

A Decade of Digging: Deconstructing Urban Archaeology

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Publication of the long awaited First Government House historical archaeological study provides the opportunity for this review article, which looks back at key issues in the discipline throughout the 1980s, and forward to prospects for the 1990s. It asserts the need for dialogue between documentary and archaeological sources as being more informative than the construction of historical narrative, and identifies other conceptual and methodological problem areas which contributed to delays in the publication of results from high-profile projects. The contribution of projects developed by the Centre for Historical Archaeology at the University of Sydney is discussed in the light of these issues.

The practice of characterising the history of one's disciplines in years, decades or centuries according to scale is always a temptation. Australian historical archaeology, some twenty five years old, began in the nineteen sixties, survived the seventies and eighties, and is about to enter the nineties. In fact periodic critique of past and present within the discipline is essential: thoughts on future directions are permissible, at least under guise of defining fields of discourse for later critique.

The publication of *Australia's First Government House*¹ is a useful starting point for a review of recent and future trends in Australian historical archaeology today, not only because work on this important Sydney site spanned the decade of the 1980s. The project presented to the general public in this book is attractively packaged – as a popular book, unlike its contemporary archaeological projects. It is in fact a benchmark in New South Wales heritage conservation, and must be so acknowledged, as the first mass-circulation publication of genuine heritage archaeology – the first vindication of the New South Wales Heritage Act, and all the legislation and philosophy that ensued from the Whitlam government of the 1970s. Lamentably few publications on historical archaeology are available to the public.² Top marks for its appearance, its lively presentation of the historical documents, and its populist ideals. It was handsomely supported in financial and other terms by the New South Wales government, and was launched by the Governor, appropriately in the residence which succeeded the earlier Government House. It thus represents sustained effort on the part of many dedicated public servants to get archaeology the profile it deserves. On the less positive side is its archaeological content, which exemplifies the uncertainties in methodology and direction characteristic of Australian historical archaeological urban projects in the 1980s.

In this paper discussion is focussed not on the formidable problems of archaeological detail at such sites, which at this stage are probably better ruled off, but on underlying issues of broader methodological reference. Full acknowledgment is made at this point that popular archaeological books, like archaeological reports, are not totally fair game for academic critique. Consultants faced with the need to complete a report on some marathon project for a non-archaeological client have to write something, including comments which may lack a degree of intellectual rigour: they should, nevertheless, meet minimal professional standards. Where they are quoted it is because they embody issues extending beyond the report

in question. Identification of approaches developed in archaeological projects of the late 1980s leads into the proposition that the next decade promises to be one of greater assurance.³

INTERACTING DATA SETS: NARRATIVE VERSUS DIALOGUE

The primary question prompted by the way in which the First Government House archaeological material is presented concerns its intended role in relation to an historical account derived overwhelmingly from documentary sources. There is no explicit discussion of how the authors saw these two classes of data interacting in their investigation, and the implicit understanding is that documentary sources and archaeological findings inevitably meld into a single authoritative historical narrative, the latter providing illustrative highlights for the former. What results is a straightforward show-and-tell presentation, with archaeological structures and artefacts glossing a narrative based almost exclusively on documentary material. Indeed, the archaeological data is presented in terms of a *fait accompli*, already allotted to its appropriate governor on the evidence of the official contemporary record:

Each part of the excavated foundations had to be assigned to specific phases of building activity. Written and pictorial records were used as a chronological key to the succession of alterations and additions. The stratigraphy revealed by the excavation was organised around the framework provided by the succession of governors who occupied Government House. This was found to be a convenient and easily understood vehicle for bringing together the archaeological remains and the surviving documents.⁴

Convenient perhaps, but not necessarily the most helpful basis for triggering significant archaeological commentary on the documentary record.

The book is archaeologically at its most confident illustrating type face from the early Government printery, ceramics found in the 1827–1845 privy silts and thought to have been in use in the governor's household, or imported French wine bottle prunts.⁵ There are occasional hints that inconsistencies between the various sources might occur. The backcover states that the 'archaeological investigation... both confirms and contradicts the historical record', and the articulated cattle hock bones⁶

which are thought to imply food wastage at a time when the Colony was near starvation are the main examples of such contradiction. Otherwise it is hard to find the physical remains used as other than illustrations of textual or graphic sources.

Thus the connection between historical narrative based on documentary records, and archaeological data as excavated is presented as complementary. There is no hint of that critical process in historical archaeological enquiry in which archaeological and documentary sources are confronted to identify not only areas of agreement, but also of contradiction and of omission between the two data-sets so that these can be further investigated. Biases in documents, even falsifications, are to be expected, their orientation dependent on a range of factors from the individual personalities, ambitions and activities involved to the back-drop of the dominant nineteenth-century Christian-European-androcentric mind-set. Archaeological data has a promising role in testing biases identified or suspected in the course of historiographic research. This will be further discussed in relation to G. A. Robinson's selective account of the British experiment at Wybalenna. Equally it has a role in testing the quality and nature of the non-falsified record, as will be considered in relation to Sir John Jamison's self-promotion at Regentville.

