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Creating a Historical Archaeology of Indigenous Australia

Мюррэй Т. Создавая историческую археологию аборигенной Австралии.

В статье рассматривается вопрос о том, как археология аборигенных обществ постконтактного периода влияет на общество, культуру и политику современной Австралии. Обратившись к дискуссии о причинах вымирания коренного населения Тасмании, автор показывает, какую роль в ней — а также и в обсуждении более общих вопросов австралийской истории после прихода европейцев — играют археологические данные

Ключевые слова: Австралия, историческая археология, аборигены, история постконтактного периода, Бёргли, Тасмания.

Abstract. This paper explores the impact of the historical archaeology of post-contact Aboriginal society on the culture and politics of contemporary Australia. Using the example of significant debates about the causes of the extinction of traditional Aboriginal society in Tasmania I explore the roles that archaeological information has played in those specific debates and in more general discussion about the history of European Australia.

Keywords: Australia, historical archaeology, Aboriginal people, post-contact history, Burghley, Tasmania.

In previous discussions about the importance of historical archaeology I have stressed that one of the most significant aspects of that discipline is its capacity to contribute to our understanding of the impact on indigenous societies of European expansion into the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia (e.g. Murray 2004a). However we need to be clear that the nature of that understanding is a matter of serious dispute, especially in the settler colonies that became nations in the Americas and Australia. There are difficult and complex issues involved, spanning the gamut from more familiar discussions related to the ownership of pasts, through to more contemporary matters revolving around the creation and maintenance of identity (see e.g. Byrne 1996; Colley 2003; DuCros 2002; Dugay-Grist 2006; Elder 2007; Ireland 1995, 2002; McBryde 1985; Murray 1992, 1993a, 1996a; Smith 2004). Historical archaeology is very actively involved in significant national debates occurring in

those settler nations, as they grapple with the consequences of colonialism. Of course these debates differ between nations — if only because of their different histories (see e.g. Eiselt 2012; Byrne 2003; Fairclough *et al.* 2008; Funari *et al.* 2005; Gamble 2008; Hull 2009; Jordan 2008; Lilley 2000; McNiven and Russell 2005; Silliman 2005; Wilcox 2009).

My purpose in this paper is to focus on a few elements of these complex debates in Australia, and to describe some of the ways the historical archaeology of indigenous Australians is currently being written. I mentioned that there was much dispute about how and why this should be done, and certainly no agreement among historians, archaeologists or indigenous people about core matters beyond perhaps the most fundamental — which is that it is vital for Australian society to come to terms with its 200 year history. But as I will show, exactly how one ‘comes to terms’ is very much the point at issue. Since the late 1990s the relationship between history and identity has become seriously contested ground in Australia, and historical archaeology is well and truly caught up in what are often extremely acrimonious debates that spill over into even more contentious issues flowing from significant post 1980s immigration into Australia. What Australia was, is, and should be are questions that excite considerable passion.

In this paper I will give these matters some coherence through a discussion of how my own work in the historical archaeology of indigenous Australia has shaped and been shaped over the past 17 years. Initially this involved intensive fieldwork in the temperate rainforests of Tasmania, which was a kind of natural flow on from a concentration on the rich Pleistocene archaeology of the continent that had been my previous focus (e. g. Murray 1992). That fieldwork was essentially brought to an end by a dispute with indigenous Tasmanian authorities over the disposition of excavated assemblages (Murray and Allen 1995; Murray 1996b). I then moved back onto the continent to begin research into the archaeology of the modern city in Sydney and Melbourne. My return to the historical archaeology of indigenous Australia was very much in response to a rapid deterioration in the politics of indigenous–settler relations that had begun to flow from the very different approach taken by the then Howard government to core matters of reconciliation and the recognition of rights to land and culture. During that time the nature of Australian history, how it was to be done and what role it should play in the maintenance of society, became a battleground — indeed it was described as such by the protagonists on both sides as the “History Wars” (see e. g. Macintyre and Clark 2003). Work that I had done a decade before suddenly became seriously contested ground, not with indigenous Tasmanians this time, but in battles with historians and conservative politicians seeking to rewrite the history of indigenous–settler relations in Australia. This dispute, which shows no signs of letting up, provided the context for new approaches to the historical archaeology of indigenous Australia which I published as “The Archaeology of Contact in Settler Societies” (2004a).

On the 25th January 2006 — on the eve of Australia Day — the former Prime Minister of Australia addressed the National Press Club on the theme: “A Sense of Balance, the Australian Achievement”. His purpose was straightforward — to celebrate the manifold virtues of being Australian: “Again, our goal must be to strive for a balance in questions of national identity and cultural diversity. And for the most part I think we achieve it. We’ve drawn back from being too obsessed with diversity

to a point where Australians are now better able to appreciate the enduring values of the national character that we proudly celebrate and preserve. We've moved on from a time when multiculturalism, in the words of the historian Gregory Melleuish, came to be associated with 'the transformation of Australia from a bad old Australia that was xenophobic, racist and monocultural to a good new Australia that is culturally diverse, tolerant and exciting'. Such a view was always a distortion and a caricature" (<http://australianpolitics.com/2006/01/25/john-howard-australia-day-address.html>).

