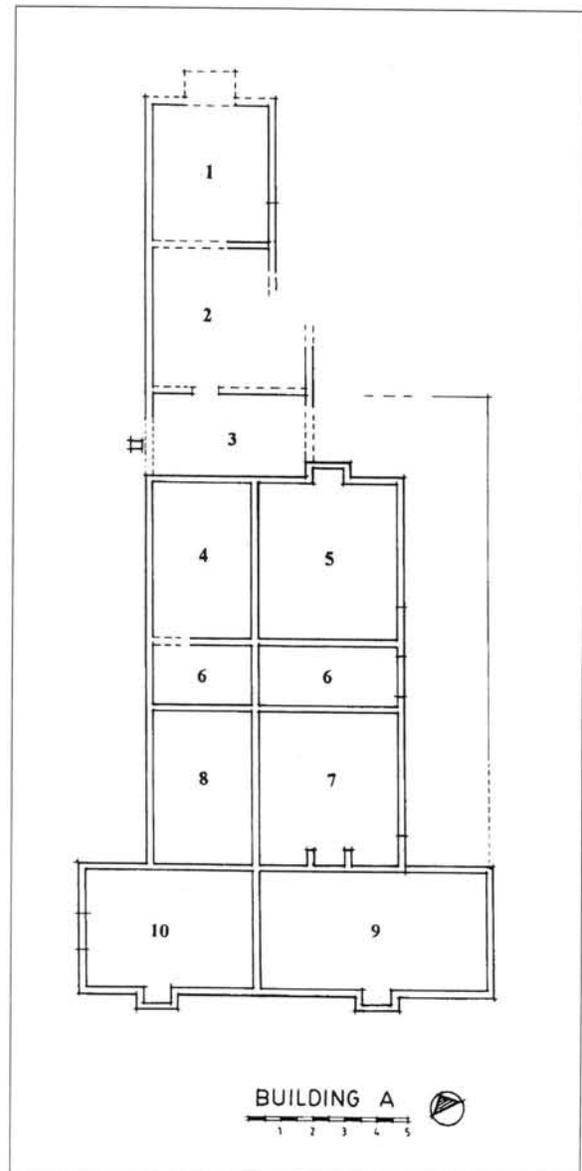


Fig. 6: Plan of Building A (reconstruction by R. Pullar).

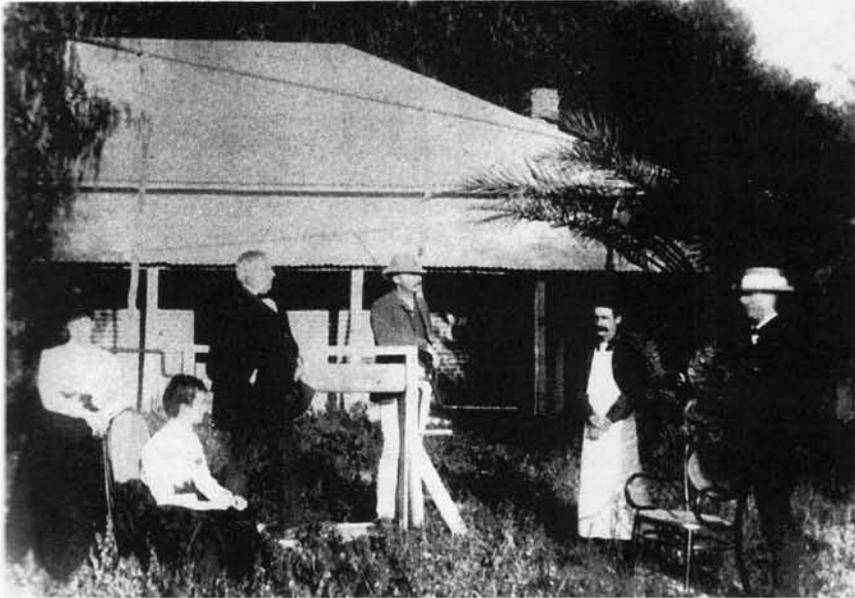


Fig. 7: Kincheha Homestead from west, H. B. Hughes third from left. c1890 (photo, courtesy of Tom Hughes, Kars Station).

rectangular frog, which is different again from the bricks in the two sections of building A. There is an area of cement flooring in the easternmost room but generally the type of flooring used in this building is not yet discernible. According to Beven, this building had once been the main kitchen of the workers. After the Second World War, although Beven's mother had had a new kitchen built in the main building, a Dutch couple had been employed to cook and had lived in this building for a short time. Excavation within this building may throw more light on the nature of its flooring and possibly the changing functions of this structure.

Building C, to the south, appears to have consisted of three rooms, with a verandah along the north side and a retaining wall along the south (Fig. 9). The walls appear to have been of bare brick, now standing to four courses or less, and the flooring had been paved, at least in parts. According to Beven, this building was at one time used for single men's accommodation but it had also served as a store for the employees at Kincheha as well as for travellers who were passing through. Clearing of the collapsed brickwork and careful documentation of the extant remains may again throw more light on these changing uses.