From the 1960s on Robert Schuyler and others have variously presented roles for the archaeological component of historical archaeology which emphasise its potential for providing independent – 'etic' to use their term – tracks into the recent and more distant past. Schuyler specifically contrasted this with the subjective 'emic' component of the written sources. All share the notion of confrontation between different kinds of source material rather than acceding to the dominance of text-based history. Schuyler's 'perceived versus observed behaviour', Binford's challenge, Leone's 'ambiguities', Deetz's 'small things forgotten', and a wealth of more recent writers⁷ have emphasised the need to use archaeology for dialogue rather than solely for narrative. In contrast, narrative dominates in *Australia's First Government House*, where the documents clearly dictated both excavation strategy and interpretation, as it dominated most urban reports of the decade. In another Central Business District rescue excavation, for example, the consultant states:

Historical archaeology is not limited to the illustration of written history nor to filling in gaps in the documented record. Its aim is to integrate all types of evidence into a comprehensive account of the past.⁸

This is precisely what was attempted. As at the first Government House site the structural phases of Lot 18 Pitt Street, Sydney, are already assumed to be in accordance with Wilson's documentation of changing ownership, changing occupancy and successive site and structures plans: the documentary record was not tested by the independent assessment and phasing of the physical remains.⁹

At times the two records – documentary and archaeological – appear neither to agree, confront nor contradict. Rather, they go past each other without apparent engagement. Political and administrative documentary sources, especially for sites with rescue-imposed boundaries, are rarely concerned with the intimate details of drains, sewers, anonymous footings and yard surfaces – with or without rubbish scatters – which are the bread-and-butter diet of urban excavation. Such utilitarian items seem in contrast to raise a suite of populist questions, to be put on behalf of the voiceless urban

proletariat, for whom matters of urban management were likely to have been of some concern. The comparative efficiency of water supply, drainage, privy construction and sewerage data daily affected the quality of life for city dwellers, whether in terms of discomfort, or to the point of life or death: familiarity with the practicalities of rainfall figures, run-off and flow-rates should be part of every urban archaeologist's tool-kit. In fact the sequence of privy arrangements at the First Government House site, although tantalisingly bare of detail, is one of the most interesting bits of archaeology in the book.¹⁰

For such sites, site-specific and purely archaeological (and historical archaeological) questions – so-called middle range – are required. Exceptionally there may be scope for investigating grander ideological or behavioural questions. Rubbish discard patterns, for example, in the confines of a colony's premier residence cannot but reflect what Deetz would see as the colonial mind-set, while both formal features and spatial arrangements of the total compound have to relate (however distantly) to the primary question pre-occupying Leone at Annapolis: in what ways did they reinforce the power of the governing authority to exert, maintain and express its control? Archaeologically-visible domestic arrangements just might allow consideration of the roles of women and servants in conjunction with other sources: identification of specific households, and dietary preferences identified in the archaeological record may well prompt further research into ethnic or status factors. Some of these possibilities were in fact raised specifically in reference to First Government House during the excavation.¹¹

More often, within the constraints of arbitrarily-limited urban rescue sites, archaeological data bearing on such questions – measurements and recording of relevant detail, together with standard archaeological quantification of deposits and artefacts – have to be collected cumulatively, looking towards inter-site contributions at a larger scale, rather than providing an on-the-spot contribution. Inter-site analysis and integration of this kind was initiated in the later 1980s by honours and postgraduate students in historical archaeology at the University of Sydney.¹² Even so, such work is more likely to yield useful results if both questions and a specification for the data required for their investigation are set out in advance.

Formulating these questions raises another point of general principle. It would seem important for archaeologists to avoid assuming the very conclusions they should be testing. Examples abound in *Australia's First Government House*: 'Obviously it was desirable to place the privy as far away as possible from the kitchen and living areas'.¹³ Obvious, perhaps, from a twentieth-century ethnocentric viewpoint, but not necessarily in remote eighteenth-century Sydney. Again: 'Other main sources for food remains are rubbish pits, which are usually placed well away from living areas to avoid noxious smells'.¹⁴ Another is discussed by Anthony English elsewhere in this volume: nineteenth-century salted meat may not be assumed to have been boneless.¹⁵

Nor is this fallacy of assumptionism, if it may be so termed, restricted to the First Government House publication. 'Some [of the fill deposits] may have come from dumping on the unoccupied site, a common activity before organised garbage collection', or: 'During the early 1820s the family's economic position had improved to the point where finer tableware, even luxury items, could be bought'.¹⁶ Several writers have demonstrated how consumer choice of tablewares involves complex social and cultural factors which go well beyond economic functionalism.¹⁷ One of the most enlightening discussions of what the archaeological component of historic sites can

contribute to the written record remains that of James Deetz – also in a popular archaeological book, which, despite some evidence of dated assumptions in reference to Afro-American sites, is overall as informative as it is engaging.¹⁸ His discussions of how American – and British – attitudes to material culture changed radically in the late eighteenth century in response to fundamental changes to the enlightened Georgian mind-set is particularly relevant to finds from the First Government House site which span this critical period. Did the inhabitants of Government House in fact remove their rubbish to a distance, in the nineteenth-twentieth-century mode, or did they still, in this distant colony, follow the old mediaeval practice of indiscriminate garbage scatter fanning out directly from the back door?

Assumptionist statements are mostly survivals from old-style functionalism – ‘the door must have been on this side because it is the most sheltered.’ One of the many promising contributions of historical archaeology is to investigate how often and in what circumstances colonial doors were not on the most sheltered side, and go on to explore the reasons why this should be so.

READING THE URBAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Pervading these substantive issues of the last decade are methodological ones. Some concern data recovery on site. Obviously, for example, there were significant stratigraphic problems at the First Government House site to which the excavator conscientiously draws attention throughout the book: the stratigraphy is described in several places as difficult because of what are called later ‘disturbances’. Yet stratigraphic relationships, however complex they may appear, are in themselves essentially simple, being limited to one of three possibilities, as Harris succinctly summarised in 1979, and the range of deposits encountered on Australian urban sites is also limited.¹⁹ These latter have been described elsewhere as fills of various kinds, scatters related to land surfaces, accumulation deposits, and household refuse deposits, with some sub-categories.²⁰ The significant factor on the First Government House site, as on other urban sites, is the increasing frequency of site events, a key characteristic of sites undergoing changes in density of settlement. Intensification of land use – and hence city site activity – is a primary indicator of the urban process at work, and its systematic analysis provides an important focus for the site’s interpretation.

