

Historical Reality: Archaeological Reality. Excavations at Regentville, Penrith, New South Wales, 1985

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Historical archaeology has the potential to explain archaeological process, as well as the capacity to add to the historical record. In this paper, the author, who is Professor of Prehistory and Archaeology at the University of New England, discusses excavations conducted in 1985 at Regentville, near Penrith, west of Sydney. This work was carried out in conjunction with Judy Birmingham of the University of Sydney and the analysis of evidence from the site is still in progress. Regentville is the site of an imposing country mansion that formed the nucleus of an agricultural estate of the 1820s to 1840s. The present paper contrasts the extensive historical record that exists for this site, with the relatively meagre archaeological one. It is suggested that the site has more to tell us about the way archaeological sites form, than about the life and times of Sir John Jamison, who lived there.

INTRODUCTION

The study of historical archaeology in Australia has usually been justified by the belief that archaeological evidence can supplement the historical record. Because of this belief, there has been little attempt to ask the sort of anthropologically-oriented questions that have been increasingly addressed by historical archaeologists in the United States of America. There has also been little interest in using historical archaeological data as a means of testing methods and theories belonging to the overall discipline of archaeology. Thus, there appears to be no Australian equivalent, in either particular or general terms, to the classic study by Deetz and Dethlefsen,¹ in which the archaeological technique of seriation was assessed by reference to seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth-century American gravestones. There has, however, been one such area to which Australian historical archaeologists have begun to contribute. This is in the use of historical archaeological data to throw light on site-formation processes.² For instance, Danny Gillespie's surface investigations of a 1930s' goldmining site in the Northern Territory, have been able to identify the agencies at work in the creation of an archaeological site so recent that it belongs within my own lifetime.³ Perhaps, Australian historical archaeologists may gradually come to accept that historical sources have sometimes as much to tell them about archaeology, as archaeological sources have to tell historians about history.

It is with things of this sort in mind, that I wish to discuss excavations that were undertaken at the site of Sir John Jamison's mansion at Regentville, near Penrith in New South Wales (Fig. 1). These excavations were conducted by the Department of Prehistory and Archaeology at the University of New England and the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sydney and lasted from 5-25 May, 1985. Direction was jointly by the writer and by Judy Birmingham, the former running the site and the latter in control of the artefact recording and analysis. Andrew Wilson was assistant site director and was in charge of surveying and photography. Direct supervision of the students and others who formed the labour force was in the hands of Bruce Veitch, Jean Smith, Sue Pearson, Tracey Ireland and Diane Churchill. Students taking part numbered from 25 to over 50 per day and came from the Universities of New England and Sydney and also from Macquarie University and the Australian National University. This paper is intended as an interim report of the

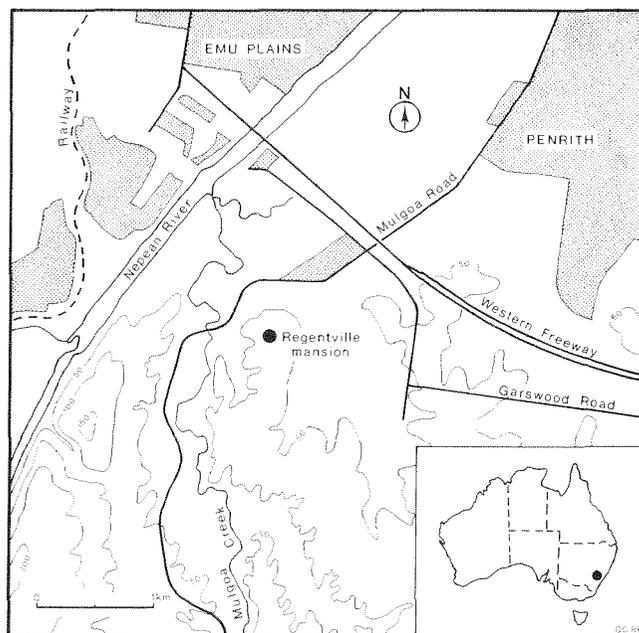


Fig. 1: The location of Sir John Jamison's mansion at Regentville, near Penrith, New South Wales. Built-up areas are stippled. Contours are in metres and are not shown north-west of the Nepean, where the land rises steeply.

excavation, as the analysis of both movable artefacts and on-site evidence is still in progress and will not be completed for some time.

THE HISTORICAL REALITY

Sir John Jamison was 'Australia's first titled settler'⁴ and was one of those wealthy migrants who helped create a colonial gentry in early nineteenth-century New South Wales. He arrived in the colony in 1814 and died there in 1844. Born in Ireland, he had had a distinguished career as a surgeon in the Royal Navy of the Napoleonic War period, before coming to Australia. He was present, for instance, at the Battle of

Trafalgar in 1805.⁵ A Master of Arts of the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and a Doctor of Medicine of that University, he had also been knighted by both Sweden and Britain. His arrival in New South Wales at the age of 38 was to enable him to take possession of properties he had inherited from his father, Thomas Jamison.⁶ The latter had been a surgeon's mate with the first fleet and had subsequently been successful in the colony as both a medical officer and a merchant. He had wisely invested some of his profits in land and it was this that his son John inherited at his father's death in 1811. Thus, when Sir John Jamison arrived in New South Wales, he already owned a number of properties, in addition to the half-pay that he received in retirement from the Royal Navy. As Brian Fletcher has written: 'few migrants were better placed at the time when they began life in the colony'.⁷ Jamison, however, did not rest on his laurels but proceeded to increase his land-holdings rapidly. In addition to land west of Sydney, particularly on the Nepean River, he was eventually to own or lease extensive acreages across the Blue Mountains, in the Hunter Valley and even far to the north on the Liverpool Plains.⁸ He also had properties and business interests in Sydney. By 1825 he was 'almost the richest man in the colony', by 1832 he had 'a fortune of ten thousand a year', and by 1839 his annual income was 18,000 pounds.⁹ Not surprisingly, he became one of the leading figures in the public life of the young colony and, indeed, might well have filled an even more important role if he had not alienated a number of the politically powerful. Nevertheless, amongst other distinctions, he served for a while as a member of the Legislative Council, was President of the Australian Patriotic Association, was the first President of the Agricultural Society of New South Wales, was a founder of the Sydney Turf Club and of the Australian Racing and Jockey Club, was a member of the committee of management for the Australian Museum and the Botanic Gardens, and was President of the council of Sydney College.¹⁰ In addition, he took an active part in the colony's social life. Although he cohabited with various women to whom he was not married, his title ensured his acceptance in polite society and amongst the many that he entertained were both the famous and the politically important. Admittedly, by the end of his life he was in some financial difficulties because of the drought and economic depression of the early 1840s but there can be no doubt that Jamison was one of the leading figures of his day. It is particularly to be regretted, therefore, that: 'Most of his private papers have . . . vanished and as a result the material for a full-scale biography is lacking.'¹¹ Surely, this ought to be a case where historical archaeology could supplement the historical record?

