



# NEWSLETTER

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# STATE OF THE ART

## ACT NEWS

*No news from the ACT this issue*

## NSW NEWS

*Compiled by Peter Davies*

### **COTTON REELS FROM THE HYDE PARK BARRACKS, SYDNEY**

Analysis of the underfloor collection of artefacts from the Hyde Park Barracks (HPB) in Sydney has recently identified a large number of wooden cotton reels. The building, which began as a convict barracks in 1819, was used as a depot for immigrant women between 1848 and 1886, and from 1862 to 1886 the top floor (Level 3) served as an asylum for destitute women. Material from the Barracks is the subject of an ARC-funded project between the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales and the Archaeology Program at La Trobe University. The wooden reels are part of a much wider suite of sewing and related artefacts, including pins, thimbles, lace bobbins, and thousands of textile fragments, analysis of which is ongoing. A brief description of the reels is offered here to provide a basis for comparison with similar items recovered from other historical sites.

At least 86 wooden cotton reels have been identified from the Barracks, including 53 from Level 3, 15 from Level 2, and 14 from unsecured contexts. The reels are often hour-glass in shape, with a deep waist and a conical flare at each end. Others have a straight barrel with only a small flare to hold the thread (Figure 1). The wood is often stained black, red or brown, having absorbed the dye from the coloured thread. The reels were manufactured from a cylindrical piece of wood turned on a lathe, with a central hole drilled through the barrel for mounting on a spindle. They ranged in length from 30 to 49 mm, and in diameter mostly from 20 to 30 mm. A circular paper label was generally glued to each end as well, but this has often disappeared (Figure 2). Where labels are preserved, several have been punctured by a spindle, possibly on a sewing machine. There are also four examples of makeshift spools, including cotton thread wrapped around a fragment of bone, and thread wound around a piece of rolled up cardboard. In addition, an ivory lid from a cotton barrel was also recovered from Level 3 (Figure 3).



*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*



*Figure 3*

The most common thread manufacturer represented in the Barracks material is J. Brook and Brothers, of Meltham Mills, West Yorkshire (n=14). The brothers Jonas, James and Joseph Brook established a mill for producing stitching cotton in the early nineteenth century, and the business became United Threads in 1890. Other makers included I. and W. Taylor of Leicester, Griffith and Son of London and Clark and Co of Paisley/Glasgow, along with Geary, Carlile, Alexander and Clapperton. Most reels contained either 100 or 200 yards of thread, with yarns of various grades or weights. While lace thread was very fine, made from two threads twisted together, cotton stitching thread was generally thicker, made from three or more yarns twisted into one (Ure 1970 [1836]:226-7). Cotton thread from this period was also a little coarser than modern materials, as the mercerizing process, which made cotton straighter and more lustrous, was not commonly used until the 1890s.

Thread reels are uncommon on archaeological sites before about 1800, when machine-finished thread came into production. Although wooden reels do not survive very well in most archaeological deposits, several examples have been recorded from other urban sites in Australia. These include four complete reels from Casselden Place in Melbourne (Porter and Ferrier 2004:355), and parts of three reels recovered from a well in the Cumberland/Gloucester Streets site in the Rocks in Sydney (Iacono 1999:62). Wooden reels were also common at the Cypress Freeway site in West Oakland, California, found in association with sewing machines, from contexts dating to the 1890s (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2004:159-60).

The mechanization of cotton spinning and cotton textile manufacture took place rapidly in Britain in the late eighteenth century (Yafa 2006:39-69). This improved both the quality and quantity of sewing thread available in shops, and resulted in the replacement of linen as the most common sewing thread. Until the early nineteenth century, however, thread was still sold by weight in loosely wound bundles, or skeins. Women used flat, pointed winders of various shapes and sizes to wind off lengths of thread for sewing and embroidery (Beaudry 2006:160). Cotton, however, tended to become loose if wound flat, and tangled if the end was not securely fastened. Alternatively, cotton barrels were used, usually made from ivory or bone. Each consisted of a hollow cylinder, a spindle attached to a small reel on which the thread was wound, and a flat screw-on lid with a central hole through which the top of the spindle protruded (Figure 3). The cotton was drawn out through a small hole in the side of the barrel, and was wound back by a turn of the spindle. When the barrel was empty the lid was unscrewed and the spindle sent back to the manufacturer for refilling. Machinery developed early in the nineteenth century made small wound balls of cotton available as well. These were held in small boxes with a hole in the lid to draw out the end of the thread (Groves 1966:33-4). By the early 1840s, manufacturers were selling their cotton wound on mass-produced, disposable wooden reels. James Carlile developed a spooling machine in 1846, capable of winding more than 10 000 spools per day, just in time, as it turned out, for the appearance of self-acting sewing machines, including Isaac Singer's, in the 1850s (Knox 1995:77-8).