Moreover, since the vast majority of Australian urban archaeological remains comprise foundations, drains, sewers, privies and rubbish scatters and pits, archaeological questions concerned with the identification and interpretation of these phenomena in their historical context are increasingly recognisable as more relevant than those dependent upon finding the closed identifiable deposits of an antipodean Pompeii or South Carolina slave plantation.²¹ Recognition of the specific characteristics of Australian sites has been part of a steady rather than dynamic learning curve in both formulation and pursuit of research questions. Again, in the earlier 1980s the extent and character of historical archaeological sites nationally and locally was still being actively explored and inventoried, with the result that heritage administrators preferred, if possible, that nothing at all be excavated, and, failing this, only the absolute minimum. This was combined with a correct awareness that, in general, excavation skills were both limited and outdated. These attitudes resulted in support for tentative excavations, using tentative techniques, and meant that the excavations were so limited in scope and execution that

they were almost bound to fail or fall short of their potential to investigate the nature of the sites concerned, let alone problems of wider implication. One excavation only in Sydney is memorable from those years for its confident spatial approach.²²

Heritage administrators also had much to learn in a short time. One view held that developers only be required to undertake archaeological excavation where there was historical documentation of pre-existing structures in the form of early maps or plans: ‘The central section of Lot 9 was not investigated, there being no historical evidence of any building there before 1880’,²³ a comment which appears at odds with the assumption quoted earlier by the same consultants, referring to the same site, that open ground was usually used for dumping rubbish. This view co-existed uneasily with the vocal ‘no duplication’ school, summarised as; ‘It is not justifiable in terms of time/cost to obtain by archaeological means information readily obtainable from historical documents’.²⁴

It also took time for both consultants and heritage administrators to realise that document-based questions formulated prior to excavation inevitably had to be revised in the light of the nature, quantity and condition of what the site produced, that period-specific excavations (‘the earliest remains’) were likely to be counter-productive in terms of elucidating urban process, that unexpected finds such as bottle dumps, not necessarily in the research design, needed to be covered by contingency clauses, and that, if anything of value was to be rescued from archaeological contracts, negotiations with developers needed to be professional, hard-headed and backed up where needed by the full force of the legislation.

Here it seems useful to initiate discussion at a general level by identifying the two key methodological areas which appear to have been most instrumental in urban rescue archaeology’s twin problems throughout the 1980s – namely the extensive delays (with minimal notable exceptions) in the appearance of final reports, and the inconclusive nature of results when they did appear.

The first of these was the reliance for the stratigraphic record in the 1980s on post-excavation study rather than sorting out stratigraphic relationships immediately on site. This approach is clearly set out in *Australia’s First Government House* in the outline of its methodology:

Once the last excavations had taken place and the site had been filled in the task of pulling all of the information together began. There were many volumes of drawings and recording forms and thousands of photographs. The reports of the archaeological supervisors needed co-ordination. This formidable task was undertaken by...an archaeological supervisor, who was responsible for developing a stratigraphic sequence for each sector of the site...²⁵

Where there were, not infrequently, stratigraphic uncertainties, analysis of finds became the primary indicator of stratigraphy and dating, rather than vice versa – a practice specifically condemned by Harris:

Stratigraphic sequences are made without any reference to this contained [artefactual] material and no results from artefactual studies can change the stratigraphic relationships found in such sequences. The failure to maintain a distinction between stratigraphic events and artefactual remains has led to the acceptance of several false types of stratigraphy.²⁶

Even a less rigorous view might hold that the absence of a sound stratigraphic record at the onset of post-excavation analysis is of concern, since apart from

other considerations it needs to provide the data for assigning priorities and revising the research questions to which the data analysis program will be directed.

The second was that in the earlier part of the decade the *ad hoc* finds-processing systems then in use were inadequate to handle the massive quantities of material resulting from a large-scale urban excavation.²⁷ It took the decade and more for most historical archaeologists to develop labour-effective streamlined techniques likely to yield answers to interesting and significant questions. One reason was the tardiness throughout most of the profession in adapting to computer technology. Another followed from the practice of fragmenting archaeological deposits, selecting 'special finds' and new 'types', and then dispersing finds in arbitrary groupings based on materials (window, decorative and bottle glass together, for example) to specialists for individual study. This inevitably led to emphasis on finds as individual artefacts – production and distribution aspects – and inadequate consideration of their find contexts (usage, discard, site formation, taphonomy) and associated material, and conversely minimal treatment or recording of total deposits, often without systematic quantification. Some idea of the distortion resulting from a selective, non-quantitative approach can be seen from figures quoted in the City Link Development, Footscray, Melbourne, report: of the 201767 artefacts 776 (0.0038%) had marks, of which after further study 217 (0.0010%) yielded dates.