Other buildings in the homestead complex that had reputedly been used as residences are building R and building Y. Building R lies to the north of the main homestead buildings. While it is now levelled to the ground, the scattered remains indicate that it had been constructed of upright poles (maximum height 2560 mm) with horizontal slabs. At the northern end are the remains of a brick fireplace, some of bricks having the same diamond frog as found on those in the northern section of building A. The floor of the building appears to have been mud and to have been built up above ground level, at least to the east. It, therefore, has the potential to contain floor deposits. Peter Beven remembers this building as 'Mick Doherty's hut'.

The final possible residence was a small building (3 m x 3 m) beside the billabong. Its remains are currently covered with bushes and consist of a series of floor stumps, with sheet metal enclosing the subfloor at the northern and southern ends. On his sketch map Beven has indicated a 'chinaman's hut' in this area. Again excavation of the subfloor deposit may throw more light on its function and occupancy.

Thus the residential buildings of the homestead area cover a range of building types, floor types and types of occupancy. Of particular interest is the range of wooden floors, paved floors, mud floors and complete lack of floors for an investigation, not only of floor and underfloor deposits but also potentially of the

range of deposits associated with each floor type.

For a study of household consumption, the household dump which lies to the north of the main homestead area is of considerable importance. This dump covers an area of approximately 160 m x 100 m and the material in it is largely domestic (Fig. 10). It consists predominantly of metal containers, glassware and pottery, whose surface scatter includes material from the nineteenth century until at least the 1960s, including pre-1900 cans which appear to have been used for canned meat (Michael Barry, pers. comm.). A detailed investigation of this material is likely to provide substantial information on the changing consumption habits - the food, drink, luxury items,

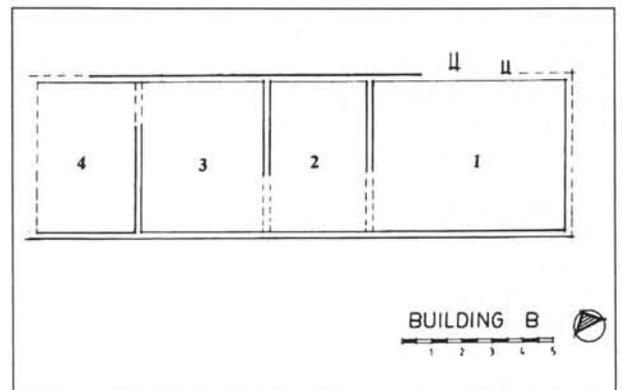


Fig. 8: Plan of Building B (reconstruction by R. Pullar).

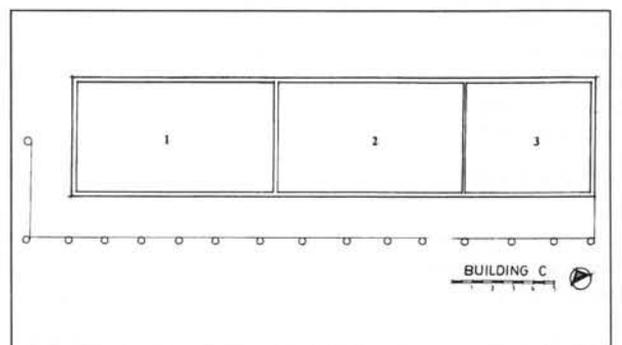


Fig. 9: Plan of building C (reconstruction by R. Pullar).



Fig. 10: View of scattered material in the household dump (DD), south-east area (photo by P. Allison).

household goods etc. of the homestead's residents.

On-going Research

Survey of the homestead area and planning and recording of the structures and their immediate surroundings is a non-invasive method which is providing initial information on the layout and functioning of the components of this homestead complex. But in order to gain more information on any changing spatial, gender or status distribution of household activities and consumption patterns at this homestead, it will be necessary to do more detailed documentary and oral research, to remove the collapsed brickwork to facilitate excavation and analyses of the underfloor deposits in the residential buildings, and to investigate the dump. These deposits have the greatest potential to increase our knowledge in these areas. The variety of building types not only provides evidence of the spatial divisions of homestead activities but also has the potential to produce material for comparative analyses of consumption patterns between different members of this homestead complex and between different periods of occupancy. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the material from the household dump will provide information on the changing consumption patterns of the homestead occupants as a whole. It is also anticipated that this material could be compared to that in a dump in the area of the woolshed which potentially represents the consumption behaviour of a different, but related, social and gender group.

The plan for the overall documentation of this site is initially to generate distribution maps of as much of the material remains as is feasible, at a range of scales — from the overall survey map to artefact contexts. The maps and relational databases will be set up with the particular research aims of this project in mind so that they can be used to assess household activities in terms of quantitative and proportional analyses of the material (as in Pompeii). However, we are also mindful of questions which other researchers might wish to ask of this data (e.g. analyses of particular artefact classes).

