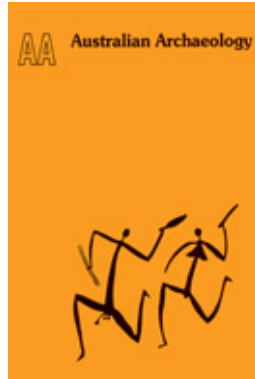


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IN MEMORIAM MAUREEN BYRNE

R. Ian Jack

Success as a director of an archaeological excavation requires talents as much social, psychological and administrative as academic. With the death of Maureen Byrne at twenty-four on 20 November 1977, we have lost a young director with substantial achievement behind her and a larger potential clearly demonstrated.

Maureen was never happier than in the field and packed a remarkable amount of experience into the six years after she first encountered Sydney University Archaeological Society and the department of archaeology. She came to archaeology at a time when an increasing effort was being expended on involving Sydney students of classical, near-eastern and aboriginal archaeology in practical experience on Australian historic sites. Maureen was among those in the first class in Historical Archaeology II in 1974 and from then on her vitality was effectively channelled into taking a precocious role in a wide variety of colonial excavations. With experience as a member of the team at Irrawang already behind her, she acted as deputy to John Wade at the Roasting Pits dig at Tambaroora near Hill End in 1974 and she adorned the best press photograph as she worked alone in the vault exposed in Old Sydney Burial Ground later that year. Apprenticeship of this sort with the stimulation and encouragement of archaeologists as different as Judy Birmingham, Vincent Megaw, David Frankel, Dick Green, Alexander Cambitoglou, Basil Hennessy and Jim Allen, led her in 1975 to take control of a number of operations during the vacations of her final honours year.

Three expeditions to James King's pottery at Irrawang near Raymond Terrace in the latter part of 1975 continued the eight-year series of digs there under the Archaeological Society and Judy Birmingham. All of Maureen's expeditions looked at Structure H, the workshop of the earthenware kiln: the briefest produced one of the most beautiful examples of Irrawang moulded ware, the so-called Aphrodite vase with the arms of the USA upon one side, while the longest took advantage of the December drought to solve the problem of drainage between H and its kiln in an area usually (and now permanently) too waterlogged to be excavated to a sufficient depth. In the December dig, she also identified and opened up the other workshop adjacent to the stoneware kiln.

In the meantime, in August 1975, she had directed a small but significant excavation on behalf of the trustees of Addington in Ryde. Behind the house visible from Victoria Road is a very early pair of two-roomed buildings. It was supposed that the one of sandstone and brick dated from the time of the grant, in 1794, and the other, of brick alone, to 1798. Maureen's elegant little report in the Australian Society for Historical Archaeology Newsletter showed that a drain 'ran beneath the foundations of the "1794" cottage thus proving that the tank, drain, and presumably the reason for it, i.e. the 1798 cottage, predated this structure.'

The last two years of her life were her happiest, with a Commonwealth Research Scholarship, candidature for a PhD at Sydney, a major topic and the opportunity to try out techniques and acquire new skills. The minor projects which Maureen fitted into these two years were significant enough pointers to the likely development of her career. At Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta, she ran two successful short seasons on the north front to answer queries unanswered in David Frankel's excavation of 1972. In Rozelle, she characteristically turned an owner's plea for some interest in his backyard well into a student experiment in dealing with a well filled with rubbish from the nineteenth century onwards: and the students who did the work are now producing the publishable report of the experiment which Maureen intended. Through the Adult Education intensive class which we ran jointly, she became involved in the recording of the important brewery-flour mill-farm site of Blaxland Park at Wallacia. Just as she had taught herself surveying to give tutorials to students of Historical Archaeology II in 1976, so she directed the recording by survey, photography and drawing of this impressive and largely unknown complex, encouraging the expertise of Bob Hislop, an engineer in the class and collaborating with Cathie O'Sullivan, a diploma student concerned with the property.

But Tasmania was her main focus in these last two years. With the very active help of Jim Allen, she undertook the study of Port Arthur, the large penal station on Tasman's Peninsula, as a test case in the relationship of historical and archaeological evidence for a colonial site. Although not restricting herself to the earliest prisoners' barracks, this site was vacant and gave promise of interest which was abundantly confirmed in her seven-week dig with substantial forces in January and February 1977. The superb records which she kept from this excavation (now deposited in the University of Sydney archives) will allow not only the posthumous publication of her draft site report and studies of some of the artefacts but also the continuation of the dig if resources can be found for the second season which Maureen had planned for January and February 1978.

As a result of her association with the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service which controls Port Arthur, Maureen was invited in 1977 to prepare an archaeological report on the Coal Mines Station on Tasman's Peninsula: this two-volume illustrated report, based on a fortnight's dig as well as historical work, was punctually produced and forthrightly expressed.

Punctuality of production was not restricted to commissioned work. Maureen not only believed that there was little merit in archaeological work which was not written up and made available in whatever form to those who might benefit, but she also set a good example. The most striking instance was her other major work in Tasmania, her study of the reconstruction of the roadway of Ross Bridge, the remarkably decorated bridge completed in 1836. The work was done in February 1976; the report was handsomely published as number three of Studies in Historical Archaeology before the year was out.

Maureen saw publication as an essential part of the archaeologist's task and her last enterprise was to edit the work done years before on

the first Presbyterian church in Balmain first by John Clegg then by John Wade. The work on the artefacts (including a fine cache of early bottles) and on reconstructing the site report was largely completed by students and recent graduates under her inspiration and will soon appear because of the energies of Jennifer van Proctor.

Maureen was happiest in the field. She knew what she wanted, and organised people, supplies, site and weather to get what she wanted. If the weather let her down, she ignored it, if people let her down they soon knew where they had failed. She was demanding and she was firm, but she was a rarely successful manager of people. She had all the authority of command. Both undergraduates and adult education students worked outstandingly well for her and most had the warmest affection for her. The distress among the student archaeologists at Sydney and among our adult education class when she suffered her fatal asthma attack was immensely moving. Since she would never ask anyone to do something she was not prepared to try herself, she was always a comrade in a camaraderie, a *prima inter pares*.

This sort of dedication which she exemplified brought her also to spend hundreds of hours over the years on preparing a corpus of the Irrawang earthenware and stoneware based on her unique acquaintance with some 15,000 sherds. It brought her to build up a first-rate working library for the colonial archaeologist from all sorts of obscure British and American sources. It drove her on to visit an extraordinary variety of historic buildings, sites and museums in Australia; it took her to Kate Holmes' expedition at Arltunga in the Northern Territory in 1977 as it had taken her to Graham Pretty's Roonka in South Australia four years before. But it never distracted her from her main priorities: for the last two years, Port Arthur, its excavation, its iconography, its written evidence dominated her academic life.

Maureen did so much so well in so short a time. Her death is a terrible waste and an abiding sadness for those who knew her.

*University of Sydney
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