Procedures on many Sydney sites included needless duplication of finds description and cataloguing, resulting in yet more reports to be coordinated, rather than flowing forward in a single goal-oriented system. Equally contributing to the attrition of archaeological meaning and fragmentation of the archaeological record was the irritating device of the so-called 'type-series' method of classifying finds as they came from the site. This, like the descriptive mode of artefact processing may well have been adopted from the methodology of older-style Aegean and Middle Eastern archaeology. It proved particularly unhelpful as a means of investigating nineteenth-century mass-produced consumer goods. Such items already have their own readily accessible point-of-manufacture typology, the basic knowledge of which must be in every professional historical archaeologists' toolkit – whether they be academics or consultants. The imposition of an additional arbitrary structure at the time of excavation is distracting and another waste of effort. A taxonomic rather than pseudo-typological level of sorting is required at this stage.

Perhaps the major fallacy underlying these marathon struggles to work through several hundred thousand items was the blurring of the distinction between compiling an informed but essentially descriptive catalogue of finds, and the production of a database constructed on the basis of variables selected to answer specific questions about the material. It is interesting that in contracts of the 1980s in New South Wales, at least, the post-excavation work of finds-processing was always called the 'analysis' phase without spelling out the methodology required: the realisation that a descriptive listing or catalogue of finds is not in itself an analysis, nor even a tool for an analytical program, nor, more significantly, for providing quick answers to any questions set, is still to be effectively embodied in government briefs.

The questions raised by the First Government House project and other sites triggered various responses by the end of the decade. One of these was the formation in 1990 of a group of younger practitioners concerned to improve levels of professional networking and communication. One major concern of this group – the Sydney Historical

Archaeology Meetings – among other concerns dedicated to areas of self-critique and assessment, was to initiate a code of ethics among practitioners, an essential basis for improved standards of professional practice. Failure to have standards agreed and accepted by the profession in Australia resulted during the 1980s in practices of questionable professionalism. In particular, undercutting competitors on tenders resulted in under-funded projects in which the major sufferer was inevitably the archaeological resource: costs by the unscrupulous were cut back in ways showing little understanding of a site's archaeological potential. There was also the widespread need, by and large unrecognised by established practitioners in the eastern states at least, to extend and up-grade skills in line with the fast-moving information and technology frontiers of the 1980s, a period of exceptional change and development everywhere within this comparatively new discipline. A second response was the development of archaeological reading circles and discussion groups which gained immense impetus from the 'Women in Archaeology' Conference.²⁸

Another form of response began much earlier with the Centre for Historical Archaeology at the University of Sydney, where historical archaeological projects from 1978 onwards were concerned with the nature of archaeological evidence, and its relationship with other historical sources. They concentrated especially on devising a conceptual framework for the recovery of meaning from the archaeological data, together with developing an effective methodology for its analysis.

AMBIGUITIES IN THE DATA SETS

Concern with what Leone called 'ambiguities' in the data sets first arose at the report-writing stage of work carried out at the site of Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta.²⁹ In 1978 the Centre for Historical Archaeology assisted in conservation work at this historic homestead by researching details of its developmental phases both physically by archaeological excavation and by library research. Like Government House, Elizabeth Farm had several documented occupational phases, and, as physical investigation revealed, several periods of active structural alteration or addition. The construction of Elizabeth Farm was begun by settler John Macarthur for his wife Elizabeth as early as 1793, with additions and alterations continuing until the 1830s. Diary and letter data indicated four periods of building activity in the early history of the complex: initial construction in 1793–1794 (period 1), building a new kitchen after a fire in 1805 destroyed the old one, 1806–1811 (period 2), a major rebuild in 1825–1827 (period 3A), and some mention of work in 1831–1833 involving the architect John Verge (period 3B). The archaeological investigation (which was not extensive) generally supported these, but to varying degrees, and with numerous discrepancies and puzzles. The massive alterations of archaeological phase III – identifiable as of the 1820s–1830s – had high visibility, and could for the most part be matched into documented periods 3A–B: earlier alterations were more complex, and less easily keyed into events as documented.

In fact from the beginning of the project there were indications of anomalies in one or other data set. The strategy adopted was to keep the documentary periods distinct from the archaeological phases identifiable in the ground or in the fabric of the building, and then as a separate operation to test whether the two were in agreement.³⁰

More difficult however was the question of describing the period to which some structure – or stage of a structure – might belong, and in the course of the dig the following

procedure was adopted to avoid the difficulties of too hasty identification with a known historical event.

The term 'mismatch' was used to highlight any conflict between archaeological and documentary sources. At first this procedure was devised to check each data set independently for error; it then proved to be a simple but effective means of ensuring that information from each source could make an independent contribution to historical debate and critique. A two-column method of presenting the documentary source material was also developed, with every relevant source quoted verbatim, and arranged in chronological order, contemporaneous sources on the left, later secondary sources and authority opinions on the right. Coding of different categories of source material by symbols was also used by Martin Davies in his analyses of standing structures, emphasising the interaction of different kinds of source material.³¹

The potential of archaeological evidence to counterpoint extensive government records was further highlighted by the Norfolk Island project of 1980–1981.³² The archaeological survey and assessment of the penal remains at Kingston and Arthur's Vale on Norfolk Island revealed interesting biases and omissions in the documentary record as a source for the structural history of the settlement. Government documentation on the Norfolk Island settlement, a place of secondary detention in its second convict stage, included fair coverage of the construction and use of most of the settlement's corrective and administrative buildings. There were, however, omissions. The survey identified physically between twelve and twenty ruined structures in small valleys apart from the main area of the penal settlement, for which no reference could be found in the records. They are most convincingly explained as dwellings, probably with gardens attached, for trusted convicts and seem to yield evidence of a policy of liberalism by some enlightened governor which did not find its way into the official correspondence. Similarly, quite extensive alterations were made to the notorious crank-mill building, in which teams of convicts manually powered one or more grain-mills. These changes, which, like the small farms, were unrecorded in the textual record, included a substantial raising of the roof and the systematic provision of ventilation slits around the upper storey which could in this instance only have been designed to improve temperature control and working conditions for those forced to work on an extremely unpleasant task. A return to documentary sources revealed the strength of mid-century public debate in Britain on liberal versus punitive views in penal institutions, from which more specific historical questions could be framed for the archaeological data. Pursuit of these will allow Norfolk Island to make a new contribution in this area of academic discourse.³³