CONCLUSIONS

It has been claimed that the investigation of households is an inappropriate inquiry for archaeology and that, because of its association with concepts of kinship, and a need for ethnography, ethnohistory and history to interpret spatial patterning, household archaeology is a misnomer. Some would argue that material remains cannot tell us anything about household behaviour. The problem here is not that archaeological remains cannot provide

information on domestic behaviour in the past but rather that archaeological data is not always capable of answering the kinds of questions which anthropologists and social-historians might ask of their own data (Wilson 1993:esp. 21). Household archaeology of historical periods must address questions which archaeological data is capable of answering and which can provide insights into human behaviour in past societies. Such insights may then be compared with textual or ethnohistorical data for similarities and differences. The differences are not necessarily errors on the part of the investigator but rather help us to understand that the diversity of human behaviour in the past is often blurred or even obliterated by use of analogy, even at the level of household activities.

Wilk and Rathje (1982:618) have pointed out that households not only live in but also use material culture. While it is true to say that archaeologists do not dig up households it is also true to say that they do not just dig up houses. Whenever they dig settlement sites they invariably dig up household material culture. However, the structural remains are only part of that material culture. As history can serve to flesh out these remains, so it can serve to warn us of the role of buildings in concealing household behaviour. Pader (1993:esp. 130) has eloquently demonstrated how the architecture and projected ideologies of Mexicans who have lived in the United States reflect their experiences, but that the actuality of domestic practice, by themselves and by other members in their households, follows more long-standing local traditions. These phenomena were not articulated through the architecture or even through direct ethnographic study. Insights into such phenomena were provided by chance discussions with relatives and by the patterns of house contents.

The 'nonfixed-feature' elements in a household (Rapoport 1990:96-101), of which there may often be considerable wealth in archaeological remains, provide major insights into household behaviour and relationships between social action and the material. While it is very difficult to use this material to identify the nature and quantity of the members of a household and their inter-relationships, the patterns which this material produces, however ephemeral and whether or not delimited by architectural remains (e.g. household dumps), must surely give us a greater comprehension of the range and distribution of the activities, and possibly the behaviour and ideologies, within these households. It is in the study of house floor assemblages and artefact assemblage and distribution patterns (e.g. Ciolek-Torello 1984; Schiffer 1996) that the material culture of past households can contribute particularly to our knowledge of past household

behaviour. That is, the investigation of household activities, their spatial distribution and their changing temporal patterns, are appropriate levels of inquiry for the nature of the archaeological record (Allison, ed., 1999).

We anticipate that, with a precise and detailed research design, the Kinchega Archaeological Research Project will not only provide information about the social and economic conditions for the inhabitants of the West Darling region from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, but also that it will demonstrate that the investigation of material culture from the past involves a rigorous assessment of its relationship to documentary and oral sources and the setting up of research questions which archaeological data is both capable of, and well-suited to, answering.⁷

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 1 I am indebted to the Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei for their generous permission and the facility to carry out my research in Pompeii. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Baldassarre Conticello, Dr Antonio d'Ambrosio and all the staff of the Direzione di Pompei.
- 2 The study of Wybalenna, on Flinders Island, (Birmingham 1992) can be included in this decade because of the publication date, although the fieldwork and research spans the two previous decades.
- 3 The initiative for this project came from Dr Peter Grave (University of New England) and Dr Paul Rainbird (Charles Sturt University (CSU)) in 1995, building on the work of a field school conducted by Laurajane Smith and Catherine Upcher (of CSU). I am grateful to Peter and Paul for their invitation to join them on this project. It is largely through the efforts of Paul Rainbird, who has now taken up an appointment at the University of Wales, that this project got off the ground. We are all indebted to the Kinchega National Park Staff, especially Lisa Menke and David Bearup, for permission to carry out this research and for facilities to assist with fieldwork, and to Denis Gojak (N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service) for support and encouragement. In addition, we are indebted to AIATSIS for funding assistance for the 1996 fieldwork and to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for funding assistance for the 1998 campaign. I am also grateful to all the students and volunteers who have assisted with fieldwork and post-excavation data processing.
- 4 The information in this report is more up to date than the present article.
- 5 They provide no reasons for this conclusion. However, similar bricks appear to have been used to build the Menindee post office in the late nineteenth century.
- 6 Robert Pullar's plotting of the wall alignments of this building suggest that a wall, previously considered to have been unaligned (Rainbird 1997:39), is in fact part of the main west wall which runs the length of this building.
- 7 I wish to thank Tracy Ireland, Linda Young, Paul Rainbird and Roland Fletcher and the two anonymous referees for reading various versions of this paper and for their comments. I am also grateful to Mary Casey and Penny Crook for useful discussions. Any errors remain my own.

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