The difficulty is to know how to 'materialize' some aspect of the career of this remarkable man, so that it may be susceptible to archaeological investigation. Fortunately there is at least the potential to be able to do this, because Jamison, like so many successful men both before and since, sought to express his achievements in a material form. The headquarters of his widespread activities was his fertile estate on the Nepean, with good access to Sydney and other important centres within the growing colony. Here, he at first lived in a cottage that had been constructed by his father but in 1823 he commenced to build a fine mansion that would be more appropriate to his role in colonial society. The house took at least two years to build and Jamison named it 'Regentville', in honour of the Prince Regent who had knighted him in 1813. The mansion and the estate were to become what Brian Fletcher has called 'one of the showpieces of New South Wales'. Jamison was an enlightened agriculturalist, who cleared land, laid out a park around his house, put up fences, improved pastures, imported English horses for breeding, raised cattle and sheep, grew a variety of crops, fruits and vegetables, and planted a successful vineyard. He practised crop rotation, manuring, and deep ploughing; used horse-drawn cultivation implements, and imported a steam engine in the 1830s to drive an irrigation pump. He also constructed a winery, a

woollen mill, various cottages, and a dam. In addition, the estate possessed a windmill, which may have been constructed by his father.¹² It is hardly surprising that a number of contemporary accounts survive of the estate and of the mansion. Indeed, we also have several contemporary illustrations of the house itself, including a particularly informative one by Conrad Martens, which is dated 1835 (Fig. 2).¹³

These writings and pictures provide us with an *historical reality* for the Regentville mansion. By perusing them we can form a fairly detailed idea of what the house and its associated buildings looked like. Andrew Wilson has made a careful collection of contemporary descriptions and illustrations of Regentville and I am much indebted to him for permission to draw on his references to these.¹⁴ It is worth reviewing a selection of the things that were written about the house. The earliest is an account by William Horton, who kept a diary while working for the Wesleyan Missionary Society. He visited the house before its construction had been completed and, in a diary entry dated 5 June 1824, had the following to say:

'Sir John Jamison who resides on his estate opposite Emu Plains took me to see his new house. It stands on the top of a long gentle ascent and is certainly a noble mansion. It is 78 feet [24m] long by 45 [14m] wide, two stories high with a spacious cellar beneath. Each of the wings is 50 feet [15m] long. The outbuildings are detached and the whole premises will occupy about an acre of ground which is to be enclosed by a wall 14 feet [4m] high. It is built of fine durable stone and commands a very extensive and diversified prospect.'¹⁵

Another early account is by Baron de Bougainville, the French circumnavigator of the world, who included a firsthand description in his memoirs. He visited the new house on 6 August 1825 and commented as follows:

'Sir John, who is his own architect, makes us go over the smallest recesses of it: the house is of freestone and solidly constructed to a fairly attractive plan; the woodwork is in local cedar of a beautiful red-brown colour, and the fireplaces made of marble taken from a neighbouring quarry. The great defect of this dwelling, which is set on a hill, is the absolute lack of shade: all the surrounding land has been completely cleared, and it will take years before it is possible to have the slightest shelter from the sun, which is very strong here; even during this season when its momentary disappearance as the result of a cloud, produces there and then a remarkable change in temperature. When the mansion has been examined in all its aspects, and the decision taken, according to our advice, to change the main entrance of the apartments, we continue our walk in the direction of a beautiful valley, of which one part of the lands is under exploitation; the rest, denuded of trees, except for the trunks, and enclosed by fences, serves as pasture for the herds.'¹⁶

The next description of value is an anonymous one, published in the *Australian* in 1827 under the pseudonym 'X.Y.Z.', and thought to have been written by Captain William John Dumaresq:

'On the right hand, and on a fine foreground, stood the palace of Regentville, the noble seat of Sir John Jamison. This splendid building is beyond all comparisons, the finest thing of the kind in New South Wales; it stands on the top of a gentle hill, and presents a front to the long reach of the river and rich vale of Emu, of 180 feet [55m]; the centre building being 80 feet [24m] in length, and the two wings 50 [15m] each. In the wings are comprised the library, baths, billiard-rooms, &c., &c.; while the kitchens and servants offices, are detached in the rear, out of sight. Regentville is built of a fine free



Fig. 2: *The Regentville mansion in 1835. Photographed from a pencil sketch by Conrad Martens, dated 'Oct. 17/35'. Reproduced by courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.*

stone, dug on the estate, in the chastest style of Grecian architecture, and is no less remarkable in the interior for the good taste and richness of its decorations, and the profuse and constant hospitality of the noble owner.¹⁷

Not all visitors to Regentville were quite so impressed, however, and Richard Bourke, son of Governor Bourke, complained in October 1832 that the house had 'with singular awkwardness been placed completely out of sight of the beautiful River Nepean'; that it was 'as uncomfortable as one would [expect] from a Sailor and a Bachelor'; and that 'The bugs bit so dreadfully last night that I made interest with Dolly the housemaid & was allowed to sleep on the drawing room sofa.'¹⁸ Nevertheless, Sarah Mathew, spared any acquaintance with the bugs by merely observing the house as she travelled along the adjacent Mulgoa Road on 5 December 1833, thought that it was:

'... a handsome stone edifice, with a fine Porticoe, and balcony above it, the latter is quite a novelty here, and with its iron railing has quite an English look; ...'¹⁹

In addition, others continued to sing the praises of the Regentville house, so that in 1838 we find James Macle hose writing as follows:

'*Regentville*.—This splendid mansion, vying in magnificence of structure with the princely residences of some of the nobility of Great Britain, is situated about thirty-five miles [56km] from Sydney, and within a quarter of an hour's ride to the township of Penrith, on the road to Richmond. The wealthy founder of this beautiful edifice, is Sir John Jamison, K.G.V., a member of the Legislative Council; and one of the oldest and most respectable of the colonists of New South Wales.'²⁰

It should be observed that all the descriptions quoted so far were written by privileged or relatively affluent members of colonial society and they all concentrate on the house, which would have been the part of Regentville with which their writers would have had the greatest contact. There was, however, another side to life on such large agricultural estates. Jamison employed a considerable amount of labour, which for many years included numerous convicts. Although some of his dependants lived and worked at his outstations, there would have been sufficient people at Regentville itself for the place to have constituted a small settlement in its own right. Apart from others with more general duties, the 1828 Census recorded that at Regentville there was a blacksmith, a millwright, a stonemason, a cooper, several carpenters, a dairyman, a ploughman, a tanner, and a superintendent who kept an eye on everything.²¹ By very good fortune, an account written by one of Sir John Jamison's workmen has survived. No less a person than Henry Parkes, later to be famous as Sir Henry Parkes, often referred to as 'the father of Australian federation', worked for Jamison for six months in 1839–1840. An extract from one of his letters (dated 1 May 1840) to his family and friends in Britain, leaves us with no illusions about life as a labourer at Regentville:

'At length, being completely starved out, I engaged as a common labourer with Sir John Jamison, Kt., M.C., to go about thirty-six miles [58km] up the country. Sir John agreed to give me £25 for the year, with a ration and half of food [Parkes had his wife and infant with him]. This amounted to weekly:—

10½ lbs. [4.8kg] beef—sometimes unfit to eat.
10½ lbs. [4.8kg] rice—of the worst imaginable quality.

6¾ lbs. [3kg] flour—half made up of ground rice.
 2 lbs. [0.9kg] sugar—good-tasted brown.
 ¼ lb. [0.1kg] tea—inferior.
 ¼ lb. [0.1kg] soap—not enough to wash our hands.
 2 figs of tobacco—useless to me.