A third project established the confrontational approach to the use of sources beyond question. Reworking the material from Wybalenna, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Settlement on Flinders Island in the Bass Strait, brought the relationship between documentary and archaeological sources again into open debate in a totally different context. At the Tasmanian Aboriginal Settlement of Wybalenna, where most of the surviving Tasmanians were contained between the years 1831 and 1846 for both their own safety and that of the European settlers, the value of archaeology in deconstructing contemporary historical narrative, and its potential for alternative insights into interactions between colonists and indigenous peoples, at last emerged unambiguously.

The primary sources for the activity of the Tasmanians at Wybalenna are G. A. Robinson's extensive journals,

which present a consistent account of the processes taking place during the four formative years when he was Commandant.³⁴ The model proposed for Robinson's diaries was that they were consciously angled towards enhancing both his contemporary and posthumous reputation as a successful Christianising quasi-missionary rather than as an objective record. Residues of mixed European cultural items and massed traditional food residues, with wholly non-European spatial patterning, belied the tendentious and self-serving character of the Robinson diaries. Continuing analysis of the diaries in conjunction with island-site data revealed the important roles of individual Tasmanian women in cultural interaction and the longer-term survival of the Tasmanian people.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FINDS ANALYSIS

The second problem area within the discipline, as already discussed, concerned excavation and post-excavation methodology. In 1985 the Centre for Historical Archaeology at the University of Sydney applied for, and received, a National Estate grant to undertake a formal research and training excavation project to develop procedures of both excavation and post-excavation processing that would not only speed up the mass treatment of finds from urban and other historical sites, but do so in ways likely to highlight the positive but elusive contribution that archaeologists kept promising was available on such sites – the archaeological lack of delivery on such promises had not been lost on respected contemporary critics such as James Broadbent and Miles Lewis.³⁵

The site was that of Regentville near Emu Plains, chosen for pragmatic reasons of distance, convenience and because it would complete a project started by students in 1977, as much as for reasons of intrinsic archaeological interest. Regentville in its heyday of 1825 to c. 1840 was a classic New South Wales mansion, once owned by the remarkably rich and successful Sir John Jamison and renowned as a seat of lavish European caste-based entertaining in the classic British Regency mode – except that it was a hemisphere away from its imperial and cultural sources. Regentville differed from other colonial elite rural sites in New South Wales in having been gutted by a fire in 1869, followed by successive sales of its building stone. Jamison died virtually bankrupt in 1844 and the family lived in reduced circumstances until the house was leased in 1859 as a private hospital and then a hotel.

Excavation proceeded from 1985–1991, with a substantial part of the house, courtyard, outbuildings and stable excavated and recorded. In the final season investigation of the domestic areas behind the west wing revealed a privy and drain packed with domestic glass and ceramics from both the Jamison and post-Jamison periods of Regentville's occupation. The richness of this deposit allowed a new suite of questions in the field of colonial consumerism to be added, especially in the light of recent overseas publications. Some background to this project has already appeared in print.³⁶

The primary objective for the project overall was to show that archaeological methodology could, on European-Australian sites, produce results that would add significantly to the broader historical perspective. To quote from its original research design: 'this project proposes to tackle head-on the question of what can historical archaeology really contribute'.³⁷ The developed proposal undertook to provide a 'field training program designed to deliver a rigorous training in a wide range of essential archaeological skills'.³⁸ Its second aim therefore

was to develop for historical sites generally 'an efficient and effective methodology both in the excavation of this historic site and in analysis of its excavated material',³⁹ i.e. an integrated system of archaeological data collection, classification, processing and analysis that would be cost-effective, fast and targeted to producing a result both usable in the market place and academically unassailable. It was already evident that the field and laboratory techniques of the late 1960s as applied on the small excavations of Irrawang, New South Wales, and Wybalenna, Tasmania – themselves adaptations of Wheeler-Kenyon-Frere methodology from Roman Britain and Western Asia – were outdated, unsuited to the shallow nature of many Australian historic sites, and, above all, unable to handle the scale of excavated material.

The field strategy and data collection comprising the Regentville methodology was comprehensive. In principle all units were to be excavated totally over substantial areas. All stratigraphic relationships were identified, assessed and recorded at the time of excavation, and the stratigraphic record was the primary tool determining on-going excavation strategy. The second concerned post-excavation work on excavated material. The agreed procedure was to retreat from the widespread practice of the arbitrary type series, and devise a two-tier classification and processing system that allowed all the data from any designated unit to contribute their meaning to the questions set, and prepare them for further intensive study of selected categories and items as appropriate, and to ensure that no new process duplicated previous work, but rather fed directly and systematically into existing information without loss or wastage. A third aim of the project was to develop and maintain public involvement in the project on as many levels as possible, including secondary and tertiary institutions, local community, and wider public through participation, media coverage and publication.

