THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIA'S PREHISTORIC PAST

As I was putting together the text of this lecture, and in a moment of day-dreaming, it entered my head that someone who had been for so long in the harness of the University of Sydney as myself (I estimate that I have already given some 1500 lectures) could have declined to give an inaugural lecture. Avoidance would have been easy, because the giving of an inaugural address is a custom not always engaged in these days. However my branch of anthropology is facing a challenge in one of its arenas – namely Australia. So I have taken the opportunity that an inaugural lecture offers to evaluate the future of Australian prehistory, in an address that reaches an audience wider than the students who have attended those many lectures that I have already delivered in departmental theatres.

I spoke of being in harness, but it has been a rewarding period in harness. I count myself as privileged to have been associated so long with this great university and with a department of anthropology composed of people with broad intellectual interests who offer stimulating, if at times robust, human relations.

The Department of Anthropology encompasses all the fields that are traditional to the subject of anthropology:

- social anthropology, reaching out towards sociology (Professor Peter Lawrence is the Professor most concerned with this part of our department's activities)
- anthropological linguistics
- anthropology.

My special field is prehistory. A broad definition of the scope of prehistory (using homely words) is to find out how the human world got to be in the state it was before written records became available.

Given the affectations that academia sometimes puts on, any self-respecting academic discipline should be able to trace its roots into two bodies of literature - the classics and Dr Johnson. Leaving Dr Johnson on one side, writers in Greek and Latin did concern themselves with the prehistory of the human species and even, in a desultory way, with antipodean prehistory. They speculated about how

the world got to be as it was, though of course their thoughts were largely empty of empirical content. They had no method for investigating the past.

This is no occasion on which to review the classics, but let me bring to your attention a few diverting examples – diverting, but instructive. The Elder Pliny, writing about the year 70 AD, speaks of "... the great fight between learning and the masses".[1] The theory of learning is that there are men all around the earth whose feet point to the centre. The objection of the masses to this theory is – why do not the people on the other side fall off? With a remarkably non-ethnocentric view of his place in the world, Pliny comments that it would be as reasonable for the antipodeans to ask why he did not fall off!

Though Pliny wrote of a great fight between learning and the masses, it was not a fight with institutionalized learning, nor was it a fight about whether or not there were people in the antipodes. That fight was to come when learning became centred in the Church, whose prehistory (if we can call it that) derived from Hebrew writings that offered a monogenetic origin for the human species, an origin that (given the time that was supposedly available) would not have allowed people to spread out as far as the antipodes, even if the antipodes did exist.

Indeed some writers thought that even speculating about the antipodes had to be quashed. The writer Lactantius, in about 300 AD, says "About the antipodes ... one can neither hear nor speak without laughter. It is asserted as something serious, that we should believe that there are men who have their feet opposite to ours. The ravings of Anaxagorous are more tolerable who said that there was black snow".[2] Soon after Lactantius, Augustine wrote: "The idea is too absurd to mention that some men might have sailed from our part of the earth to the other and have arrived there by crossing the boundless tracks of ocean, so that the human race might be established there also by descent from the first one man".[3]

Speculation about antipodean prehistory became not only improper but dangerous. Virgil, an Irish monk living in Salzburg in 748 AD, was accused of heresy for believing in the antipodes. He survived. Not so fortunate was d'Ascoli, who in the thirteenth century was burned to death, one of the charges brought against him being that he believed in the antipodes.[4]

Then, of course, the voyages of the 15th and 16th centuries found the New World. The voyages of the 17th century found the Antipodes but found that they had already been found – that there were people living there. These discoveries were a severe blow to the intellectual authority of the world of learning.

One of my favourite pieces of tendentious anthropological writing (that took

1. *Natural History* II:LXV.
2. *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* XXXIX.
3. *City of God* XVI:IX.
4. J.K. Wright (1925). "Geographical lore of the time of the Crusades." *Am.Geogr.Soc., Research Series No. 15.*

account of these discoveries) was published in 1695 as a pamphlet in England. It was published anonymously – prehistory was slightly dangerous, even in 1695. The writer discusses the implications of the finding of unknown people and unknown species of animals. He writes: "how come those myriads of people and new animals ... into those immense countries ... discovered more lately by ... van Dieman, Tasman and others? The Indian canoes could not transport them over such boisterous long seas ... neither can we fetch them from the capes of Africa or Asia. I see no way at present to solve this new face of nature by old arguments ... unless some new philosopher starts up with a fresh system; in the meantime, let them all be Aborigines"[5].