This was what we had to live upon, and not a leaf of a vegetable or a drop of milk beyond this. For the first four months we had no other bed than a sheet of bark off a box tree, and an old door, laid on two cross pieces of wood, covered over with a few articles of clothing. The hut appointed for us to live in was a very poor one. The morning sunshine, the noontide shower, and the white moonlight of midnight, gushed in upon us alike. You will, perhaps, think had you been with us, you would have had a few vegetables at any rate, for you would have made a bit of garden, and cultivated them for yourselves; but you would have done no such thing! The slave-masters of New South Wales require their servants to work for them from sunrise till sunset, and will not allow them to have gardens, lest they should steal a half-hour's time to work in them.²²

Clearly, Jamison's experiences in the Royal Navy of the Napoleonic War and subsequently as an employer of convict labour, had made him a hard man to work for. He was also nearing the end of his life, dying in 1844 in somewhat reduced circumstances. A few years later, sometime between 1846 and 1851, Lieutenant-Colonel Mundy found Regentville in a state of decay, leading Brian Fletcher to suggest that such deterioration had presumably already commenced during the last years of Jamison's lifetime.²³ Mundy had the following to say:

'From Fernhill I rode one day to Regentville. There are sermons in its stones, in its gardens and vineries ruined and run to waste, its cattle-trampled pleasure grounds, its silent echoes. My foot sank through the floor where many a joyous measure had been trod. The rafters were rotting that had oftentimes rung to the merriment of host and guest; and, if rumour lies not, there were "sad doings" as well as merry ones at Regentville in the days of its prosperity!²⁴

In 1847 the Regentville estate was put up for sale and the sale notice that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* is particularly informative about the house and its outbuildings:

'First,
 "REGENTVILLE HOUSE,"

substantially built of stone, with a tasteful Colonnade in front and on each side, surmounted with an Iron Balcony from which there is a delightful prospect of the adjacent country.

It contains an Entrance Hall and 15 Rooms, viz.:—
 2 Drawing-rooms 1 Dining ditto
 1 Breakfast ditto 1 study
 1 Library and Cabinet 9 Bed-rooms

The principal stair-case is also stone built and circular.

A wash-house and laundry are attached, and there are spacious cellars under the House.

THE RIGHT WING

consists of an immense coach-house, with store above;

THE LEFT WING

contains the Billiard-room.

THE OUT-OFFICES

are also stone-built, and consist of two kitchens and a bake-house, communicating with the house by a covered way, a servants' hall and seven bed-rooms adjoining; the whole being under one roof.

All the above offices are contained within an area of 180 feet [55m] square, enclosed by a substantial stone wall about 10 feet [3m] high.

In the rear of the foregoing, adjoining the wall, are the HANDSOME STONE STABLES, which consist of one ten-stall and one four-stall, with three large boxes and two harness-rooms.—The lofts are over the whole of the above stabling, and are about 160 feet [49m] in length by 15 feet [4.5m] breadth. The stable yard is enclosed by a paling, and contains also three loose boxes, slab built, with loft over them.

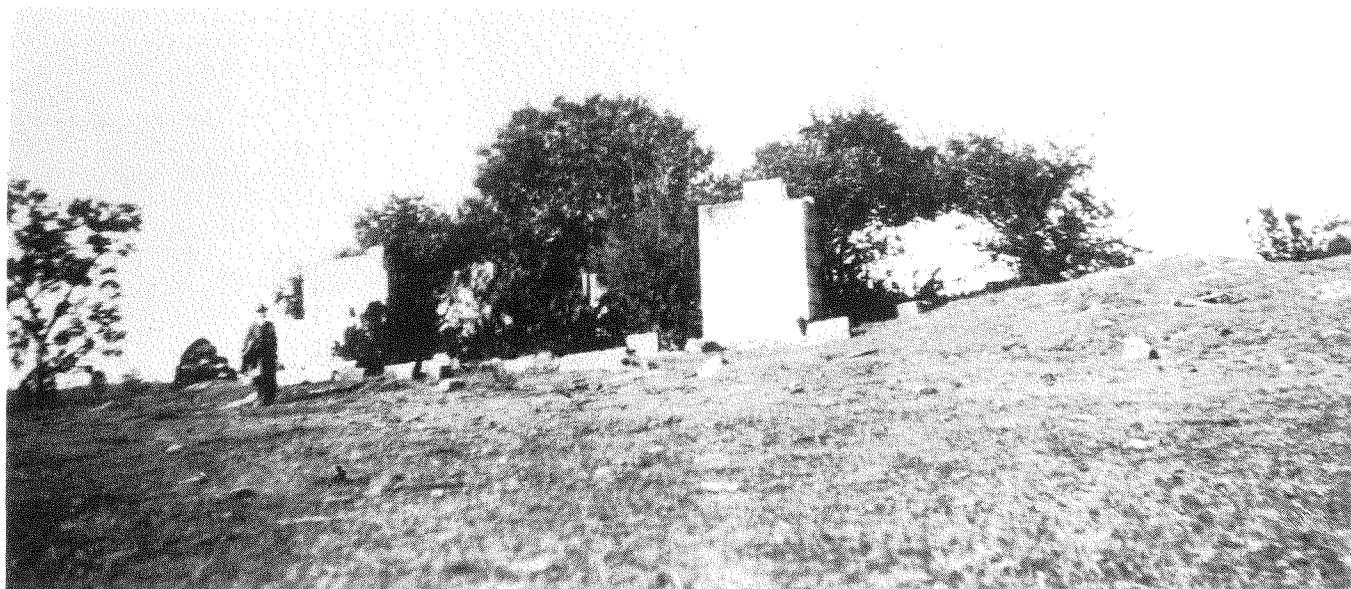
Adjoining the stable-yard at the back lies the GARDEN, covering about

FOUR ACRES [1.6ha],

full of choice fruit trees, vegetables, &c., and containing the gardener's house.

In the rear of the garden, a shed is partitioned off, and railed in to accommodate about thirty colts; it is well secured by a substantial fence, and has a paddock attached, which contains stock-yards and draughting-yards.²⁵

Fig. 3: The ruins of the Regentville mansion in 1928. Photographed by C.H. Bertie. Reproduced by courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.



The subsequent history of Regentville house lacked the grandeur of its earlier days. Brian Fletcher records that in 1856 it was in use as a private lunatic asylum and continued in this role until 1863. It was then converted into Abels Family Hotel, and was still being used in this way when it was burnt down in the early hours of 22 May 1869.²⁶ It was not rebuilt (Fig. 3).