The former Prime Minister believed that this should be rejected and one of the best ways of doing it was through History. But not just any kind of history. "Quite apart from a strong focus on Australian values, I believe the time has also come for root and branch renewal of the teaching of Australian history in our schools, both in terms of the numbers learning and the way it is taught. ...And too often, history, along with other subjects in the humanities, has succumbed to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record of achievement is questioned or repudiated" (<http://australianpolitics.com/2006/01/25/john-howard-australia-day-address.html>).

Burghley and the Tasmanians (1826–1850)

I went to Tasmania in 1986 to begin work on the archaeology of the Van Diemen's Land Company (or VDL), a commercial enterprise begun in 1825. The Van Diemen's Land Company was the primary agent for the destruction of traditional Aboriginal society in the northwest of Tasmania (fig. 1).

Initially my research mostly concentrated on the development of managerial strategies among transnational entities, which came to be a hallmark of the industrial age. The second focus was on the material consequences of those policies. The VDL stands as an excellent example of a private colonisation in Australia — one of a very few world-wide that survive into the present, with a complex interplay of state and free market that had a tremendous impact on the human geography of northwest Tasmania in the 'making of the northwest Tasmanian landscape'. The imprint of the aspirations of the VDL Directors and managers is found in the names of towns, the size of landholdings, the designs of farm houses, the placement of roads and ports, even in the bloodlines of local stock (Duxbury 1989; Lennox 1990; McFarlane 2002; Meston 1958; Murray 1988, 2000; Plomley 1966, 1992).

In the first phases of research I considered Aboriginal history and contact archaeology to be peripheral to the larger



Fig. 1. Map showing VDL Company holdings in north west Tasmania.

Рис. 1. Карта владений компании VDL на северо-западе Тасмании.

task of integrating policy, company ideology, landscape and material culture into a convincing account of the first 25 years of VDL operations. Historical research demonstrated that clashes had occurred between the Company servants and the local Aboriginal population, but in the absence of detailed investigations of the VDL archive there seemed to be little that would survive archaeologically of this period of conflict. Indeed, I understood Burghley (the site that was to become the focus of my efforts) as being primarily a European site, and thereby (probably unconsciously) excluded an Aboriginal dimension. Again unconsciously, I was subscribing to the view that European settlement had wiped the slate of history clean and had created the country anew. Thus initial investigations at Burghley conformed to a model of doing the archaeology of European Australia. Aboriginal involvement in this research was considered to be necessary only if unambiguous evidence of Aboriginal activity was found on the site, and the historical research indicated that an Aboriginal presence at Burghley was highly unlikely (see especially Murray 1993b; Williamson 2002).

Excavation of the site proved otherwise and it became necessary for me to refocus research into the company away from a primary concern with ideology and landscape, to a broader investigation of the consequences of dispossession of the local Aboriginal people. I concluded that these consequences extended beyond the murders and deportations which were a central feature of the frontier experience in northwest Tasmania. My object became to understand how the factor of conflict, between white and black and between convict and gaoler, master and servant, also shaped VDL ideology and policy. Excavation of Burghley revealed more of the hidden history of the contact period in Tasmania and provided an opportunity for me to recognise the validity of a much broader indigenous interest in the archaeology of settler places; particularly in places where there may be no direct evidence of Aboriginal activity, but which were, nonetheless, founded and maintained in opposition to Aboriginal people. It also came to underwrite my desire to explore whether there could be a legitimate settler interest in the archaeology of indigenous places created since contact.

I revisit the story of Burghley in this paper because of the role it has come to play in the “History Wars” and in the development of the historical archaeology of indigenous Australia.

Burghley 1827–1842

Burghley, in the heart of the Surrey Hills area of the VDL grant (fig. 2), was the first of the stock camps established in the area in 1827. Its abandonment by the Company around 1839 marked a change in land-use strategies, as the VDL attempted to reduce the level of its involvement in the Surrey Hills. The Surrey Hills were first explored by Henry Hellyer in 1827. An avid reader of German romantic poetry, he equated spectacular scenery with quality farm land. His reports of park-like uplands ringed by snow-capped mountains stirred the imagination of a Company management needing a place to de-pasture the first consignment of sheep which were at that stage enduring the sea voyage from England.

It transpired that the park-like aspect was the result of intensive Aboriginal burning, that the soils were too poor for agriculture, that the remnant *nothofagus* and *schlerophyll* forests were ever-ready to re-colonize the grasslands, that it snowed in



Fig. 2. Burghley before excavation. The remains of the chimney butt is flanked by steel poles.