Some 150 years later the fresh system was started up. It is what we now call prehistoric archaeology. By the use of the methods of prehistoric archaeology prehistory is written. Prehistory's sources are artefacts and osteological remains ordered in time and space. Its scope is the human species.

At times, prehistory is as dry as the dust that settles in its museums, at other times exciting enough to be waited upon by melodramatic journalism. Prehistory has threatened many a dogma. The antiquity of the human species, (demonstrated by the unimpeachable occurrence of stone artefacts in ancient stratified European gravels to predate the present form of the world) was one of the great empirical achievements of prehistoric archaeology. Prehistory has fulfilled the great prediction of Charles Darwin, that the ancient fossil ancestors of human beings should be looked for in Africa – looked for in Africa because the comparative anatomy of humans, chimpanzees and gorillas suggested to Darwin a close evolutionary relationship. I had the privilege to be in East Africa when the first Australopithecines were discovered there and dated to 2 million years ago, but it was not until I came to Australia that I read Darwin and realized what a satisfying event those discoveries would have been to Darwin himself.

Again, prehistory has shown what we now accept as a truism, that the whole human species has a hunting and gathering past, and that food production by pastoralism and farming is a superficially recent development, even for *Homo sapiens sapiens*. In addition, prehistoric archaeology has excavated, from stratified deposits of the last ten millennia, remains of plants and animals that allow us to trace the evolution, by artificial selection, of the very plants and animals on which the world depends today for its supplies of food. It has shown, for example, the evolution of maize, sheep, barley and (it is likely in the near future with expanding prehistoric research in South and East Asia) rice.

All this is the scientific face of prehistory. But it is not the only face that some have claimed to see. Some have seen prehistory as part of the ideology used by dominant groups, of European origin, to justify their oppression of peoples outside Europe. The evolutionary pattern, that is woven through both cultural prehis-

5. This rare pamphlet is quoted by T. Bendysche (1865). "The History of Anthropology." *Mem.Anthropol.Soc.Lond.* 1:335-458.

tory and physical anthropology, has been seen as bolstering the view (to put it bluntly) that Whites, especially north west European Whites, are innately superior and others innately inferior.

Notwithstanding this belief, a mere browse through journals of prehistory will show that prehistory is not ideologically committed in this way, nor is it organized institutionally in a manner that gives credence to such a belief. Indeed prehistoric archaeology has shown that my ancestors, and the ancestors of many of us in this Great Hall tonight, were dilatory hunters and gatherers in NW Europe, while villages and towns flourished around the Mediterranean. Four thousand years later, and a mere two thousand years ago, my British ancestors were dragged momentarily into the light of history by invading Romans, to enjoy four hundred years of peace and prosperity. Then the Romans pulled out and my ancestors relapsed into largely unrelieved barbarism. There is nothing in the prehistory of north west Europe to give comfort to racial supremicists.

Indeed, that evil architect of Nazi policy, Heinrich Himmler, saw the dangers of prehistoric research to the Aryan mystique and so set up an archaeological wing of the Schutzstaffel (the SS) to transform the prehistoric German pots and stone axes, that were seen to contrast so poorly with the Parthenon, into objects that the Germans could empathize with – objects exuding the essence of Aryanality.[6]

At the same time as this dangerous nonsense was going on in Germany, Japanese prehistory was alarming its authorities. It was indicating that the Japanese, as described by tradition and the historic records, had not always been in Japan. The archaeologists were excavating prehistoric cultures that it made no taxonomic sense to call Japanese. Some archaeologists were suggesting that Japanese culture was a relatively recent arrival from Asia, a culture that had superimposed itself on earlier, unrelated cultures.[7] Such findings were considered to threaten the divinity of the Emperor and prehistoric archaeology was censored. Again, prehistory was dangerous.