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REALITY

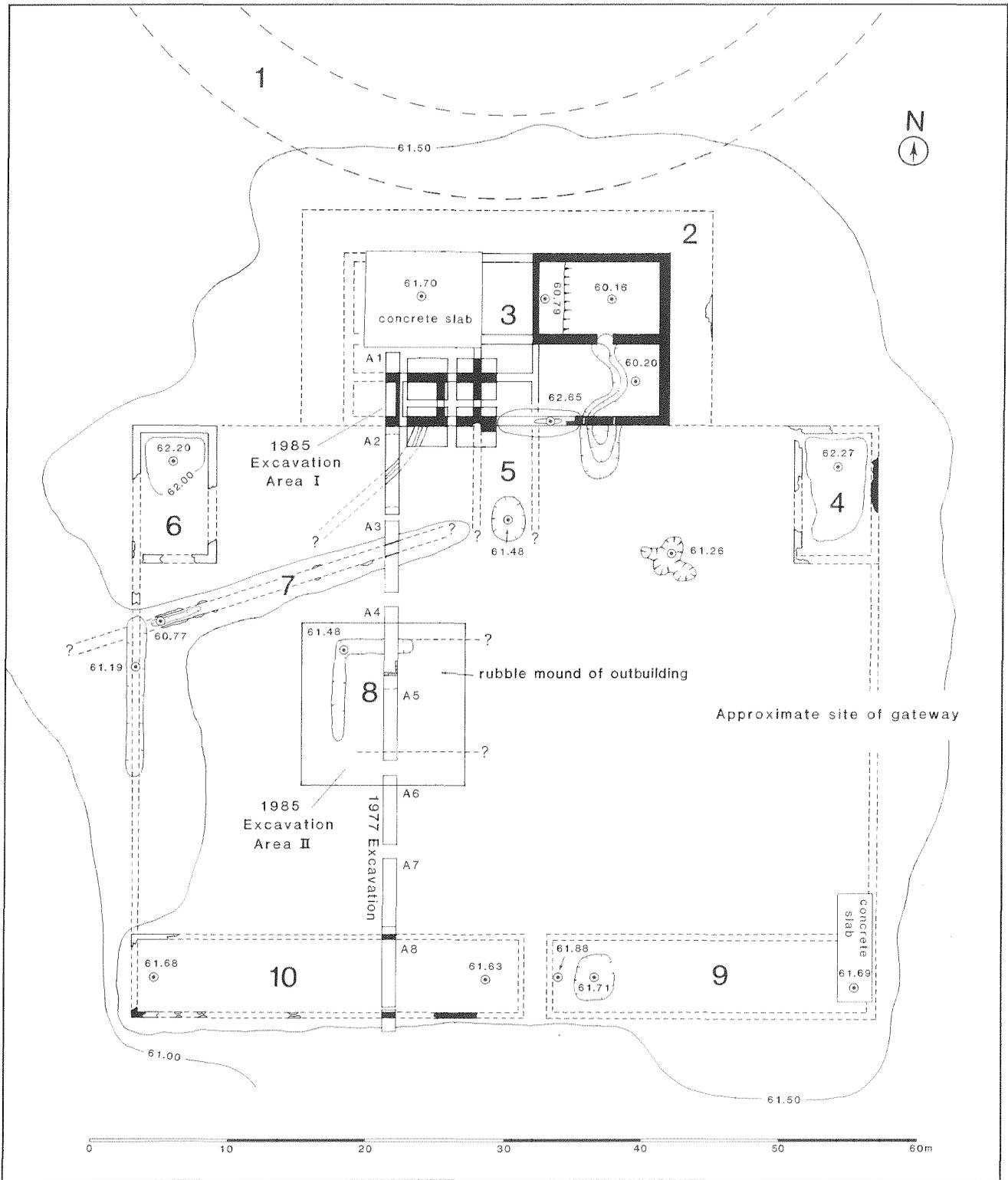
So much for the historical reality of Sir John Jamison's mansion at Regentville. Potentially, the site of this house should be able to supplement our knowledge of Jamison's life. Archaeological evidence should also be able to throw light on the widely varying life-styles of the inhabitants of a large agricultural estate, in New South Wales, during the early part of the nineteenth century. At the one end of the socio-economic scale would have been Jamison himself and at the other end the convict labourers. It was primarily to explore such archaeological possibilities that excavations were carried out in 1985. It was also hoped that the work might form the initial stage of a long-term, ongoing excavation and field survey project, that could examine various aspects of life and labour on this early estate: investigating not only the site of the house itself but also those of its associated outbuildings, and the sites or surviving remains of the vineyard, the winery, the dam, the mill, the cottages adjacent to the mill, the windmill, the earlier Jamison house, and the school and church. It was recognized that with the rapid growth of modern settlement in the Penrith district, such a project might not be possible for much longer. In addition, the 1985

Regentville excavation was intended to provide excavation training for a large number of university students and other interested members of the public.

The site of the Regentville mansion lies on top of a low hill of a little more than 60 metres in height, overlooking the eastern side of the Nepean River (Fig. 1). It is situated on the south-western outskirts of Penrith, on the edge of the built-up area known as Regentville. The site lies in a grass paddock, at present used for grazing horses but there are a number of trees and bushes in the vicinity, some of them growing on the house-site itself (Fig. 4). The site is at present owned by the Land Commission of New South Wales and low-density housing is gradually encroaching on it. Archaeological surface features are limited to a large part of the cellars of the house, apparently cleared out as an historical attraction by the developer of an amusement park on the site in about the 1960s, and several slight mounds and depressions which indicate the presence of structures and of robbed walls. In 1982 Andrew Wilson made a detailed study of the surface traces on both this and the other local Jamison sites. This work was carried out as part of the research for his B.A. Honours thesis for the University of Sydney.²⁷ The plan of the mansion site shown here (Fig. 5) is redrawn from the plan that he produced at that time by plotting all the standing remains and the mounds and depressions, together with walls that

Fig. 4: Aerial photograph of the site of the Regentville mansion during the 1985 excavations. The Area II excavation is near the centre of the photograph and the Area I excavation, covered by white sheets and adjacent to a large concrete slab, is partly obscured by trees. Photograph from south-east by Graham Connah, 10.00 a.m., 12 May 1985.





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were partly visible, though buried. By conjecturing the rest of the details, he was able to produce a highly satisfactory and informative plan that is in general agreement with the historical accounts. Perusal of this plan suggests that archaeological excavation should be able to supplement substantially the available details, as well as confirming some of its basic features.

This was apparently the intention of a brief test excavation carried out in 1977.²⁸ This excavation was conducted by a group of people from the University of Sydney but it is uncertain who was responsible for its overall direction. It seems to have lasted for only one week and no published

Fig. 5: Archaeological plan of the site of the Regentville mansion. Based on Wilson 1982 with additions from the 1985 excavations. Standing or excavated structures are shown in black, walls that are partly visible though buried are shown in outline, conjectured features are indicated by broken lines. A dot in a circle marks a spot-height, given in metres. Numbers are as follows: 1: Carriageway. 2: Verandah. 3: Main block of house (cellars beneath eastern end). 4: Billiard room. 5: Site of wash-house and laundry. 6: Coach house. 7: Drain. 8: Site of outbuilding containing kitchens etc. 9: Stable. 10: Stable. Redrawn by Douglas Hobbs.



Fig. 6: Area I from west. Excavation completed. Note the robbing of the wall to the right. Standing walls at left were partly reconstructed in the 1960s. Scale of 1 metre, divided in half. Photograph by Andrew Wilson.