Рис. 2. Бёргли до раскопок. Остов основания трубы отмечен стальными вехами.

summer, and that the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Hills were in a mood to resist dispossession. Nearly all of the first consignment of sheep froze to death in the first year, a devastating blow to the fledgling enterprise. The loss in self-confidence was greater. Henry Hellyer's romantic sensibilities were never to recover. Although a superb surveyor and a highly competent leader, especially in the incredibly tough country of upland north west Tasmania, he succumbed to melancholy and blew his head off some three years later.

I excavated Burghley between 1988 and 1990 (fig. 3). After two seasons the outlines of a house attached to a more substantial chimney butt of mortared rock were defined. Other important features were a midden, a drain and two cobbled areas (fig. 4). Befitting a stock camp inhabited by poor shepherds, the assemblage of material culture was sparse. Excavation showed that the house had been destroyed by fire, and (controversially) that the building was inhabited by Aboriginal people after its abandonment by the Company (fig. 5). This claim was supported by three lines of evidence: stratigraphic, documentary and material culture (see Murray 1993b; Murray and Williamson 2003; Williamson 2002).

Stratigraphic evidence

The large numbers of stone artefacts on the site in the main clustered around the house. At the base of the chimney butt a quartz manuport was wedged between the

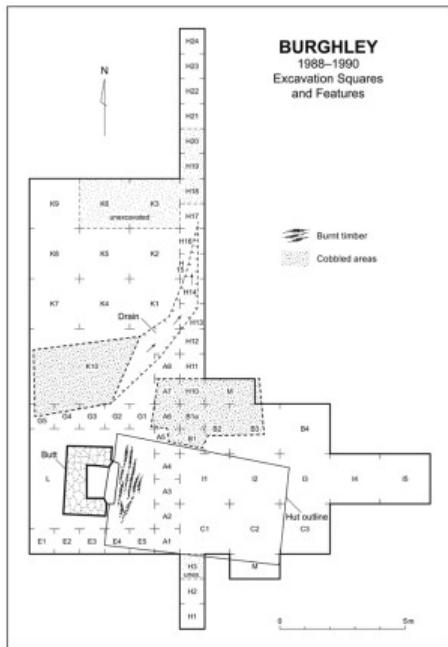


Fig. 3. Site map of Burghley.

Рис. 3. Бёргли. План раскопок.

fallen chimney stones and the charred floorboards in association with a broken clay pipe, the remains of a tin can, a spoon, and a musket flint. After the first excavation season we felt that the stone tools were from an earlier (pre-European) occupation, the evidence from the second season clearly indicated that the bulk of the stone tools were deposited after the site was abandoned by Company servants.

That said, a stone tool was recovered from a level 10cm below the foundations of the house, along with an in situ deposit of charcoal, dated at 3370 ± 90 bp (Beta 38780). On this basis we know that indigenous people occupied the site prior to the settlers. Further work in an associated research project running in the same area confirmed a complex settlement system linking shelter sites and open sites such as Burghley, which had a history of some 32000 years and which had changed significantly during the Holocene (Murray *et al.* 1990).

Documentary evidence

The likelihood that Burghley had been reoccupied was a complete surprise. All documentary evidence indicated open warfare between the Aboriginal people and Company servants shortly after Burghley was built, that had continued until the very last of the Aborigines were deported to Flinders Island in 1842. A shared occupation at Burghley was simply out of the question. Burghley was regularly attacked, and its occupants were driven off on more than one occasion. A good example is the events around 25 September 1828, when at half past three in the morning Henry Hellyer