The initial research design for the Regentville project was of necessity general: 'to investigate the ways in which the estate, modelled on a British squirehood, functioned in its new form as transplanted to the colony.' As initial work proceeded it was apparent that however the overall research questions were refined, the overall design had a second site-specific middle-range component which would be to elucidate the formal properties and relationships of the structures as they changed through time. No illustrations, plans or descriptions of this outstanding property showed its ground plan or its entirety, and to provide this record was a contribution of significant value. It was moreover essential as a basis for the historical question which increasingly appeared to be of the greatest archaeological potential: in what ways did this mansion project Sir John Jamison's perceptions of himself and his role in the colony? This was refined into the propositions that Sir John came to the Colony to make good: that making good had to be in terms defined by British standards: that he had to be seen to be making good within the Colony; and that the faces he presented to the Colony in terms of material culture such as his houses, their design and their fittings, and his clothing, activities, attitudes therefore had to be those which added up to his conception of what making good in the Colony in British terms was all about.

In such an enquiry the meticulous recording of structures, noting materials, construction details, size, finish, and spatial relationships between them, together with any domestic rubbish scattered around them, would provide the basic data anyway. The selection of this topic partially resulted from the denuded and disturbed character of the site: while structural remains were

generally visible, there was no guarantee that rich deposits of household refuse would be found. If they did, they would contribute handsomely to the research framework; if not, documenting the structural remains and their associated scatters of artefacts already ensured a result would be forthcoming.⁴⁰

The proposed analysis therefore emphasised the spatial arrangements of structures, together with the distribution and frequencies of any artefactual material present (both structural and refuse), and the collection of field data was devised accordingly. Excavation was carried out in large open area format, in which a notional one-metre-quadrat grid throughout the site provided accurate quantitative control. Each stratigraphic unit had its relationships to the rest of the site entered into a stratigraphic matrix at the time of excavation, and its investigation was completed before excavation of the next unit was begun. Excavation proceeded in all quadrats of a stratigraphic unit simultaneously to ensure its proper understanding. The total unit was quantified by weight and volume, and sieved for artefacts; where questions arose a soil sample was collected, and for fill deposits a 10% sample of the deposit matrix was nest-sieved for a characterisation of its building materials. Each unit was coded immediately as structural feature, foundation trench, ground surface, negative interface or fill, to facilitate post-excavation decisions on priorities for further work as well as the actual analysis. All deposits were excavated in full and their contents characterised by matrix sample and artefact frequency. A wide range of soil studies was carried out as part of student training at Regentville in conjunction with the School of Crop Sciences, initiating a long-term process of customising soil tests for historic sites.

Regentville, like many Australian sites, had no great depth of deposit, and notional sections, based on the continuous recording of unit levels, proved the most efficient method of drawing sections. All site records were organised into sets of pre-printed pro-forma sheets which minimised ambiguity, omission, error and inconsistency, and speeded computer entry. The objective of developing an efficient, streamlined system included the selection or design of uniform equipment – plastic garden sieves used as finds trays, for example, so that finds could remain in them through the washing and drying cycle; light, collapsible grid metric planning frames made from electric conduit, and single-colour buckets to minimise distraction in the photographic record.

This field system was keyed into a laboratory processing system based on a classification already started at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, and considerably developed in the years following the first season at Regentville.⁴¹ First level taxonomic classification was carried out during each season's excavation, with data entry following immediately after. It was based on a printed pre-coded classification system developed by the team for all classes of nineteenth and twentieth-century excavated material that ensured consistent sorting whether by archaeologists or volunteers. All finds from a unit/quadrat were sorted in their tray into groups on the basis of similarities in material, function and form until they could be sorted no further; each group was then weighed, counted, coded, and bagged; each bag received an inventory ID number and was written into an inventory sheet for later entry into the computerised finds database. No 'types', 'special finds' or other 'goodies' (*sic*) were allowed to be physically separated from other material from the same unit/quadrat; conversely, marked, complete, or otherwise individually significant items were annotated on their inventory sheet so that their shelf-location could be called up in the database as

required. Finds from significant deposits could be immediately identified and tagged for fast-track processing at both levels.

The precise level at which first-level sorting stopped depended on the material: for deposits comprising restorable tableware items, for example, there was a further level of sorting for *sets*, which sub-sorted matching ceramic or glass-ware. The *set* concept was especially useful for conjoin analysis, where distributions needed to be tracked across the site or through stratigraphic units. At the level of set identification three further variables were added to the inventory sheet – a pattern number (identifying unnamed patterns by a number taken from a single running sequence which was then named and listed in the pattern list); a set number, also from a single running sequence, denoting pieces from the same set, with definitions similarly listed; and an object number, denoting the object resulting from joining together some pieces of the set. After listing, total classes (or taxa) were handed over for individual study to specialists who then knew they had all the relevant material. This was the stage of second-level processing, involving reference to catalogues and other source books for contextual information on individual items or groups within the total class. At this stage some grouping into *types* within the class proved useful where contemporary information was not available.

What can be termed the analytical stage began as soon as the material was sorted, since the variables selected for database entry determined the parameters of any future analysis. The variables were partly basic ones, comprising spatial and temporal data, quantification data such as weight, and number, material, formal, functional and technological categories overall, and management information such as shelf and records locations, and conservation needs, and partly more complex, introducing variables considered significant in relation to the question of Jamison's self characterisation. Building materials and fittings were categorised by social and stylistic aspects as well as simply by material; tablewares by functional and decorative categories, together with pattern, set, object and marks information as appropriate; containers by functional categories relevant to questions of domestic practice; faunal identifications with coded treatments (burnt, gnawed, sawn) relevant to questions of diet and life style. Additional variables were added later, on the basis of second level processing where this was useful; often information at a higher level of individual complexity proved to be better handled manually.