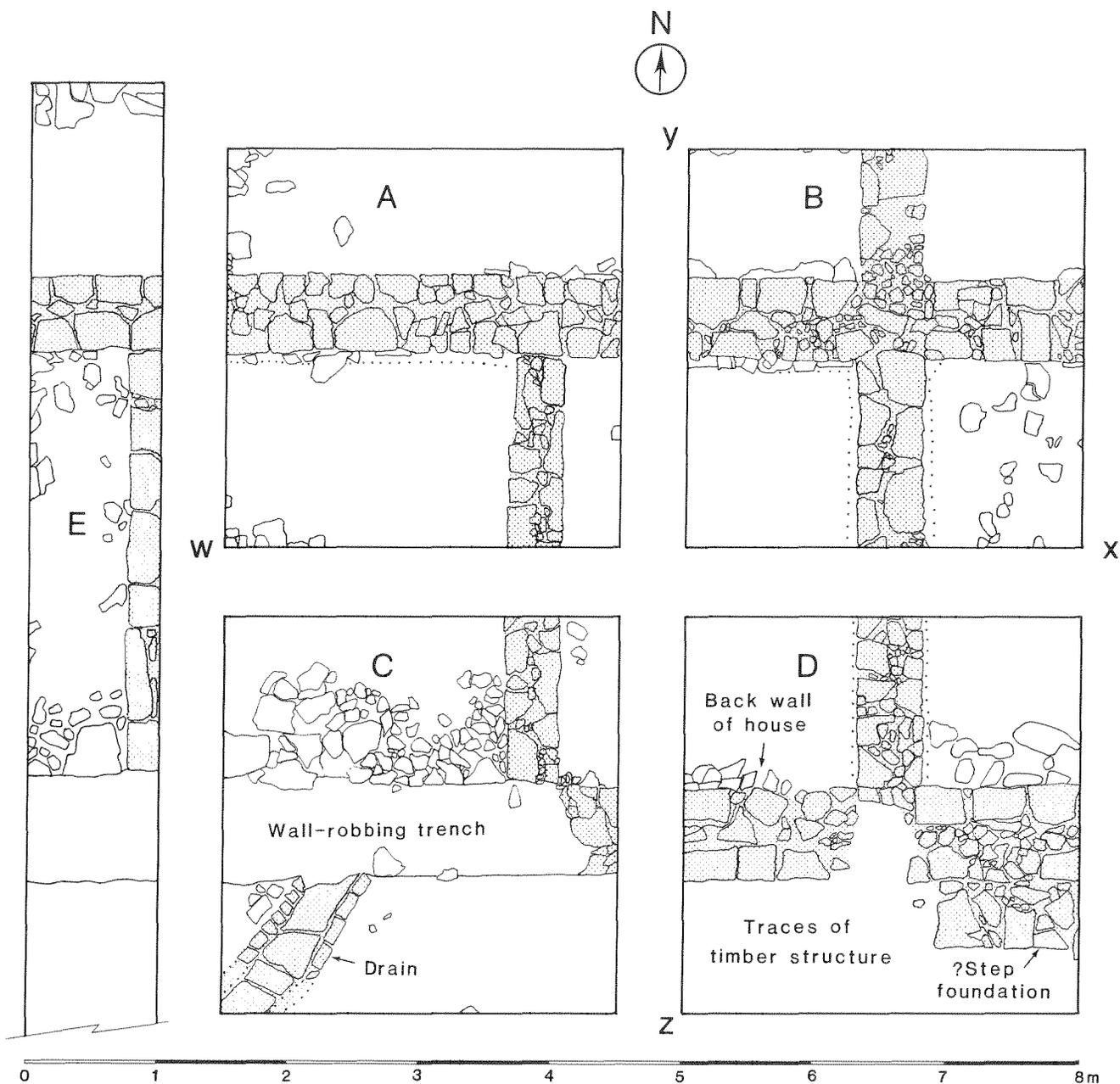
report exists. Furthermore, the excavation records and the recovered artefacts are said to have got into different hands and it now seems unlikely that the work will ever be published. Nevertheless, the excavation was a particularly valuable one, producing information that was of considerable assistance to the 1985 excavators. I was fortunate in being able to examine some of the field records for the discontinuous trench (designated A1-A8) that was cut across the greater part of the site (Fig. 5).²⁹ For the most part, this was done in such a way as to ensure minimum destruction of the archaeological resource. That is to say, the tops of structures were exposed but the surrounding deposits were usually left unexcavated. Also, all the cuttings were carefully backfilled. The result was to provide structural information on the south-west part of the house, on an adjacent drain, on the outbuilding that stood in the centre of the yard, and on the stables that enclosed that yard to the south. Some stratigraphic information was also forthcoming from the 1977 excavation: clearly the deposits were generally shallow and consisted, in the main, of constructional rubble and demolition rubble.

Having regard for the different socio-economic levels of the people who worked and lived at this site in Jamison's time, the 1985 excavations concentrated on two suitably contrasting areas of the site (Fig. 5). The first of these, designated Area I, was an undisturbed part of the imposing stone house in which Jamison had lived. The second, designated Area II, was a sample half of the adjacent domestic outbuilding, which housed (according to the 1847 sale notice) two kitchens, a bakehouse, a servants' hall and seven bedrooms which were presumably for the servants' use. It was hoped to be able to compare and contrast the structures, the building materials, and the cultural artefacts excavated in the two areas. Deliberately contrasting excavation approaches were used for the two areas, having in mind the present debate in Australian historical archaeology about the appropriateness of

area excavation as compared with traditional trench or grid excavation.³⁰ Area I was investigated by means of four 3 x 3-metre squares, designated A, B, C, and D, set in a grid with 50-centimetre baulks; Area II was examined by means of a 12 x 12-metre area excavation. Adjacent to Area I, two of the trenches from the 1977 excavation (Trenches A1 and A2; Fig. 5) were re-excavated, together with their intervening baulk, and lengthened slightly. This piece of excavation was designated Trench IÉ, and gave us a stratigraphic control to assist our work in the rest of Area I. Although the excavation approach differed in Area II from that in Area I, both areas were excavated using the unit-recording system and drawing frequent control plans of excavated surfaces of identified units.³¹ Numerous sections were also recorded: in Area I by means of traditional baulk-section drawing, in Area II by cumulative section drawing based on repeated levellings over the surface of each unit. In addition, the entire surface of Area II was surveyed and contoured before excavation was commenced. A detailed photographic record was also made of the excavation as it progressed. A small sample of the more important drawings and photographs are reproduced in this paper.

Area I

Excavation of Area I (Figs 6-7) revealed the foundation courses of sandstone walls comprising a substantial portion of the south-western part of the house. These foundations indicated the existence of six small rooms. Looking at the 1847 sale notice, one might guess at their most likely use by a process of elimination. The bedrooms were presumably in