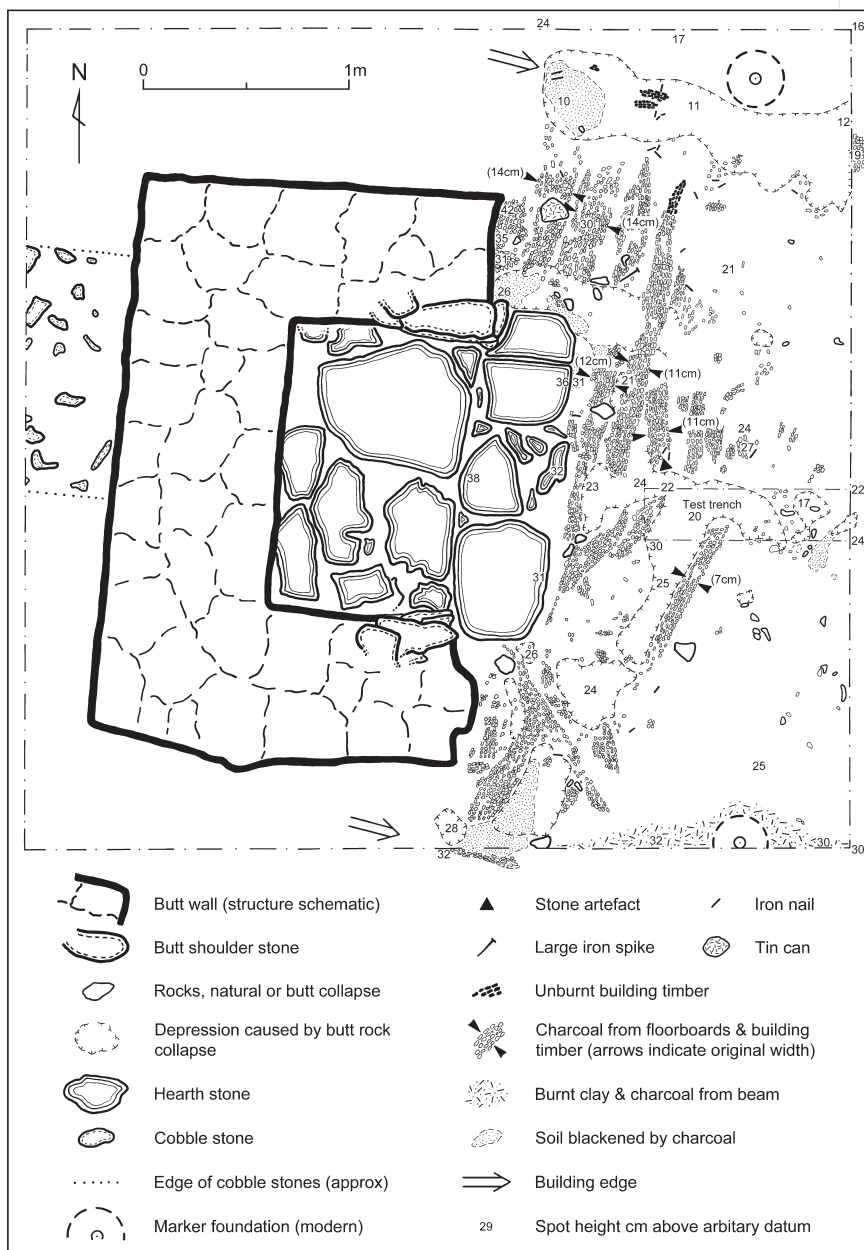


Fig. 4. Detail of the area immediately in front of the hearth and chimney butt.

Рис. 4. План участка с очагом и остовом основания трубы.



Fig. 5. Burghley as excavated. The chimney butt, cobbled areas and burn scars are all visible.

Рис. 5. Раскоп в Бёргли. Видны остов трубы, мощные участки и пятна гари.

reported (from Emu Bay) to Company headquarters at Circular Head (further to the west on the coast): “On my arrival here this afternoon September 24 two of the men from Burghleigh had reached this place in a most deplorable state namely Gunshannon and N. Russell and at this moment at half past five poor Murray and McGuffee literally covered with blood have just crawled from the same place. The natives attacked them yesterday afternoon 23rd at 3 o’clock and left one or two of them for dead and the poor lacerated have been ever since getting thus far” (VDL archive 23/2:304).

Historians have tabulated the violence between Company servants and Aboriginal people on Company lands which occurred between 1827 and 1842. A sharp escalation of conflict occurred in the Surrey Hills from 1828 until George Augustus Robinson’s ‘mission of conciliation’ reached the tribes of the northwest between February and November 1832, and when the bulk of the indigenous population were induced to leave their lands (see e.g. Lennox 1990; McFarlane 2002; Meston 1958; Plomley 1992). During this period there was a sharp divergence between the “official” policy of the Company (and especially of its Tasmanian Agent, Edward Curr), and the reality of life in the bush, where the behaviour of some shepherds and convicts veered between an arrogant disregard for Aboriginal lives (and especially of the liberty of Aboriginal women), and a justified fear of reprisal.

Historians have estimated that the bulk of the attacks by Aborigines were reprisals for murders, rapes, or abductions by servants of the VDL. The incident reported above was held by Lennox to be a response to the shooting of an Aboriginal women

by two Company servants earlier that September (Lennox 1990). Although there was occasionally a measure of panic among the VDL servants, for the most part they were able to 'retaliate' in an 'effective' manner, kicking off a spiral of violence where actions of almost unimaginable savagery took place against a background of official policies of conciliation. Yet there was always some ambiguity. After the attack on Burghley, the Court of Directors in London expressed their sympathy to the wounded but emphasized that: "every measure should be tried to conciliate and civilize the natives to make them your friends instead of your enemies, this is no doubt a difficult task but still it is the duty of the Company to attempt it, and if they can be brought into a state of comparatively social comfort it will be conferring upon them a greater boon than the value of the range and hunting of the Lands of which they will be deprived, and of which the Company will have possession. The Court cannot too strongly urge these attempts upon you, they are aware of the difficulties which have increased since the natives and the Servants have come in contact and blood spilt; they are also aware that a knowledge of the strength and power of the Company must first be proved to exist and fully impressed upon the natives and on that account the court send you by the Friendship some Fire Arms, particularly pistols which they conceive will be of more use than muskets because they can be carried about the person; you will therefore be fully prepared for war and possessing power, you will leave no steps untried to prevent hostile contact with the Natives, and to promote friendship and conciliation".