TESTING THE SYSTEM

The success of the Regentville project, and its objectives was near total, except in one small detail: its impact on current practice in urban consultant historical archaeology was minimal, if not non-existent. Undergraduates and volunteers participated with enthusiasm and learned a great deal; virtually no practising consultants visited the site nor enquired at any stage about procedures, techniques or methodology. The directors saw two possible causes. One was that consultants felt the Regentville system was all very well, but too academic and research-oriented to be relevant to the constraints and pressures of urban rescue archaeology; the second was that in 1985 the whole structure of the computerised database and analytical procedure was so alien to the current consultancy climate that there was no common ground of communication. The latter view was supported by unambiguous indicators – for example, that the critical difference between a database and a descriptive list was not commonly recognised either in the profession or among administrators until

disastrously late in several major projects.

The answer at least to the first possibility was to test the Regentville system – already developed a stage further – in a standard urban redevelopment consultant project, and this was done in 1989 with the City Link Development Project in Footscray, Victoria, an extended activity of the Centre for Historical Archaeology through its Field Director, Andrew Wilson. The redevelopment comprised three sites, the Bridge Hotel and the Pickett Cottages Sites, and the Stanley Arms Hotel Site which proved to have been built on the site of an earlier hotel, the Victoria, which, built and licensed in 1840, was the first European building in Footscray. The first achievement of this excavation was that its report was researched and completed within eighteen months from the last day of excavation. This was achieved by designing the form of the report before the project began, so that the results of each stage of work fed directly into it with minimum duplication of effort.

Second, the report was readable, precise and clear, in two-tier form. The first tier consisted of an informative introductory volume giving, first, an overview of structural and stratigraphic results within an historical context, as well as precise directions as to where all further information about structures and stratigraphy was to be found, and, second, a comprehensive overview of the finds. This latter was based on quantitative analysis and first-level processing of the excavated material, including identification of marked ceramics and glassware, dietary and other bone, and shell material. The second tier comprised, site by site, a detailed stratigraphic analysis, and a full presentation of the artefacts found, derived from the computer database augmented by discussion. Third, the report was explicit about what it aimed at, did and did not do. For the purpose of the project report it aimed at completing a thoroughly competent middle range investigation, and specifically distinguished any areas where data or their relevance were equivocal in relation to this aim. Anything beyond middle-range research levels was explicitly stated as outside the scope of the final report, yet all relevant information was provided to those readers who might wish to look further into specific research possibilities.

In its methodology and efficiency, and especially in its explicit identification and analysis of what final reports of public archaeology projects should aim to do, as well as defining the limits of where they end, the City Link Development report was a significant benchmark for all consultant reports.⁴²

An expanded teaching programme for historical archaeology at the University of Sydney accompanied these various research projects, with emphasis on the need to see archaeological investigation of historic sites in contexts more expanded both historically and theoretically than was currently apparent. Four topic areas were introduced in the late 1980s which were seen as having particular relevance to Australian conditions: the archaeology of settlement and contact, of government and power, of industry and capital, and of urbanisation and consumerism. Overseas readings on theoretical approaches were combined with primary historical documents and readings from recent Australian social histories to provide historical contexts, and case studies selected from both overseas and Australian research and practice. It also introduced a new postgraduate degree by course-work in public archaeology.

The Centre for Historical Archaeology had one further role to play in relation to public archaeology in the eighties. It was invited to prepare a set of procedural guidelines for the public practice of historical

archaeology, as well as an historical archaeologists' and developers' Code of Practice: these were completed in 1989, but were not published until 1993. The ideas within the Guidelines have been aired and debated – most influentially at a Seminar in 1989 published by the Heritage Council of New South Wales.⁴³ Publication of the Guidelines should assist in upgrading work practices, ending for one thing their vulnerability to mis-application.⁴⁴

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

So to the nineties. If there is one lesson from the decade of the 1980s it has been to identify isolation, be it professional, intellectual, or peer group, as a damaging problem for a developing discipline. Consultant archaeologists overseas, as is now being recognised here, rate isolation from mainstream disciplinary studies as their most critical occupational hazard. There is a need, until now certainly more recognised overseas than here, to take advantage of every tax opportunity possible to attend conferences, seminars and meetings in order to remain at the cutting edge of the discipline. Consultants are not alone in this: postgraduates and academics also have to work equally hard to avoid a time warp syndrome, but have more resources than at least out-of-town consultants. Recently there has been more contact between postgraduates and consultants in Sydney: prehistory and historical archaeology seminars have always been open to all interested, and the Sydney Historical Archaeology Meetings group by the end of the 1980s endorsed the needs and professional obligations of practitioners to read the literature, go to meetings, seminars and conferences, and keep up to date in as many areas as possible of their discipline. The new spirit of open discourse and free exchange of information, together with the emergent code of ethics, suggest a welcome new look for the public historical archaeology of the new decade.