It is true that some archaeologists of European origin have attempted to deny people of other cultures the authorship of cultural achievements. The Easter Islanders have been denied authorship of their statues; Aborigines of their rock art. The least insane of these theories (if we can have degrees of insanity in such matters) attempts to attribute the works to the Egyptians. Most insane are the attempts to attribute them to space men. Such ideas run riot through the public mind. But archaeologists with ideas of this sort are a minute minority within the profession. Prehistorians, on the whole, have ignored such extravagances or worked to restore sanity in the public mind and pointed out that it is not only Europeans who are capable of imaginative achievement, a view trenchantly put by Peter White in his book *The Past is Human*.[8]

6. J.C. Fest (1963). *The Face of the Third Reich*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.
7. C.M. Aikens and Takayasu Higuchi (1982). *Prehistory of Japan*. NY: Academic Press.
8. J.P. White (1974). *The Past is Human*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.

Of course prehistory may be captured and subverted by interest groups outside itself. It has numbered among its practitioners those to whom the pursuit of knowledge takes second place to the fighting of a cause. But on the whole the record of prehistory is clean – and to the extent that data can speak for itself the data of prehistory speaks with so many tongues as to discourage monism.

Even that most contentious area of study in prehistory – human skeletal remains – does not, in my view, threaten the evolutionary egalitarianism that people of liberal intellectual persuasion profess. From the worry that some people show about osteological studies I really do think that, in their heart of hearts, they believe that non-caucasian people (and possibly some caucasian people from countries other than their own) have disguised tails that physical anthropology risks revealing. On the contrary, it is my experience that a comparative physical anthropology that includes the statistical analysis of cranial measurements is a speedy cure for the type of outrageous theoretical opinion expressed to the Anthropological Society (now Royal Anthropological Society) in 1864 by James Reddie, who said that evolutionary theory assigned to us the ape for an ancestor, mediately through the Negro.[9] The rebuttal of that fantasy came five years later in 1869 from a careful assessment of the size and shape of eight crania from West Africa – an area where it was popularly believed (by Europeans, and to use the deplorable language of the day) the most degraded members of the Negro race lived. The conclusion of Smith and Turner in 1869, after their quantified analysis, was that the skulls showed no such appearance of degradation, and one of the male skulls had an internal capacity of 93 cubic inches, well above the average for caucasians. This discovery was not buried away but reported in the *Popular Science Review*, the equivalent of today's *Scientific American*.

We can see that craniometry has not been the threat to liberal values that it has been so widely believed to be. This is not to deny that some specimens were collected in indefensible circumstances; the point that I am making now is that it would be wrong to assert that physical anthropology, in its intent and practice and in its results, is essentially racist. It is not.

I have already made the point that a prehistoric archaeology, that gathers data, can worry interests external to prehistory itself. But in addition, new fieldwork can be a worry to interests that exist within prehistory. There are vested interests for maintaining interpretations of the past, made by one generation, against the threat of new fieldwork by the next generation. And since the earlier generation often has in its hands the granting of permissions (money, permits) we face the risk of stagnation self-imposed by the discipline itself. Stagnation is a risk in any discipline – but archaeology has the added risk of the need to get permission to carry out fieldwork. On the whole, this potential risk has not manifested itself, certainly not in Australia. In fact, the risks to the progress of knowledge, coming from the denial of permission, are perhaps not as great as those that come from

9. *J.Anthropol.Soc.* (1864). II:CXVII.

the desire to generalize from very few cases. This desire is understandable, given the sheer uncomfortableness and expense of fieldwork.

To illustrate my point about the dangers of stretched generalization I will refer to fieldwork conducted for the last four years on the Liverpool Plains, north northwest of Sydney and south of Gunnedah.

This work, much of the strategy for which was worked out with Paul Gorecki (then a tutor in my department, now a post-doctoral fellow at the Australian National University) is clipping the wings of three generalizations that have been made about Australian prehistory. These generalizations are

(1) that Diprotodon (the marsupial analogue of the rhinoceros), and other elements of the Australian megafauna such as short faced kangaroos called Procoptodon and the marsupial lion Thylacoleo) became extinct at or shortly after the first settlement of Australia by human beings – that is before 30,000 years ago.