This ambiguity might have resolved a possible conflict between the commercial goals and the Christian values of the Court of Directors in London but it had little impact in the Tasmanian bush. A great divergence between official policy and the reality of life on the frontier occurred right across south east Australia in the first forty years of the nineteenth century. However, it had different effects in Tasmania than elsewhere. Although it is true that massacres as well as the almost casual taking of individual Aboriginal lives occurred in Tasmania as well as in other places, in the northwest of Tasmania all attempts at binding Aboriginal people into the web of pastoral life failed dismally. The contrast between the Cape Grim massacre, where approximately thirty Aboriginal people were murdered by Company servants on 10 February 1828, and the infamous Myall Creek massacre which took place in northern New South Wales a decade later, is instructive. At Cape Grim 'wild' blacks were murdered, while at Myall Creek thirty Aboriginal people (some of whom were working for, and sleeping with, the local white people), were slaughtered in the station stockyards (see e. g. Murray 2004b). It is this lack of success in showing the Aboriginal people the 'blessings of civilized life', and the change from policies of 'conciliation' to deportation which makes it unlikely that indigenous people had lived with settlers at Burghley.

Material culture evidence

The third line of evidence is the pattern of material culture found at the site. The mixing of Aboriginal and European material culture might be partially explained by earlier Aboriginal material being brought up in excavating foundation trenches for the house. Other material culture evidence was considered to be decisive. Glass tools emulate classic Tasmanian forms made on stone (fig. 6). Musket and pistol flints are flaked into Aboriginal forms, (fig. 7) and two traditional forms of bone tools

are made on dog and bovid, which are of course introduced species (fig. 8). The midden has wallaby and horse bones in the same stratigraphic units. The midden might tell a story of Europeans adapting to life on the frontier and broadening their diet, but it could not explain the glass tools, the modified gunflints or the quartz manuport near the chimney butt.

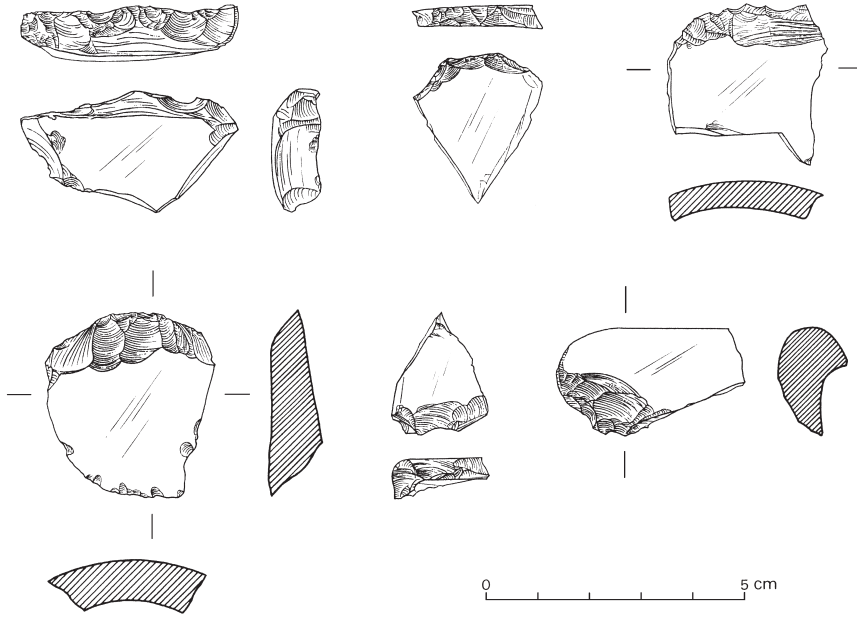


Fig. 6. Artefacts made on bottle glass in traditional Tasmanian lithic forms.

Рис. 6. Изделия из бутылочного стекла, повторяющие форму традиционных тасманийских каменных орудий.

The probability that Burghley had been reoccupied after abandonment by the Company was controversial, but the search for the identities of the occupants produced even more sensational results.