Single female immigrants to New South Wales were supplied with sewing materials on board ship, both as training and to keep their hands busy. They sewed bonnets, pinafores and aprons, embroidered samplers, and knitted woollen stockings. If they conducted themselves well on the voyage these items were distributed to the women on their arrival at the Immigration Depot. Within the Asylum, able-bodied women were responsible for making and mending the Asylum's bed linen and their own clothing. A second-hand treadle sewing

machine was purchased for the Asylum in 1878, and another was acquired in 1880, but most of the women continued to stitch and sew by hand (Crook and Murray 2006:73; Godley 1996; Hughes 2004:84). The dozens of cotton reels and thousands of textile fragments in the collection are evidence of the painstaking work carried out by inmates of the Destitute Asylum.

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***Peter Davies, Archaeology Program, La Trobe University, Melbourne***

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK AT THE SITE OF THE FORMER COMMERCIAL MILL, YASS**

In July and August 2009 JCIS Consultants on behalf of Aldi Stores undertook an excavation on the site of the Commercial Mill at Yass,

The Commercial Mill had been constructed in c.1881 Petherick Tamblyn Crago one of the Crago family who later owned many flour mills in NSW. The Mill operated until 1953 when it was sold and demolished and a stock and station agent, Winchombe Carson, established a modern office and showroom on the site, In turn this business moved and the site was purchased by Aldi Stores for use as a supermarket site.

An archaeological assessment by JCIS Consultants identified that there was the potential for the remains of the Commercial Mill to be located under the site of the existing buildings on the site.

Accordingly on a chilly Monday, 20th July, 2009, a team of Dr Iain Stuart from JCIS Consultants with Jack McIlroy, Simon Coxe, Laura Bates and Damian Tybussek (we were later joined by Faye Powell and Anna Streatfeild) assembled to do the work.

The Aldi Site, Yass was excavated under Excavation Permit 2009/5140/01 Aldi Site, Yass issued by the NSW Heritage Branch, Department of Planning

The overall project aim was to locate, identify and record archaeological remains within the study area and where possible backfill and retain the remains "in situ". Where this was not possible due to conflicting levels or where some remains had to be disturbed to allow a limited construction impact, archaeological recording or salvage excavation would be undertaken.

Our approach to the archaeological recording or salvage excavation was to aim for a comprehensive recovery of archaeological information from good quality contexts within the impact area so that the loss of archaeological significance was mitigated by artefact recovery and an analysis that adds to our knowledge of flour milling in Yass and, more generally, life in Yass.

Prior to commencing the Excavation Phase of the Mitigation Works at the Aldi Stores Site, Comur Street, Yass, JCIS Consultants had done the field work necessary to record evidence of the function of the building at 74 Lead Street (the former printery). We had also done the archaeological recording of the building at 197 Comur Street prior to demolition. Plans of both buildings will be drawn up and included with our final report. We had, additionally, completed the "in situ" retention methodology which was submitted to and approved by the Heritage Branch.

Some preliminary work began with the recording of a section of the demolished Landmark Building (i.e. the 1953 building) to establish the archaeological "signature" of this type of construction. We then cleaned back the area which had been demolished and revealed the foundations of the Commercial mill (a substantial stone wall). We cleaned this wall to establish the basic stratigraphic sequence of its construction and any relationships to the newer construction of the Landmark Building.

We then began work in an area immediately behind the Landmark Building where the large shed had been located. The shed was constructed in 1970 and was over some of the Mill remains although at the commencement of work this was not apparent.

We cleaned an area out and exposed a large and deep concrete lined structure whose fill dated from the 1950s (probably demolition fill). We continued opening areas around this concrete structure and it became clear that this structure cut into some of the walls of the Mill as, during the clearing process, a complicated series of Mill walls were uncovered. We had an exciting find when some initials and a date, 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1933, were revealed inscribed on a concrete wall.

