

OBITUARIES

Vale Alister Malcolm Bowen (1968–2018)

The ASHA community has lost a valuable member with the passing of Alister Bowen on 16 May 2018. Alister was best known for his contributions to the scholarship of the Overseas Chinese in Australia and his many works on that subject are widely cited.

Alister's unpretentious manner belied his incredible breadth of expertise. He was born on 7 November 1968 in Canberra and grew up spending time in the bush. Alister left school at 15 and apprenticed as a plumber with his father. He worked on the construction of Parliament House and was the youngest, smallest member of that big project. Alister became licensed in operating a variety of heavy equipment including backhoes, buses and boats, and by the time he was in his early twenties he was successfully running his own bobcat company. A year's leave to travel in the US and UK opened Alister's eyes to the possibilities offered by education. He returned to Canberra and studied at night to qualify for entry to university. At ANU he studied archaeology and geography and graduated with Honours in Archaeology in 1999.

Alister's intellectual curiosity was not yet satisfied. Alister's love of fishing prompted him to explore the early history of the industry and particularly the role of the Chinese. He moved to Melbourne to be with his partner Carol Julian and got to work looking for likely sites along the coast of south-eastern Australia. When he was ready Alister enrolled in a PhD at La Trobe University, graduating in 2007. His groundbreaking research on Chinese fish curing was based on excavations at Chinaman's Point, Port Albert. Alister's thesis, *The Chinese Involvement in Victoria's Early Fishing Industry*, was awarded a La Trobe Research Merit Citation. That was only one of the many awards bestowed on Alister for the excellence and originality of his research. While completing his thesis Alister presented a paper at the 2005 ASHA conference, receiving both the Best Student Paper and Best Overall Paper awards. His work was also recognised by the Chinese heritage community, receiving the Best Paper Award at the Dragon Tails conference in 2009. In the same year ASHA presented Alister with the Maureen Byrne Award for Best Post-Graduate Thesis.

Alister believed strongly in the public dissemination of research and made sure that his work reached a wide audience. He worked closely with the local community in Port Albert to develop a display at the Port Albert Maritime Museum. He spoke on the radio and on several television programs. Alister also published his work extensively in academic journals. The list of journals that featured his work indicates the scope and significance of Alister's work. It includes heritage journals, local history journals, community-focused publications, and local, national and international archaeological journals. His thesis was subsequently published in the ASHA monograph series as *Archaeology of the Chinese Fishing Industry in Colonial Australia*. In documenting the full extent and importance of Chinese fish curing Alister's work made a significant contribution to the study of the overseas Chinese.

Alister accomplished all of this while being primary carer for his two children, Harriett and Hugh on a full-time and then part-time basis. It was the birth of Alister and Carol's daughter Harriet that prompted Alister to return to study. He saw it as the perfect opportunity. Alister would put Harriet on the bike and cycle in for supervisions. If she fussed Alister would calmly give her a bottle and keep talking. When their son

Hugh was born Alister just continued. By then he had finished his excavation at Port Albert. There were artefacts to be catalogued so Hugh was propped in the baby seat on top of the bench in the lab while Alister worked. When Hugh was a bit bigger Alister set up a playpen in the corner and Hugh played in there. Alister was more effective than anyone at making La Trobe a family-friendly workplace. He was a trail-blazer.

Alister's incredible patience, determination, and capacity to get things done with such grace made him a natural leader. His practical skills, personal style, and intellectual curiosity made him the perfect archaeologist. Alister's approach to planning fieldwork, looking after the logistics of the volunteers, excavation, and cataloguing were all meticulous. His scholarship was highly original, perhaps because of his own wide experience and unconventional route to academia. Alister uncovered dimensions of Chinese history that are still largely unknown. His curiosity and need to explain what he found drove him to many new discoveries about the history of the Chinese fishing industry, the organisation of labour and capital, and the small details of how the men lived their lives. Alister looked carefully at each artefact and made them reveal secrets that others would have missed.

Alister moved back to Canberra with his family in 2012, where he worked in commercial archaeology and devoted himself to caring for his family and giving his children a loving childhood full of adventure and fun. Alister was still at the beginning of his career as an archaeologist with many more contributions to make. He was a fine scholar, valued colleague, and good friend. We regret his passing and the loss of his insight, humour and skill. Alister is survived by his partner Carol and children Harriet, Hugh and Samm. He will be greatly missed.

Susan Lawrence

with assistance from Carol Julian

Alister Bowen's Publications

- 2012** *The Archaeology of Chinese Involvement in Victoria's Colonial Fishing Industry*, Sydney University Press, Sydney.
- 2011** 'Some Social, Historical and Characteristic Aspects of Australia's Colonial Period Chinese Fish Curing Sites', *Historic Environment* 23(3):15–23.
- 2011** 'The Merchants: Chinese Social Organisation in Colonial Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 42(1):25–44.
- 2010** 'The Central Role of Chinese People in Australia's Colonial Fishing Industry', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 12:97–118.
- 2008** 'Dating a Chinese Fish Curing Camp at Port Albert, Victoria', *The Artefact: Pacific Rim Archaeology* 30.
- 2006** 'Excavation at a Colonial Chinese Fish Curing Site in Victoria's South Gippsland Region', *Archaeology in Oceania* 41(1):37–41.
- 2006** 'Colonial Chinese Fish Curing Activities in Victoria, Australia', *The Artefact: Pacific Rim Archaeology*, 29:4–13.
- 2006** 'The Chinese Involvement in Victoria's Colonial Fishing Industry', *Coastline: The Coast Action/Coastcare Newsletter*, Edition 37 (non-refereed).
- 2004** 'Material evidence for early commercial fishing activities on the far south coast of NSW', *Australian Historical Archaeology* 22:79–89.
- 2004** 'Gippsland's Chinese Fish-Curing Industry: An Ongoing Archaeological Study', *Gippsland Heritage Journal* 28:45–50.
- 2003** 'The archaeology of early commercial fishing activities in New South Wales: a theoretical model', *Bulletin of the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology* 27:9–18.