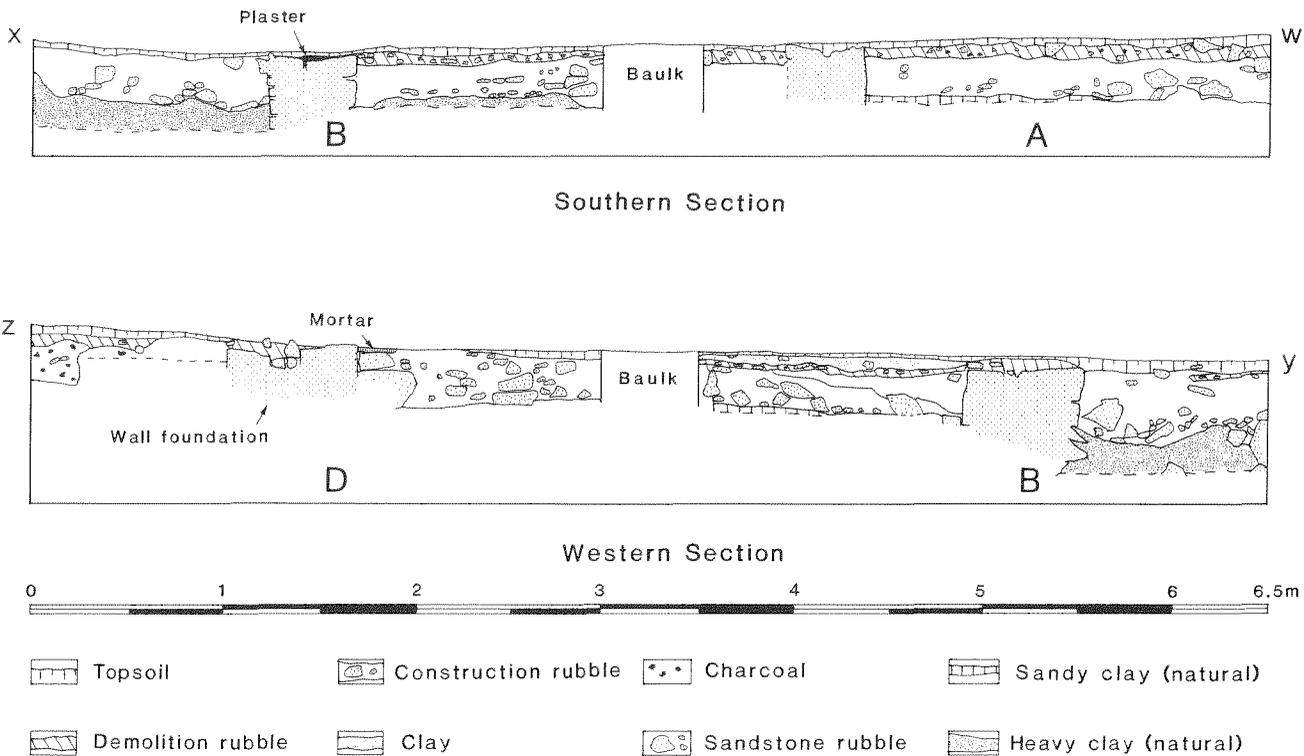


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the upper storey and the two drawing rooms and the dining room must have been the large rooms occupying the north-western, north-eastern, and south-eastern portions of the ground floor of the house. The entrance hall was apparently in the centre of the northern side. This leaves a breakfast room, a study, and a 'library and cabinet'. By 'cabinet' was probably meant a 'small private room'³² and the impression given in the sale notice is that the library and cabinet were one and the same room. These three rooms must have been in the part of the house excavated in Area I but what about the three remaining rooms uncovered in the excavation? Two of them probably formed a central corridor running from west to east that made an L-shape with the entrance hall (Fig. 5). The two walls that crossed the corridor and entrance hall could have been load-bearing walls for the upper storey, that were broken by archways on the ground floor. A third such wall deduced by Andrew Wilson was found by excavation not to exist.³³ The remaining 'room', immediately south of the entrance hall, may have been the location of the circular stone-built staircase mentioned in the sale notice, although Andrew Wilson thought that the staircase would have been more likely to have projected behind the main block of the house.³⁴

Fig. 7: Plan of Area I, excluding southern part of Trench IE. This shows the area after excavation had been completed. Stippling indicates surviving masonry structures. Rubble is shown in outline. The edges of foundation trenches, where detected, are indicated by a dotted line. A-E are excavation square or trench designations. W-X, Y-Z indicate the locations of sections shown in Fig. 8.

The sandstone foundations of these walls had been laid with a lime mortar and it was noticeable that the east-west walls were wider than the north-south ones (Fig. 7). The east-west walls also seemed to have been constructed on the bedrock surface, whereas the north-south ones were allowed to stand on the natural clay which overlay the bedrock. Clearly, it was the east-west walls that were intended to take the greater part of the load of the upper storey. However, little else could be deduced about the structure of the house, because the walls nowhere rose above ground-floor height (Fig. 8) and therefore no evidence survived for the location and character of the doorways and window apertures. It is apparent, nevertheless, that the floors must have consisted of suspended timberwork. Also, running from the back wall of the house in Square IC was a brick and stone drain (Fig. 6), that led into a stone-based, wooden box-drain that was



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examined in Trench IE (Fig. 9). It seems fairly certain that this drain emptied into the major drain that ran west-south-west out of the yard and a very slight depression in the ground surface indicated the route that the house drain probably took (Fig. 5). The major drain was presumably intended to carry waste water from the wash-house and laundry behind the main house and the smaller drain from the house may have been intended to carry water from a roof downspout. At the time of the excavation, however, I assumed that this drain must have led from a scullery sink within the house itself, because in both Trench IE and Square IC it was found to contain a dark brown sediment in which were fragments of bone, fine china, and glass. Such evidence would suggest dish-washing rather than rainwater but, as has been shown above, it seems unlikely that there was anywhere within the house where such an activity took place. The only other structural detail provided by the excavated evidence was that the interior of the house, as might be expected, was lime-plastered and parts of the plasterwork were painted. Plaster fragments were recovered from a number of places in Area I but came particularly from the demolition rubble in the wall-robbing trench in Square IC and Trench IE (Fig. 7). Most of these pieces were of plain white plaster but some of this was decorated with raised bands and some pieces were painted grey or dark red.

The excavation of Area I also provided a little information on a structure that seems to have been attached to the back wall of the house. In the south-west part of Square ID were two sleeper trenches at right-angles to one another (Figs 7 & 10). Between them and the back wall of the house was a spread of yellow clay which extended also across much of the southern part of Square IC. This clay appeared to be foreign to the immediate site and could have been part of a laid floor. Adjacent to the sleeper trenches, the sandstone foundations of the back wall were appreciably wider than elsewhere, suggesting that there may have been a step in this position, located near a back doorway of the house. The overall evidence suggested the existence of a timber structure, possibly with a clay floor, that was attached to the back of the house and could be entered from a back door of the house. The 1847 sale notice specifically stated that a wash-house and

Fig. 8: Sections of Area I. Locations shown in Fig. 7.

laundry were attached to the house and that the outbuilding, that contained the kitchens and other domestic facilities, communicated with the house 'by a covered way'. It seems likely, therefore, that the excavated evidence referred to here, belonged to one or the other, or possibly both, of these structures.

The stratification of Area I consisted of the sandstone wall foundations packed around with construction rubble, and partly covered by a thin layer of demolition rubble, above which was a shallow topsoil and turf (Fig. 8). The wall foundations sat on the natural rock or clay surface, as discussed above, and it appeared likely that the upper part of the soil profile had been removed prior to the commencement of building. This was most probably done in the process of levelling the site and pegging out the plan of the house that was to be constructed. The bedrock of the site consists of a soft red sandstone, which can be seen exposed as an unexcavated 'bench' at the western end of the northern cellar (Fig. 5). The surface of the bedrock is covered by clay, sand and gravel, and humus, and the builders of the house had dug their wall foundation trenches into or through those parts of these deposits that remained after the levelling of the house-site. In some places the edges of the foundation trenches could be identified (Fig. 7) but in most instances they were either absent or not detected in excavation. The construction rubble consisted of a mixture of clays and sandy clays, in which there were frequent irregular lumps and fragments of sandstone. It seems likely that it was an intentional packing, made up of waste building material and spoil from foundation-trench digging and site-levelling. Some of it might even have been part of the spoil from the digging of the cellars. It was noticeable that artefactual material was virtually absent from the construction rubble but locally dense in some parts of the demolition rubble. The demolition rubble was also distinguishable from the construction rubble by its more sandy consistency and by the presence of fragments of mortar and broken red brick, as well as lumps of sandstone. The most remarkable thing about the demolition rubble, however, was that there