The indigenous people at Burghley

By 1835, George Augustus Robinson, whose role in the deportation of Aboriginal people to Flinders Island is well documented, was claiming that with the possible exception of some small groups, the entire Aboriginal population of Tasmania had been removed to Flinders Island and the Black War was over. Nonetheless reports from VDL settlements during 1836 of further violence and robbery compelled Robinson to despatch his last mission. Late in 1836 Robinson's sons found a family

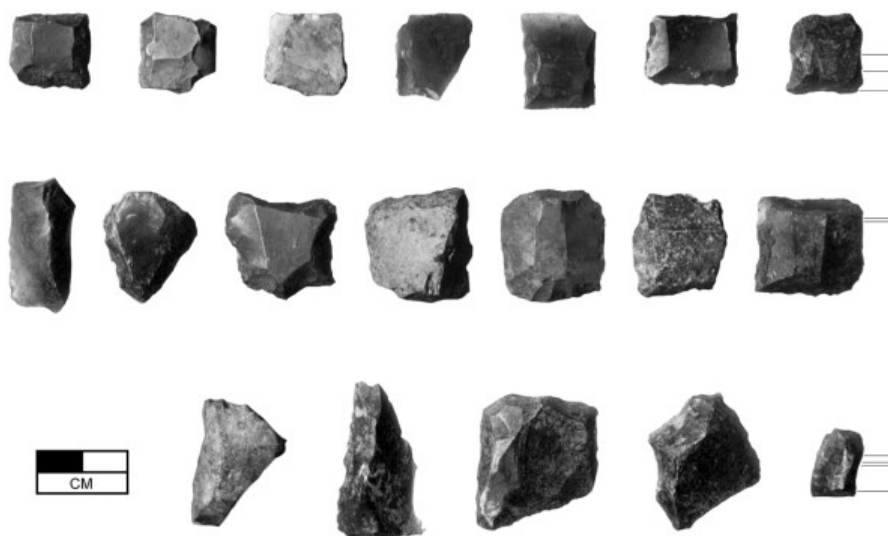


Fig. 7. European musket flints reused and reshaped by Aboriginal occupants of Burghley.
Рис. 7. Мушкетные кремни, переделанные аборигенными обитателями Бёргли в орудия.

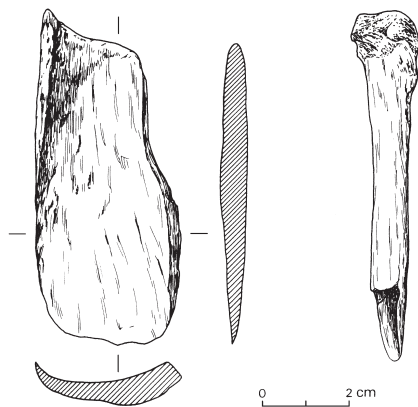


Fig. 8. Bone artefacts made on bovid (scraper) and dog (point).
Рис. 8. Изделия из костей полорогого (скребло) и собаки (острие).

group (a man, a woman and four or five children) but could not persuade them to surrender. Violent clashes continued in the Surrey Hills until 1842.

On 10 December 1842 William Gibson, the newly appointed Superintendent of the Van Diemen's Land Company, wrote to the Court of Directors of the demise of traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal society: "The Court will be glad to learn that the natives who had hitherto been so troublesome were captured upon the 4th instant near the River Arthur and forwarded them yesterday to Launceston, their party consisted of a middle-aged man and female, two males about 18 and 20 years of age, and three male children between 3 and 7 years old".

The man was known as John Lanna, his wife was Nabrunga, the five children were Banna, Pieti, Albert, William and Frank. John Lanna and his family, it seems, were the people contacted by Robinson's sons behind Cradle Mountain in 1836. The timing is crucial. After 1834 Robinson's evidence indicates only a small family group are left free in northwest Tasmania, which coincides with a marked decline in incidents of violence (until 1839). We do not know the exact date of the European abandonment of Burghley (but by the late 1830s it was an outpost of only minor importance), and a likely date is around 1839. It is a reasonable conjecture that the people who left the Aboriginal artefacts found at Burghley, and fought the guerilla actions against the VDL after 1836, were this family group. Only William and Banna survived internment at Flinders Island. William Lanne was to live until 1869 employed as a whaler. He was the last full-blood Tasmanian Aboriginal man to die (fig. 9).

During the early 1990s as we continued with our attempts to write the Pleistocene and Holocene histories of the region, my primary interest was in drawing lessons that might be learned by the broad Australian public from our work at Burghley. I stressed the importance of acknowledging the shared histories of indigenous and settler Australians exemplified at such places.

Making this acknowledgement has proved to be very difficult for many, both indigenous and settler, as it raised the ghosts of a terrible violent past and directly questioned the moral legitimacy of the settler occupation of the north west. But of equal importance was the lessons the site had to teach archaeologists about the capacities of traditional Tasmanian society to adapt and to survive. Both of these aspects of Burghley were to become a great deal more controversial a decade later.



Fig. 9. A portrait photograph of William Lanne.