NOTES

1. Proudfoot *et al.* *Australia's First Government House*.
2. The only two state agencies which have met their responsibilities in this area are the Victoria Archaeological Survey and the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service. Currently the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service has no publications in print on any archaeological topic. The Department of Planning has done reasonably well in publishing three of the data papers from the First Government House excavation, but the most important paper, on the stratigraphy of the site by Robyn Stocks, has yet to appear. Papers on the glass, ceramics, animal bones and small finds have been in camera-ready manuscript form since 1988. I am indebted to Dr Egloff for this information.
3. It must be acknowledged that, as a case study, the First Government House project had features particular to its own political and historical context. It was, for example, not a structured rescue excavation *in toto*, but rather a locational and conservation exercise, concentrating on the positive identification of remains in the first instance, then more extensively on the north and south out-buildings. The dominance of historical documentation over the archaeological record arose from the quantity of historical information already existing, assembled by one of the most productive historians in the profession, and the absence of preliminary archaeological reports. This paper argues, however, that it is just these sorts of expedient and *ex tempore* solutions that need to be avoided in future.
4. Proudfoot *et al.* *op. cit.*, p.20.
5. See *ibid.* the photograph and caption of printing type p.77, the discussion of tablewares from the privy p.52, and the colour plates of bottle prunts (unnumbered, unpaginated). The caption here raises an interesting issue which is not, however, carried through to any conclusion.
6. *ibid.*, pp.65-66.
7. Robert Schuyler, 'The Written Word, the Spoken Word, Observed and Perceived Behaviour' in R. L. Schuyler (ed.) 1978; Lewis R. Binford, 'Historical Archaeology - is it Historical or Archaeological?' in Leland Ferguson (ed.); 1977 Mark Leone and Constance Crosby, 1987: 397-410; James Deetz 1977; and, for example, in *Historical Archaeology* 25.2, 1991.
8. Bairstow & Wilson 1990, p. 4. It must be noted that examples in this paper taken to reflect general practice have necessarily been drawn from the few substantial reports and publications which are accessible, thus appearing to penalise the very consultants who actually produced results. No such impression is intended.
9. The original historical research for the Pitt Street site (as fully acknowledged by Bairstow and Wilson), can be found in Andrew Wilson, *Sydney School of Arts Project*, 1989.
10. Proudfoot *et al.* *op. cit.*, p.52 and fig. 6.2
11. cf. Birmingham, Pearson and Murray, in Temple & Sullivan (eds), 1985.
12. Notably Bower (1989), and Atkins, Callaghan, English, Graves, Hourani (1991). These theses are available for consultation in the Department of Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology, University of Sydney.
13. Proudfoot *et al.* *op. cit.*, p.53.
14. *ibid.* p.64
15. See also conclusion reached by A. English, *This Muttonous Diet*, pp. 140f. Unpublished thesis, in part- requirement for BA Honours Degree, Department of Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology, University of Sydney. Note also (as Dr. Egloff reminds me) the ships' cask display at Fremantle Maritime Museum. Consideration of further issues raised by these studies, such as whether eighteenth century ships' fare differed from nineteenth-century cask beef designed for sale, reinforces the need to guard against simplistic assumptions.
16. Bairstow & Wilson 1990: 71
17. For example Susan Henry 1991: 3-14; and Diana DiZerega Wall, *ibid.*, 69-81.
18. Deetz 1977.
19. Harris 1979, notably fig. 13.
20. cf. Birmingham, 'The Refuse of Empire: International Perspectives on Urban Rubbish' in Birmingham *et al.* 1989: 150-151.
21. Andrew Wilson 1990: 99 sets out an analysis of the excavation units at the City Link Development sites. Of the total of the listed archaeological units 50% were structures, 9% demolition fill, 25 % other fills.
22. Edward Higginbotham's work in the garden of Vaucluse House was a pioneering and effective example of open excavation, which is discussed in Peter Watts 1985: 22-27.
23. Bairstow & Wilson *op. cit.*, p.146.
24. Bairstow & Wilson *op. cit.*, p.5.
25. Proudfoot *et al.* *op. cit.*, p.24-28.
26. Harris 1979: 92.
27. Except at the University of Sydney, where a new computer-based inventory system began to be developed from 1984.
28. Held at Albury, New South Wales, February 1991.
29. King *et al.* 1979. For general background cf. Broadbent 1984, especially chapter 2.
30. cf. Birmingham 1979.
31. Davies & Buckley 1987: 102-129. Also Davies 1987: 54-64.

32. The fieldwork and research on this project was carried out by Martin Davies and Graham Wilson, for the Department of Housing and Construction, cf. Davies and Wilson 1980.
33. For a brief summary of this material cf. Kerr 1988. More information can be sought through A. G. L. Shaw's bibliography in Borchardt and Crittenden 1987:182-185, or in Evans and Nicholls 1984.
34. See for the publication of these journals Plomley (ed.) 1987. For a fuller account of the archaeological investigation see Birmingham 1992.
35. Broadbent 1986: 54, a letter in response to Helen Temple's paper on First Government House, 1985; cf. also Lewis 1982.
36. cf. Connah, 1986: 29-42; Wilson 1988:123-138 Interim reports are available in the New South Wales Department of Planning: the final report will be completed in 1993.
37. Birmingham & Wilson 1987.
38. Birmingham & Wilson 1985.
39. Birmingham & Wilson 1985.
40. Wilson in Birmingham *et al.* 1989:123-128. The systematic logging of all artefact scatters allowed, for example, the architectural reconstruction of the location of upper storey windows from window glass scatters, and the establishment of demolition and subsequent site formation processes by spatially tracking fragments of the magnificent Masons dinner service.
41. Wilson 1985.
42. Wilson 1990.
43. NSW Department of Planning 1989. *Urban Digs*.
44. As for example is done in the Pitt Street report quotation earlier in this paper. The archaeologist does not unconditionally accept that "it is incumbent upon the archaeologist "to recognise the legitimate objectives and restrictions of the developer and the costs of the develop or archaeological investigation", and "to minimise costs and delays while avoiding unnecessary costs and delays", (Bairstow and Wilson, *op cit.* p.5). These proposals set out in the Code of Practice (which has in no way been discussed or accepted by either of the professional groups involved) only have weight if the developer has explicitly accepted his/her counter-obligations to the community, the archaeological profession and the archaeological resource.

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