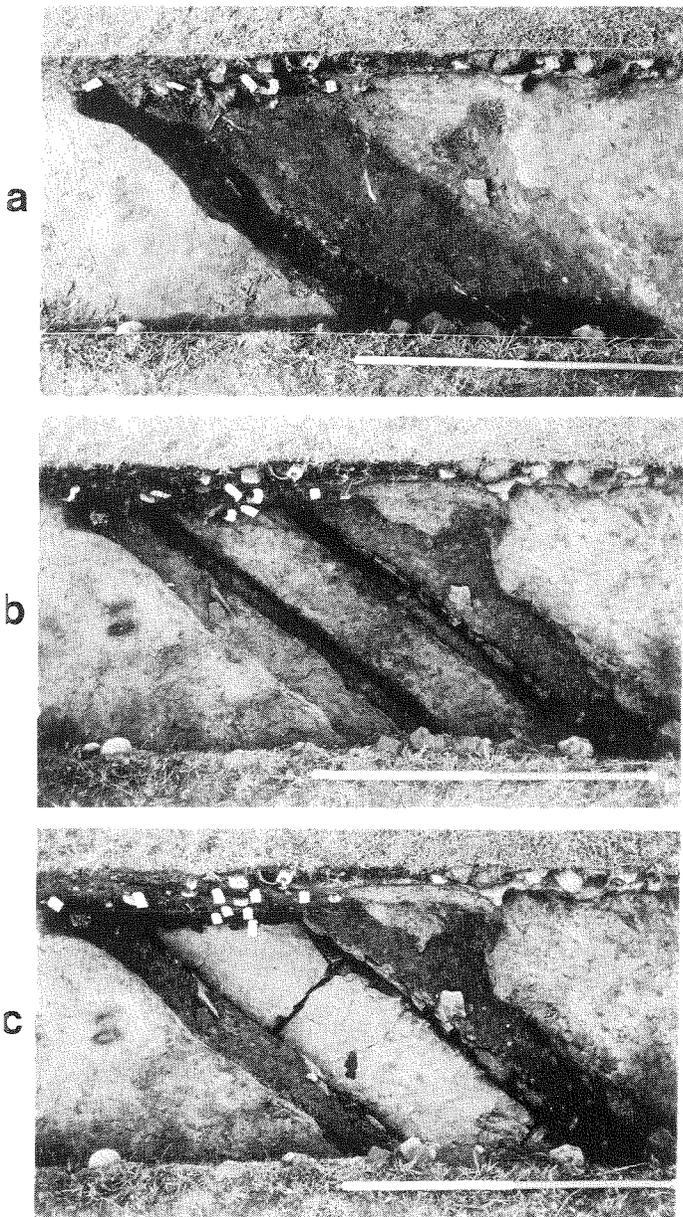


Fig. 9: Vertical views of drain in Trench IE. (a) As first exposed, showing the black soil that had replaced the wooden cover. (b) Partly excavated, showing drain filling and slots from which the black soil replacing the wooden sides has been removed. (c) Completely excavated, showing stone base and soil and rubble that had been packed between the wooden sides and the sides of the drain trench. Scales of 1 metre, divided in half. Photographs by Andrew Wilson.

was so very little of it. Indeed, in some places it was absent altogether. It seemed curious that the destruction by fire and subsequent demolition of a two-storeyed stone building could have produced so little debris. It was equally curious that the thin layer of topsoil, that lay over the demolition rubble, should contain so much artefactual material, much of it fragmentary. These aspects of the stratification of Area I raise important questions about site formation processes, to which we shall return.

The artefacts recovered from Area I, as from Area II also, are still in the process of analysis at Sydney University. Nevertheless, some general comments can be made. As already indicated, most of them came from the thin layer of demolition rubble and from the shallow topsoil, locations that were stratigraphically superficial. The only important exceptions to this were artefacts found in the demolition rubble in the wall-robbing trench in Square IC and Trench IE



Fig. 10: Southern part of Area I from west at an advanced stage of excavation. The extent of wall-robbing should be noted: the foundations of the back wall of the house are intact in Square ID but have been replaced by rubble backfill in Square IC, which has been sectioned by excavation in Trench IE. Note also the inverted L of sleeper trenches, filled with dark material, in the bottom righthand corner of Square ID. Scale of 1 metre, divided in half. Photograph by Andrew Wilson.

and in the filling of the drain excavated in the same two cuttings. Most of the artefactual material was fragmentary and most of the fragments were small. Pieces of glass predominated, in many cases seemingly pieces of window glass rather than pieces of bottles or other containers. Partial melting and distortion of many of the glass fragments was the only obvious evidence of the fire that destroyed the house in 1869. Fragments of china were fairly common also, and the rest of the material included iron nails, an occasional iron nut, bolt, screw, or piece of wire, various other fragments of metal, bone fragments, the odd button, and fragments of charcoal and charred wood that might also have come from the 1869 fire. There were, in addition, a small number of fine brass fittings from the doors and windows of the house. The only other items that hinted at the status of the house were some fragments of wine glasses. The stratigraphic superficiality of most of the artefactual material was emphasized by the presence amongst it of one or two fragments of plastic.

Reflecting on this assortment of artefactual material, it is apparent that it generally consisted of residual fragments in stratigraphically secondary locations. As was the case with the stratification of Area I, this observation has important implications for the site formation processes involved. The artefactual evidence seems to have less to tell us of the activities within Sir John Jamison's house, than it does of what happened to the house after the disastrous fire that destroyed it.



Area II

The excavation of Area II, unlike that of Area I, remained incomplete at the end of the 1985 excavations. The removal of deposit from the 12 x 12-metre area was carried out in 1-metre squares. These 144 squares were each identified by a letter and numeral code: letters A-M from east to west, and numerals 1-12 from north to south. To avoid confusion, letter I was not used. Following a contour survey of the surface of Area II, the turf was removed and the topsoil entirely excavated. The backfilling of 1977 excavation trenches was also removed. As already indicated, sectional control of this huge area excavation was maintained by cumulative section drawing. There was some time lost to bad weather during the 1985 excavations and this, combined with greater topsoil depth than had been expected, severely limited the overall progress with this area. In the end, the low mound of demolition debris that marks the site of the domestic outbuilding was successfully exposed, as was the natural pale brown sand to the south of that mound (Figs 11 & 12). Several minor structures located on the natural surface to the south of the building mound were also investigated. The mound of rubble itself, however, was not excavated, except where the 1977 work had cut into it. Finally, Area II was entirely shrouded in heavy duty black plastic sheeting and backfilled, so that any subsequent excavation could resume exactly where we had left off. Identical plastic was also laid over the bottom of those parts of the cuttings in Area I that are towards the back of the house, so that any subsequent excavation to the south of that area can correlate its stratigraphy with that of 1985.

The building represented by the rubble mound uncovered in Area II (Fig. 5) was probably about twice the size of the part that was investigated. Surface indications would seem to suggest this. That would mean a building of some 18 x 8 metres. A building of such size and in this position, must be the outbuilding described in the 1847 sale notice as being stone-built and consisting of two kitchens, a bakehouse, a servants' hall, and seven bedrooms. Clearly, this was a large and important building. The excavated evidence, however,

Fig. 11: Area II at its most advanced stage of excavation, showing northern and central parts from west. Note the depression marking the robbed northern and western walls of the outbuilding. The foundations of internal partition walls of brick and of the stone southern outside wall, are visible in the 1977 excavation trench. Scale of 1 metre, divided in half. Photograph by Andrew Wilson.

consisted of only a low mound of rubble, most of it being broken brick. Where the 1977 trenches had crossed this mound, it was possible to see that the building had been of stone with internal partition walls of brick and there were also some minor remains of wooden structural components. However, extensive parts of the outer wall had been robbed (Fig. 11) and the resultant depression was visible on the surface and is shown on the site plan (Fig. 5). Some fragments of the foundations of the southern wall have probably survived, nevertheless, and part of them was certainly visible in the 1977 trenches. Also, slight irregularities in the surface of the rubble mound, suggested that further excavation might well reveal some of the internal structural features of the building. Furthermore, south of the rubble mound were two elongated areas of waterworn cobbles that were obviously structural features (Fig. 12). Without excavating the adjacent building traces, it is difficult to interpret these cobble spreads but a reasonable guess is that they may have been placed along the drip-lines of the eaves of a verandah, attached to the southern side of the outbuilding. Thus, their function may have been to prevent erosion and to facilitate drainage.