Рис. 9. Фотопортрет Уильяма Лэнна.

The history wars and “The Fabrication of Aboriginal History”

Beginning in the early 1990s and gathering much greater momentum after the election of a conservative government in 1996, the nature of the settlement of Australia by the British became the subject of intense national debate. Was it a generally humane appropriation of essentially virgin lands by colonists seeking a better life, or was it something less noble, less praiseworthy? Up to this point the national story had been one of courage, will to win, innovation and egalitarianism, but it came to be understood that this only worked if you managed not to mention the original owners of the land and what had happened to them in the 200 years since first settlement. Aboriginal history as an academic field had been born in the late 1960s, and in the 30 years that followed, research unfolded a complex and troubling story that is widely understood to have bolstered moves towards granting self determination and ‘native title’ to indigenous groups (see e.g. Attwood and Foster 2003; Reynolds 1981). Although there was widespread public approval of attempts to seek reconciliation with indigenous Australia, some historians and politicians of the right firmly believed that their opponents had, to all intents and purposes, fabricated evidence of conflict on the frontier, and subsequent transgressions of the rights and liberties of Aboriginal people. Chief among these is Keith Windshuttle whose “The Fabrication of Aboriginal History”, was published in 2002. The back cover blurb states its purpose loud and clear. His intention was to reappraise: “the now widely accepted story about conflict between colonists and Aborigines in Australian history...Windshuttle concludes that much of their case is poorly founded, other parts are seriously mistaken, and some of it is outright fabrication... The author finds the British colonization of Australia was the least violent of all Europe’s encounters with the New World”.

In “The Fabrication” Windschuttle writes about the history of Van Diemen’s Land between 1803 and 1847, and makes a several claims about traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal society that he regards as being supported by available archaeological and ethno-historical evidence. Most memorably when summarizing the fate of the Tasmanians: “They had survived for millennia, it is true, but it seems clear that this owed more to good fortune than to good management. The ‘slow strangulation of the mind’ was true not only of their technical abilities but also of their social relationships. Hence it was not surprising that when the British arrived, this small, precarious society quickly collapsed under the dual weight of the susceptibility of its members to disease and the abuse and neglect of its women” (Windschuttle 2002: 386).

In essence the destruction of traditional society was the fault of the Tasmanians, not the British. Notwithstanding Windshuttle’s strictures against fabrication, this was the grossest distortion of archaeological and historical evidence, and a group of us were organised by my colleague Robert Manne to refute him. Our essays were collected as “Whitewash” (Manne 2003).

Of course the archaeological evidence did not support Windshuttle’s claims concerning three characteristics of Tasmanian society prior to the arrival of the Europeans. First, that it was internally maladapted; second, that it was precariously balanced, and third, that it was dysfunctional: “The real tragedy of the Aborigines was not British colonization per se but that their society was, on the one hand, so

internally dysfunctional and, on the other, so incompatible with the looming presence of the rest of the world” (2002: 386). But the strongest evidence against Windshuttle came from historical archaeology.

The 45 years of European occupation of Tasmania provides ample evidence that during this period when traditional society was brought to the brink of extinction Aboriginal people rapidly adopted new animals (dogs), and material culture (guns and blankets), sometimes modifying them to traditional uses (glass for tools and rust as a substitute for ochre). Clearly the descendants of those who had coped with an ice age and the separation of Tasmania from the continent of Australia had not lost their desire (nor indeed their capacity) to attempt to cope with change. Historical archaeology was able to create an image of cultural dynamism and adaptation rather than of regression. Burghley played a pivotal role in that refutation and has ensured that historians of both the left and the right now at least appreciate the value of archaeological evidence and perspectives.

New Archaeologies/ New Histories

The emphasis on fabrication and of the inherent unreliability of oral testimony and ethnohistory in comparison to written documents (a point driven home in litigation over native title claims) raises some significant challenges and opportunities for historical archaeology. How can Australian archaeologists effectively meet the interests of indigenous communities, and of a broader Australian community which is seeking both a deeper understanding of the human history of the continent, and a reconciliation with its indigenous peoples? A significant part of the answers to this difficult question lies in a reconsideration of the role archaeology should play in constructing new identities.

Although there are real differences of approach and purpose among practitioners (for example some believing that the historical archaeology of Aboriginal Australia is solely aboriginal history) the resultant diversity provides a stimulating and rapidly evolving locus for making history. The central issue here concerns the methodology of history-writing. During the course of the last decade Australian prehistoric archaeology has witnessed the final rejection of earlier views that Aboriginal history could only begin with the arrival of the Europeans. But what has replaced it? It is increasingly well understood that an indigenous interest in historical archaeology revolves around the need to comprehend the experience of dispossession and cultural survival. For Aboriginal people, exploring indigenous history over the past 200 years can enhance understanding about the histories of separation and sharing that are so much a feature of community life, while at the same time providing a rich store of information from which such communities can renegotiate or reshape their identities within modern Australian society. Of course this is hardly a risk-free environment as we have already seen in my brief discussion of the “History Wars”.