Areas further to the west were opened which revealed more of the outbuildings which were associated with a black deposit. In addition, a trench from the Mill wall to Comur Street was excavated to verify that the building wall didn't extend into this area.

As a result of information received on the Open Day (see below), we were able to identify the area at the rear of the building as being the likely location of a charcoal producer gas unit which drove a suction gas engine and replaced the earlier steam engine and boilers. We also located two "ships tanks" which had been dug into the ground and were probably installed to serve as water tanks. We completely excavated one of these but found only demolition fill from the 1950s so the decision was made to leave the other tank cleared but not excavated.

We discovered some low brick walls that may have been the bottom of flues running into the chimney. Thus, we had the location of the steam engine and boilers which powered the Mill.

A Public Open Day was held on the 2nd August, 2009 from 9:00am to 3:00pm. Attending on site were Iain Stuart, JCIS Consultants, and Jack McIlroy, our Site Supervisor, along with Brendan Smith (Aldi) and Ted Hanlon (Kell & Rigby).

A total of 355 people attended the Open Day (which is either 6% or 4% of the population of Yass – depending on which figures you use). This attendance figure was especially good as the day was cold, grey and overcast with occasional showers or rain.

People were incredibly generous with their memories of the site and the help that they wanted to give us. It became apparent that many people's view of the project was changed to a very positive one because of this inspection and the realisation that Aldi Stores were making an effort to be involved in their heritage.

The archaeological works at the Aldi site Yass was successful in identifying the remains of the Commercial Mill and in undertaking an archaeological recording of these remains which identified the changes to the Commercial Mill over time. In particular it was interesting to record the changes to how the Mill was powered (from a steam to a gas suction engine) which verified a historical document provided to use by Mrs Anne McLean.

The Open Day was an unexpected success allowing a large number of community members to visit the site, discover what we have found and to hear how Aldi is planning to manage the remains of the Commercial Mill. In addition many people shared with the archaeological team their memories of the site and provide us with some new historical documents and plans which added to our knowledge of the site.

As a consequence, our knowledge about the Commercial Mill, the history of the Crago Brothers milling activities on the site and their importance to Yass has been greatly increased.



Clearing the fill over the Commercial Mill site to expose concrete walls and features.



The archaeological team at work on the Commercial Mill (Dr Stuart stands on the brick masonry machinery base while Jack McIlroy contemplates the diggers Simon Coxe and Laura Bates).

***Dr Iain Stuart***

## NEW ZEALAND NEWS

*No news from New Zealand this quarter*

## NORTHERN TERRITORY NEWS

*No News from Northern Territory*

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA NEWS

*Compiled by Adam Patterson*

### **SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COUNCIL**

Associate Professor Mark Staniforth has been appointed as a member of the South Australian Heritage Council for a three year term (2009-2011). He was appointed on the basis of his knowledge of, and experience in, archaeology and public administration and he is the first experienced archaeologist as well as the first Flinders University academic to be appointed to the Heritage Council. The South Australian Heritage Council meets regularly every two months and has a stated vision 'To ensure our heritage is protected, conserved, recognised and celebrated'. It deals with the identification, recording and conservation of places and objects of non-Aboriginal heritage significance which can be controversial and recent issues include heritage issues associated with the re-development of Port Adelaide and the Glenside Hospital. It is a nine member statutory authority that provides strategic advice on heritage protection and conservation as well as on the administration of the Heritage Places Act 1993 to the South Australian Minister for Environment and Conservation (Hon. Jay Weatherill MP). The principal legislation which directs the work of the Heritage Council is the Heritage Places Act 1993 (as amended in 2005) but also plays a role with regard to other Acts that are of relevance such as the Development Act 1993, the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976 and the South Australia Historic Shipwrecks Act 1981. The Heritage Council, with administrative support from the Heritage Branch of the Department of Environment and Heritage, is also responsible for maintaining the State Heritage Register and for providing strategic advice on the management and expenditure of the South Australian Heritage Fund.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA NEWS

*No news from Western Australia*

## QUEENSLAND NEWS

*No news from Queensland*



# TASMANIA NEWS

*Compiled by Greg Jackman*

## HERITAGE TASMANIA

The Tasmanian Heritage Council has released new guidelines on historical archaeological research projects on registered places. The guidelines are aimed primarily at proposals for which archaeological research is the sole or primary catalyst for a Works Application to the Tasmanian Heritage Council.