The stratification of Area II was very simple. The topsoil overlay a shallow mound of rubble which, so far as could be seen, overlay the natural sand. Nevertheless, there was some variation within the topsoil itself. Over the rubble mound and to its north and west, the soil was of a dark chocolate brown colour. To the south of the mound, however, stretching right across the excavated area from east to west, was a moist, black loam with a strong smell. This material was deeper than the topsoil over the rest of the area and had a pH of 8.5 in Square F11. A tendency to alkalinity seemed, indeed, to be



Fig. 12: Area II at its most advanced stage of excavation, showing southern and central parts from west. Note the southern edge of the rubble mound and the adjacent areas of waterworn cobbles, possibly marking the edge of a former verandah. Scale of 1 metre, divided in half. Photograph by Andrew Wilson.

general on the Regentville site. The natural sand beneath the rubble mound in Area II (as exposed in Squares F3 and F4 by the 1977 excavation) even gave a reading of pH 10. It seems possible that this tendency results from the accidental scattering of some of the considerable quantity of wood ash, that would have been generated over many years by the house, kitchen and wash-house fires. The most remarkable aspect of the stratification of Area II, however, remains its shallowness, even allowing for the unexcavated building mound. As with the stratification of Area I, these miserable structural fragments and minimal deposits marking the site of a substantial building, raise questions about the site formation processes that have been at work here. Furthermore, it might be relevant to remark at this point that it is only with a large scale area excavation that one might hope to interpret and fully understand such slight building traces as remain in Area II. Grid excavation would certainly limit comprehension and trench excavation would virtually destroy it.

The artefacts recovered from Area II consist of an assortment of fragmentary items comparable with that from Area I. Fragments of glass and china and iron nails were particularly common. Although artefactual material was widely distributed over the excavated area, it seemed most common in the moist, black loam to the south of the rubble mound. Whereas in Area I only selective sieving of excavated deposits was carried out, in Area II fairly comprehensive sieving and weighing of the excavated deposits was done. This should enable artefact densities to be worked out eventually but the subjective impression at the time of excavation was that greater quantities of artefactual material had been deposited at the back of the domestic outbuilding than elsewhere. Not only could this be explained by the time-honoured practice of throwing garbage out of the back door but some of this material may have been intentionally dumped onto what was very likely a rather muddy area in wet weather. Particularly informative finds from Area II included a large iron hinge of Y-shaped plan, that fitted into a recessed area cut into one of

four sandstone blocks lying on the surface of the adjacent stable site. This hinge must have been from one of the gateposts at the main entrance to the house yard (Fig. 5) and the sandstone blocks must be remnants of those posts. The gateway was situated at about the centre of the eastern side of the yard. The hinge was excavated from superficial rubble lying over the cobbled area in the south-east of Area II. It actually came from Square D11. Other useful artefacts included several wine bottle prunts from the black loam and an iron hammer head from the northern side of the area. Perhaps the most remarkable item recovered, however, was an 1826 bronze coin of George IV.

The overall impression gained from the artefacts excavated from Area II is similar to that gained from those recovered from Area I. It would appear that these items were residual fragments deposited in secondary locations. They were more informative about garbage disposal and the demolition of the structure, then they were about the activities that went on within it. Perhaps the most important point, however, is that a superficial comparison showed no obvious socio-economic contrasts between the artefacts from the house and those from the domestic outbuilding. Admittedly these comments are based on an incomplete analysis of an incomplete excavation but again there would appear to be interesting implications, about site formation processes, arising from the artefactual evidence in Area II.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that the archaeological reality of the Regentville mansion is far removed from the historical reality. From

the archaeological evidence alone we would, at best, be only able to make generalized statements about the socio-economic levels of the people who inhabited it. Although archaeological excavation at the site of the house and its outbuildings can inform the historian about details of plan, of building materials, and of constructional techniques, there is little *new* information that could not already have been obtained from the available historical documentation. Comparison of the historical and the archaeological evidence does, however, have a very real value but it is for the archaeologist rather than for the historian. What had been going on at this site to reduce two substantial buildings to such inconsequential remnants, sprinkled with shattered artefactual material? The archaeological evidence included only the last remnants of structures, indeed wall-robbing trenches showed that even those had been ripped out in places. Even the demolition rubble, that one might have expected to have covered these last traces, was minimal in the extreme. Archaeologically, it is quite clear that almost everything of the slightest use had been removed from this site. Turning to the history of the site since the 1869 fire, it is apparent that in 1879, when the land was sold, 'the stone and the remains of the house were excepted from the sale . . . The buildings were demolished and the stone re-used in a number of buildings in and around Penrith.³⁵ This was not the end of the story, however, because as late as 1928 a photograph was taken of the ruins of the house that showed sandstone walls still standing over 2 metres in height and heaps of rubble in the vicinity (Fig. 3). It seems likely that removal of building materials continued to the middle of this century and then in about the 1960s the site was developed as an amusement park. As part of the attractions for the public, a large section of the house cellars was cleared and, almost certainly, the surface of the house site, at least, was tidied up with a bulldozer. Evidence of such 'landscaping' of this site survives in the form of a ring of stones around one of the trees on the house-site: clearly intended to form a garden feature of some kind. A concrete slab was laid over the north-western part of the house, reputedly as a floor to a building that housed a display of old cars. Another similar slab was laid at the south-eastern corner of the house yard (Fig. 5). The amusement park is now long gone but its impact on the site remains evident, particularly in the form of a double-decker bus that is gradually disintegrating with rust in the north-eastern part of the house yard. That bus, indeed, provides a vivid reminder that, when considering site-formation processes, archaeologists need to understand the whole history of a site not only during but also *since* the events that are of principal interest.³⁶ Site taphonomy, the study of how the historical reality is gradually transmuted into the archaeological reality, is a subject to which Australian historical archaeology could be making important and original contributions.

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NOTES

1. Deetz & Dethlefsen 1978.
2. On site formation processes see for example Schiffer 1976; Foley 1981.
3. Gillespie 1985.

4. Fletcher 1979: 1.
5. Evans 1929: 15 February, 760.
6. Fletcher 1979: 2 but compare Wilson 1982: Part 2.
7. Fletcher 1979: 3.
8. *ibid.*: 3–4.
9. *ibid.*: 9.
10. *ibid.*: 10–11, 20.
11. *ibid.*: 21. Fletcher (p. 29, note 141) also refers to a portrait supposedly of Jamison but of doubtful identification.
12. Fletcher 1979: 4–6; Wilson 1982: Parts 3.1–3.6.
13. Martens 1835.
14. Wilson 1982: Parts 5 & 6.
15. Bonwick Transcripts, Series I, 52: 1358–9.
16. Bougainville 1837: Vol. 1, 498. Translated by Jennifer Hatte of Armidale.
17. Mackaness 1950, Part II: 82.
18. W.L. Havard 1940: 344–5.
19. O. Havard 1943: 181.
20. Maclehole 1977: 171.
21. Fletcher 1979: 6.
22. Parkes 1896: 88–9.
23. Fletcher 1979: 21.
24. Mundy 1852: Vol. 1, 151. It is sometimes assumed that Mundy's visit was in 1846 but a careful reading of his account makes this doubtful.
25. *Sydney Morning Herald*: 16/12/1847.
26. Fletcher 1979: 21; Wilson 1982: Part 3.1.
27. Wilson 1982. The site plan referred to is Part 7.3.
28. Anon. 1977.
29. I am indebted to Andrew Wilson for arranging access to these records.
30. Higginbotham 1985.
31. Barker 1982.
32. Sykes 1985.
33. Compare Wilson 1982: Part 7.3 with Fig. 5 in this paper.
34. Wilson 1982: Part 3.1.
35. *ibid.*
36. As Binford 1983: 231 remarks: 'even under the best of circumstances, the archaeological record represents a massive palimpsest of derivatives from many separate episodes.'

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