(2) the second generalization is a cultural one, based on the analysis of stone industries, namely that the manifestation of the core tool and scraper tradition (the Kartan, an industry that shows core tools predominating over scrapers)[10] is early in the sequence of Australian stone industries perhaps the earliest tradition that we have in the Australian Pleistocene.

(3) the third generalization (and this is not purely a generalization in prehistory, but one in palaeo-climatology) is that the end of the last Ice Age, centred on 18,000 years ago, was an arid episode, cold and more arid than the Holocene period of the last 10,000 years.

These generalizations have been derived, in the main, from fieldwork carried out in the southeast of the Australian Continent – in the southeast, but in areas that are inland, for instance around the famous dried up lakes such as Lake Mungo. These are arid areas today – areas of summer drought.

Now the Liverpool Plains, where I have been carrying out archaeological fieldwork, is an area that is well watered today (rich farming country) with not only good winter rainfall but also good summer rainfall. It is perhaps to be anticipated that the picture of Australian prehistory to be discovered in such a well watered area would be different from a picture worked out in the summer drought areas to the southwest. It might be expected that the generalizations about the southwest could not be extended northeast.

At this point it would be tempting to portray myself as having insightfully predicted the destruction of the three generalizations before I started fieldwork on the Liverpool Plains. However, any temptation I might have felt to fudge this point was removed by the knowledge that there would be in the audience people to whom I have asserted, in lectures, the Australia-wide gospel about early extinction of the megafauna, the great age of the Kartan industry, and the Australia-wide

10. R.J. Lampert (1983). "The Kartan mystery reinvented." *Am.Archaeology*. 16:175-177.

aridity of the Late-Pleistocene. I made no such predictions before starting the fieldwork. Indeed I was attracted by the received belief. To give an example, the argument for the early extinction of megafauna was compelling. When we look at the Australian megafauna we are looking at the extinction of species that lived securely in Australia for at least five million years (through the end of the Tertiary and the whole of the Pleistocene, except its very end) and that survived the vagaries of countless climatic fluctuations. What better explanation for their extinction than the arrival of human beings? I was persuaded by Wallace, by Paul Martin, and by Rhys Jones (one of our distinguished scholars and ex-staff members) that megafaunal extinctions in Australia had a catastrophic explanation, and that the explanation was first human impact. Indeed, some of the work I did myself, at Koonalda Cave on the Nullarbor Plain, suggested that the megafauna had gone by 20,000 years ago.

The first crack in my belief came in the late 1970s, with the fieldwork that I conducted at Lancefield, near Melbourne, in association with colleagues from several institutions. At Lancefield were remains of hundreds of megafaunal individuals, with the odd artefact, and with marks on the bones that looked like traces of butchery. What better site than Lancefield as evidence for the initial human slaughter of the megafauna, the fist blitzkrieg of a naive fauna? But, alas for this theory, we diagnosed the marks on the bones as caused by the extinct marsupial lion and established a date for the megafaunal bone bed of 26,000 years. That may seem old enough to you, but it is far too recent (by some 14,000 years we now know) to be evidence of the megafaunal blitzkrieg. Human beings were around the Lancefield site, and dropping the occasional artefact, but they were the descendants of people who had been around for some thousands of years before and who had lived alongside the megafauna without bringing about its extinction (or so the dates from Lancefield suggest).

Such is the vanity of archaeologists that, after the Lancefield work, I preferred to defend my unravelling of Lancefield's stratigraphy and its recent 26,000 year old dates, to defending someone else's blitzkrieg theory. I was changing my views. But so important were the palaeo-ecological implications of Lancefield that verification became necessary. No other work, in well watered parts of eastern Australia, and relevant to Pleistocene extinctions, was being done. Sceptics could reasonably demand additional evidence for such a recent date of the megafauna.

The accidental discovery of a carcass of Diprotodon in late 1979 led me to the Liverpool Plains, and it is the results of our excavations in two spring-fed swamps, found during our surveys, that are menacing the beliefs of even myself and those other prehistorians who accept the 26,000 years old dates for Lancefield, but would not be prepared to let the megafauna get much younger.