The guidelines outline the steps to be followed when the proposed impact is the process of archaeological investigation itself. The aim is to help researchers develop proposals for archaeological research at places listed in the Tasmanian Heritage Register, and to help position all investigations, whether arising from academic research, conservation works or development projects, within a common framework of knowledge and social responsibility.

The guidelines are intended as an adjunct to the existing Practice Note No 2 – Managing historical archaeological significance in the works application process. A third useful practice note for archaeologists is Practice Note 11, which discusses the research values of cemeteries and burial grounds, and provides basic guidelines for archaeological investigations therein. These practice notes aim to mitigate impacts on a site's archaeological research potential resulting from other works, and to define a process for incorporating assessment and appropriate management of archaeological values into the works approval process. This ensures that standards and procedures are in place to minimise loss of important archaeological information and provides certainty in the planning and development process.

All documents are available from the Tasmanian Heritage Council website [www.heritage.tas.gov.au](http://www.heritage.tas.gov.au) under the "Resources" link.

*Ester Guerzoni*

## PORT ARTHUR HISTORIC SITE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

### **It's the Pits!' Port Arthur Convict Sawpits Project, 2010 Port Arthur Summer Archaeology Program**

The PAHSMA is looking for energetic volunteers to be part of the Port Arthur Historic Site archaeology team in January 2010. For three fun-drenched weeks (i.e. variously fun or drenching) you can participate in one of Australia's most enduring archaeological traditions - the Port Arthur Summer Archaeology Program. This year we will focus on a group of 1850s convict sawpits that were later used as a town dump site. Here's your chance to gain some serious field and lab experience at one of the country's great archaeological sites.

Contact us for an application form. The program runs from Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> – Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2010. Places are very limited and the closing date for applications is 30<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

To request an application form or for further information contact:

Annita Waghorn

Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority

annita.waghorn@portarthur.org.au phone: (03) 6251 2337



## ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS POST EXCAVATION

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery ran a workshop in August for heritage managers and historical archaeologists. The aim of the workshop was to assist in developing guidelines for archaeological collections that often end up in the custodianship of museums. The guidelines are an attempt to create some consistency in approach and methodology for the long term care of archaeological collections and improvement of access for research purposes.

A further session on this issue (although with a global perspective) will be held at the upcoming ASHA/AIMA joint conference in Launceston.

***Linda Clark (QVMAG) and Elspeth Wishart (TMAG)***

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NOTICES

### STATE REPRESENTATIVE NEEDED FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

After a few years in the position I would like to hand on the NT ASHA correspondent job. It has become more difficult for me to keep track of the archaeology scene up here, and it is time for a new perspective. Have we any volunteers? Don't all speak at once - but somebody speak up please.

*Colin De La Rue*

## IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT - 2009 ASHA/AIMA JOINT CONFERENCE

Organising for the 2009 joint conference is proceeding well. The papers are looking great and registrations are starting to flow, but we would like to see more ASHA members making the short journey south to experience the very best part of Australia. So come on and get your registration in!



**IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT**  
Inveresk, Launceston, Tasmania  
24-26 September 2009

**FOR:**

- latest conference news
- late registrations, photo entries

GoTo: [www.members.iinet.net.au/~jodysteele/](http://www.members.iinet.net.au/~jodysteele/)

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## FORTHCOMING NEWSLETTERS

The ASHA Newsletter is produced quarterly with the assistance of guest editors. The 2008–2009 guest editors are:

Dec 2009 issue

Tim Owen

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In order to facilitate a more efficient newsletter production, all contributions should be forwarded to the e-mail address of your state rep (see ASHA contacts on the previous page for address details) by the following dates:

March issue: *15 February*    September issue: *15 August*

June issue: *15 May*    December issue: *15 November*

The guest editors are asked to finalise the newsletter in the third week of the month prior to circulation. Final copy must reach the General Editor, Rick McGovern-Wilson, by the final week of the month prior to circulation.

This is your newsletter and your contributions are vital. Please check deadlines diligently. Your efficiency will be greatly appreciated. I look forward to your forthcoming news of events.

***Rick McGovern-Wilson***  
**General Editor**  
**ASHA Newsletter**

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