A focus on historical archaeology means that we have to identify and deal with the consequences of what Nick Thomas termed the ‘entanglements’ of indigenes and settlers (Thomas 1991). The existence of ‘shared histories’ and ‘shared identities’ does not mean that there can ever be or should ever be, a single account of those histories or those identities. Indeed one of the most exciting aspects of history making in this field is the very diversity of interests and the strong sense that these

interests are quite plastic. Acknowledging diversity, and recognising the fact that in some contexts and for some audiences, constructing separate histories (separate in the sense of indigenous and non-indigenous, urban and rural, women and men, labour and capital, European and Asian) does not in any sense absolutely entail that this should apply in every case (see e.g. Harrison 2004; Murray 1996c).

But such arguments will also be bolstered by the creation of what I have called 'conjectural histories' of social and cultural landscapes in the 19th and 20th centuries that can serve to chart the lives of Aboriginal people during those times when they were of little interest to white Australia (see e.g. Murray 2000b). Of course all histories are 'conjectural', but these new histories carry this into the realm of methodology as well and thereby run the significant risk of being declared 'fabrications' by Windshuttle and others.

These new 'conjectural' histories will be the product of integrations of data and perspectives derived from traditional sources such as anthropology, oral history, ethnohistory, and detailed documentary research, and from newer sources such as studies of contact and post-contact landscapes, that integrate specifically archaeological and historical data. The techniques of landscape (physical, social, cultural, symbolic) reconstruction are already fundamentally in place, deriving from a more widespread application of GIS software to create complex maps with a wide variety of spatio-temporal scales. At the same time approaches similar to those used to map the shape and context of traditional land use in the Canadian Arctic (pioneered by Robinson and others) are being applied along side low-tech reconstructions of contact landscape through the use of explorer's maps (see e.g. Robinson 1994; Hewitt 2000). A richer history of Aboriginal communities, patterns of residence, work and social relationships in the towns as well as in the bush, and the role of heritage sites (both recent and ancient) in the maintenance of identity are now firmly in prospect and are best exemplified in Rodney Harrison's analysis of pastoral heritage in NSW (Harrison 2004) and in Mike Smith's marvellous longitudinal historical archaeology of the Cleland Hills in Central Australia between 1850 and 1890 (Smith 2005).

The same approach can and is being applied to interactions between the black and white communities in those areas that form the core of 'shared' histories and 'shared' identities. Of course landscape archaeology in itself will never be enough to create these new histories. Detailed archaeological analysis of Aboriginal places integrated into a diversity of histories — both indigenous and non-indigenous — is also essential, but so too is theory and perspective (again indigenous and non-indigenous) as sources of conjectures. Jane Lydon's recently published "Fantastic Dreaming: The Archaeology of Ebenezer Mission in Victoria" is a good example of what is being achieved on that front (Lydon 2009).

It is also important to note that historical archaeologists don't just have to convince people like Windshuttle of the value of these new histories. Notwithstanding their richness as sources of data and perspective, in the main the new histories continue to be essentially unintegrated with archaeological studies, and archaeologists have to struggle to convince many historians about whether archaeological data or perspectives have much to add. Such scepticism is not completely unfounded because the archaeological characterisation of post-contact indigenous societies (even at the level of material culture, not to mention issues of gender, power, or identity) continues to challenge us. Of course there is abundant evidence of the

strong interest indigenous people have in charting the histories of their communities, and archaeology obviously has a role to play here. However we also have the chance to reveal the significance of archaeological data and perspectives for the creation of histories that will address our general need to understand the experiences of indigenous societies during a period of great transformation. The shape and composition of such histories, and the meanings of archaeological data that will both shape and be integrated into them, are still to be determined.

Concluding remarks

There have been many fine analyses of the history wars. Stuart Macintyre has argued that histories that seek to downplay frontier violence or the role of the British in the destruction of traditional indigenous societies are in essence responding to changes to the social and cultural fabric of Australia that have begun to call into question long-held beliefs about the meaning of Australian history. The idea that Australian nationalism in 1901 (when the nation was created by act of parliament) had its roots in a deep racism (not just towards indigenous people but also towards Asians as well) is hardly a novel one. But the question of whether this remains appropriate for Australia over a century after nationhood is highly contentious and difficult to answer. However the first steps on a long journey towards a new kind of nationhood have been taken, and one of the images that has begun to emerge is of diversity. There is no single national story, but many. There is no 'essential' Australian, be they indigenous, settler or recent immigrant. Historical archaeology has the capacity to reveal how material culture and landscapes carry information about transformation, continuity, diversity and community that are vital ingredients for new national stories.

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