I used to despise a phrase that became linked as a cliche to every new archaeological discovery – "the textbooks will have to be rewritten". But if future fieldwork sustains our already strongly documented and cross-checked indications

on the Liverpool Plains, then we will be able to say that at least certain parts of the textbooks will have to be rewritten. I say cross-checked, and am much indebted to Dr Barbetti and the staff of the NWG Macintosh Centre for Quaternary Dating.

What are these results? On the Liverpool Plains:

(1) Diprotodon did not become extinct until the mid-Holocene, at or after 6,000 years ago, that is some 20,000 years after the age of the bone bed at Lancefield.

(2) So far from the Kartan being an early industry on the Liverpool Plains, the early industry we find in the late-Pleistocene and the first part of the Holocene is small and amorphous. This small and amorphous industry was replaced by the Kartan at about 6,000 years ago. The Kartan appears abruptly at this time, which is also marked by the onset of aridity, and perhaps the time of local extinctions.

(3) Available moisture at the end of the Pleistocene (after 20,000 years ago) was not low, but high. At this time our swamps were lush, depositing fine soils rich in organic matter and maintained by high groundwater. It was not until after the Pleistocene (to be precise at about 6,000 years ago) that groundwater retreated, the swamp dried out, and an extraordinary episode of blowing dust smothered the swamp to a metre deep – the dust apparently trapped by reeds that had their roots nourished by the retreating groundwater. No more deposits formed at our sites.

Did this arid episode extinguish the megafauna? To answer this we need to discover and excavate sites that are *later* than any we have found so far. Does the occurrence of the Kartan industry in this arid episode represent an intrusion into the Liverpool Plains of people who had for long been established in arid areas to the west (witness, in the far west, earlier comparable stone industries at Lake Mungo and Burkes Cave) at an episode of major climatic disruption to the ecology? To answer this we need to find and excavate Kartan sites to the west of the Liverpool Plains.

Were the Liverpool Plains some microcosmic oasis, some anachronistic lost world of the type imagined by Conan Doyle, with Diprotodon and Procoptodon roaming in its lush flats, the last survivors of an epoch long since extinguished elsewhere in Australia? I doubt it. There is nothing geographically isolated about the Liverpool Plains. But to answer the question we need to shift our research to more northerly latitudes to see if there are sites, say, around Barraba: then to the Queensland border (I should stress that no suitable sites are yet known). The purpose of this work would be to see what dates we could establish for extinctions well away from the Liverpool Plains. An hypothesis that the Liverpool Plains were peculiar, not showing the pattern of extinctions evident elsewhere in Australia, is examinable by extending the range of the fieldwork we are doing.

Thus, to begin to answer these questions, we are looking at an extended and

major programme of fieldwork over the next decade, and we are anticipating this programme at a time when there is a growing mood of pessimism in Australia about the chances of getting permission to carry out such excavation. Now palaeoecological work itself (including several aspects of the work I am doing) does not need permission. I do not need a permit to dig for Diprotodon or for the record of past climates. But if I find artefacts, even casually, in the course of my excavation, I must stop and apply for a permit. And of course as an archaeologist I cannot plead ignorance of the artefactual nature of the pieces of stone I am finding.

In case any of you should think that stone artefacts are rather rare, let me say that I have published calculations which suggest that there might be an average of 10,000 artefacts, in the sense of flakes or flaked pieces of stone, for every km^2 in Australia.[11] It is the fossils that are the scarce resource, not the artefacts associated with them.

But excavation done for the purpose of recovering artefacts requires a permit – and rightly so; sites need to be protected from the whims of archaeologists. It may be galling to have to apply for permission to excavate the very sites that one has discovered oneself, sites that without one's own discovery might have gone under the plough. It is not such gall that leads to pessimism. The pessimism has come about because sites, including archaeological sites, have become so wrapped up in the issues surrounding Aboriginal rights and land claims that it is believed two sorts of permission will become hard to get:

(1) from landowners who wrongly think that the discovery of archaeological sites will mean alienation of their land. One may label this attitude 'white backlash' and then dismiss it. But to do so obscures a serious problem for site conservation – the belief that alienation will occur leads to concealment, even to destruction. Thus the laws of New South Wales that were designed to protect sites and reveal knowledge are in danger of producing opposite consequences – destruction of sites and the concealment of knowledge.

