OBITUARIES

Vale Angela Middleton¹ (1953–2019)

Angela Middleton was born in Auckland in 1953 and died recently in Dunedin, aged 65, after a short battle with motor neurone disease. Her childhood was spent in Auckland, Taranaki and Puhoe, and for most of secondary school she boarded at New Plymouth Girls High School, forging friendships that persisted through the rest of her life. In her late teens Angela lived for a time in the Jerusalem commune on the Wanganui river, beginning her lifelong interest in and engagement with Māori communities.

Angela was a relative late-comer to archaeology. She had earlier careers in photography, book publishing and retailing, silk-screen printing, and as coordinator of the Ponsonby Community Centre. She was also the sole parent to son Joss, born in 1982. In 1990 Angela trained as a Social Worker, beginning yet another career, but also stimulating her interest in further academic study, which she pursued part time. In 1997 she graduated from the University of Auckland with a BA in Anthropology. Her MA thesis, Reading Landscapes for Meaning at Tataraimaka, Taranaki, completed with First Class honours in 1999, established one of the primary themes of Angela’s research, locating physical remnants in New Zealand’s landscapes of the dynamic interplay and overlay of Māori and Pākehā cultures.

Missionaries played a significant part in early nineteenth century cross-cultural encounters in New Zealand, but prior to 2002 there had been no research-focused excavations at any mission station sites. Angela’s excavations at Te Puna mission station in the Bay of Islands changed that, providing the evidential base for her University of Auckland PhD, Te Puna: the Archaeology and History of a New Zealand Mission Station, 1832–1874, completed in 2005. This won the Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology’s Maureen Byrne Award for best MA or PhD thesis. A revised version was published as the 2008 book Te Puna: A New Zealand Mission Station as part of Springer’s Contributions to Global Historical Archaeology series. More than half of the 27 books, chapters and articles that Angela went on to publish concerned aspects of missionization, both in New Zealand and globally, and she was widely acknowledged as one of the leading archaeological scholars in the field.

Angela shifted to Dunedin in 2003 and was a part-time Teaching Fellow (2003–2006) and Lecturer (2006–2011) in archaeology at the University of Otago. She also worked briefly for NZHPT, before establishing an archaeological consulting company, Arch Hill Heritage in 2005. Her work focused primarily on assessment, monitoring and excavation of historic period sites in Dunedin, Oamaru, Central Otago and Southland. Through this she became expert in the archaeology of mining landscapes, nineteenth century urban backyards, and relict rural landscapes, such as that now preserved around Harbour Cone on Otago Peninsula partly as a result of Angela’s research and advocacy. Arch Hill Heritage also provided work experience for a steady stream of Otago archaeology students, many of whom have continued in archaeology. The company produced some 200 reports, copies of which are now held by the Hocken Library.

Although engaged in the commercial side of archaeology, Angela maintained an active research career, both through her own research initiatives and collaborations. Among the latter was the Department of Conservation’s Codfish Island/Whenua Hou Archaeological Project, which combined Angela’s historical research with excavations led by Atholl Anderson and Ian Smith. Angela’s (2007) Two Hundred Years on Codfish Island (Whenua Hou): From Cultural Encounter to Nature Conservation has become an essential source of authoritative historical information for the many Ngāi Tahu descendants of the early 19th-century ‘mixed-race’ community there. Angela and Ian Smith also collaborated with DoC in archaeological and historical research on the first permanent settlement by Pākehā, at Hoki mission station in the Bay of Islands. This provided a detailed picture of mission life and interactions with Māori during the 18 years preceding the Te Puna mission, located just over a kilometre distant.

Alongside her long-term research focus on mission archaeology, Angela also maintained a broader interest in the history and archaeology of the Bay of Islands. She worked alongside Manuka Henare and Adrienne Puckey to compile a summary report for the Waitangi Tribunal on the oral and traditional history for the Te Aho claims alliance. Two further books followed, Kerikeri Mission and Kororipo Pā: an Entwined History (2013) and Pewhairangi: Bay of Islands Missions and Māori 1814–1845 (2014). The latter provides a comprehensive and highly readable account of three dynamic decades that helped to shape the future course of New Zealand’s history.

Much of Angela’s work highlighted the lives of women in the historical contexts that she studied. This included not only missionary women, but also those from the Māori world. Her final sole-authored paper, published in the New Zealand Journal of History (2018), concerned Hariata Hongi, who played a significant but poorly known role in important events in northern New Zealand throughout the 19th century.

Angela was a regular participant in annual conferences of the New Zealand Archaeological Association and Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology, presenting on an aspect of her research or consultancy activity, and served on the ASHA Committee from 2014 to 2018. She leaves behind many friends throughout the New Zealand and Australian archaeological communities.

Ian W.G. Smith

Angela Middleton’s publications


2007 [with M. Horrocks et al.] ‘A Late Quaternary Record of Natural Change and Human Impact from Rangihoua Bay, Bay of Islands, Northern New Zealand’, Journal of Coastal Research 23:592–604


2007 ‘Potatoes and muskets: Māori gardening at Kerikeri’, in

¹ A previous version of this obituary appeared in Archaeology in New Zealand 62(2):5–7. Reproduced with permission from the New Zealand Archaeological Association.


2007 Two hundred years on Codfish Island (Whenua Hou): from cultural encounter to nature conservation, Dept of Conservation, Southland Conservancy, Invercargill, NZ.


2014 Pēwhairangi: Bay of Islands missions and Māori 1814 to 1845, Otago University Press, Dunedin, New Zealand.