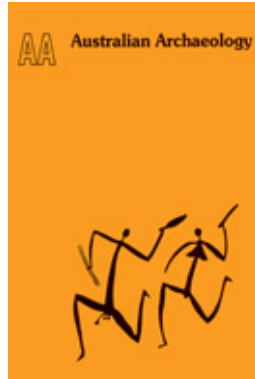


## Australian Archaeology



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to an appreciation of a long lasting way of life different from his own, which was successfully practised even in the harshest parts of the continent, was broken only by force and still maintains an identity in the modern world. For both groups, co-citizens as they are, it can help to foster a joint pride in the unique past of the particular part of the world where both now live.

This is a large aim and will not have been achieved until Aboriginal scholars are working on the archaeology of Australia and of other parts of the world as well. The first steps must be modest, since we have to overcome not only lack of knowledge of our aims, but suspicion of our activities. This seems to involve two things: seizing every opportunity to explain our work to Aborigines, and undertaking the responsibility of discussing projects we wish to initiate with appropriate Aboriginal groups. We may well find that because of the temper of the times some projects are not negotiable. It will be a measure of our success when such areas of disagreement disappear.

Jack Golson

#### ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND ABORIGINES

Some thoughts following the AAA Symposium at ANZAAS 1975

The problems that have already arisen, and are likely to occur even more in future, regarding Aboriginal hostility to archaeological work in Australia seem to be due mainly to lack of public understanding of what archaeology is all about. For this archaeologists themselves are chiefly to blame, because of their general disinclination or inability to communicate in a popular way. In comparison with the Australian situation one might consider the enormous popularity of an interest in archaeology in Great Britain, which is considerably due to popular archaeological publications and TV series, leading to wide public support for the excavation and preservation of archaeological sites. One reason for the avoidance of the popular media by archaeologists in Australia is probably fear of interference and vandalism and, latterly, of Aboriginal political exploitation.

However, it was made clear at the AAA Symposium that Aborigines, both country and urban, feel very strongly and genuinely opposed to desecration of burial sites of their ancestors, regardless of any specific local connotations. This is not just a political ploy; it is an emotive issue that can

only be resolved by dialogue, leading to concessions on both sides. The present dilemma is, therefore, also a result of the failure of Australian archaeologists to achieve any empathy with Aboriginal motivations, both conscious and unconscious. There is no doubt that many archaeologists frequently thank their lucky stars that, unlike their fellow workers in other fields, they do not have to deal with living people; they can happily dig away and pose their theoretical problems, without worrying about social or ethnic difficulties. Obviously this simplistic situation is now at an end.

The old dictum that attack is the best form of defence should not be forgotten. Archaeologists in Australia have a very strong case in support of their work. What we are doing is of world importance, but it is of particular importance to Aborigines, because it is establishing their long antiquity in and possession of the Australian continent. It reinforces their claim to land, increases their stature and identity as a people, and will ultimately establish their place in the brotherhood of man. The point that must be strongly made is that our work can only be to the ultimate advantage of the Aborigines themselves.

In the existing situation archaeology only gets into the news when ancient skeletal material is found, or when some outstanding new art site is located. Therefore it is not surprising that Aborigines see us as endlessly hunting for burials of their ancestors and for sacred sites. They cannot know that, in fact, most archaeologists try to avoid finding burials in their sites, since it usually means a long and worrying obstruction of their main project and does not often add any significant information.

It is obvious that archaeologists must now consider using every possible aspect of the media to get their story over to Australians in general and to Aborigines in particular. This would involve consciously putting pressure on TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, and particularly journals expressly directed at Aborigines, such as *Identity*, *New Dawn*, *Aboriginal News*, etc. If we do not take popular communication seriously, we shall soon find our work stringently inhibited. I feel it is of the utmost importance that AAA should produce an "Archaeological Manifesto", setting out in clear terms what we are aiming for and what we have to do to achieve our aims. If this was compelling enough (and we have a strong and fascinating case to present) and was accompanied by first-class illustrations, there can be little doubt that the media would jump at it and we would be overwhelmed with requests for TV appearances, feature articles, and so on.

If a key point in the manifesto was the urgent need for serious dialogue with Aborigines, then this might also eventuate, both privately and publicly on the media. Archaeology has an irrefutably strong case, but it has to be presented with skill and integrity. The worst thing we can do is to retire fearfully into our ivory towers. We are now at a most crucial stage in archaeological development in Australia, which might well be characterised as the "Publicize or Pack Up" interstadial.

David R. Moore,  
Curator of Anthropology  
The Australian Museum