(2) The second reason why it is believed that permission for fieldwork will become hard to get springs from an anticipation that the permit issuing authorities will, because of political ferment, play safe and decline to issue any permits. Or, it is felt, the government may decide to hand over authority to issue permits to an Aboriginal organization that may then decide to issue none.

Now, prehistory within the Department of Anthropology has a world perspective. It is a minority of us that is engaged in fieldwork in Australia – myself, John Clegg, with his pioneeringly intensive work on the prehistoric rock engravings north of Broken Hill, and recently, Jim Rhoads on the river terraces of the

[11] R.V.S. Wright (1983). "Stone Implements." In G. Connah (ed.), *Australian Field Archaeology: a Guide to Techniques*. Canberra: Institute of Aboriginal Studies, p.13.

Hawkesbury River. A minority within the prehistory section we may be, but an inability to get permits would be a worrying blow.

Of course, I cannot be stopped from thinking about Australian prehistoric archaeology. I presumably will not be stopped from speaking about it. But by the stroke of a bureaucratic pen (or rather the lack of stroke of a bureaucratic pen) I could be stopped from pursuing the research that I have earlier foreshadowed.

Perhaps any stoppage will be partial. Perhaps some fieldwork could be pursued that was perceived as not relevant to Aboriginal interests. Alas, such a prescription produces no panacea. For example, let us consider the question of the first date at which people arrived in Australia. Surely this is an innocent archaeological question open to examination by fieldwork and free of political overtones? No – some aborigines say they have always been in Australia. From the point of view of the prehistoric archaeologist the question of when people first arrived in Australia, versus the question of whether people have always been here, is answerable in two ways

(1) from a world perspective, and given what we know of the species *Homo sapiens*, we must conclude that human beings are recent arrivals in Australia compared with the time-depth of the Old World.

(2) furthermore, any deducation of recency is open to archaeological verification by a well directed programme of fieldwork, one that inspected the fossil dunes of the last interglacial high sea level dating from 120,000 years ago and searched for the presence or absence of artefacts in these fossil dunes. So far as I know, no such programme has yet been mounted or even conceived, but absence of artefacts from such dunes (a finding that I suspect most archaeologists would anticipate) would tell against the notion of perpetual occupancy of Australia.

Without a permit no such research would be possible. Of course, one might browse, on the pretext of doing geomorphology, but without a permit no sustained archaeological research would be possible for the reason that none of us is going to wittingly break the law. Thus we can see that such an apparently abstruse research topic as the presence or absence of artefacts in last interglacial dunes has political connotations that might lead to the refusal of a permit.

At this point I must make it plain that my remarks do not spring from bitter experiences with the authorities. I have had nothing but helpful interest from the permit issuing body in New South Wales (the National Parks and Wildlife Service) and mutual pleasure has, I believe, been generated by my consultation with Aborigines in the Gunnedah area, some of whom have visited my excavation. No threats have ever been directed at my research.

In fact you may think that my exploration of the permit problem has introduced mundane matters into what should be a more lofty inaugural address. However, the permit system, designed to protect sites, can, I fear, be perverted to protect various other interests, including those of other research workers. I argued this

point at ANZAAS in May, and do not intend to go over that ground again, except to say that universities should present themselves to the authorities, and to interest groups, as obliged to undertake detached enquiry. Now I acknowledge that no enquiry is entirely detached. Academics are not clean slates, unmarked by prejudices of class, ethnic group and race. But we do, or we should, come closer to this condition than any other group in the community. Universities have sought to allow freedom of enquiry and conflicting research interests within the same institution. We need to remind people outside universities that freedom of enquiry is necessary to protect the process of enquiry itself.

All this is not to deny that permits are needed for the protection of uniquely scarce archaeological resources. However, the permit system should not be used to protect interests other than the sites themselves, and I believe that research workers in prehistory should request that permit giving bodies deny permits only where destruction will be caused to scarce archaeological resources, or where the research worker is not making available to others the results of enquiry (that being a violation of freedom of enquiry).

It may be that in the near future in New South Wales local Aboriginal communities will be vested with the control of archaeological access to sites including archaeological sites found by archaeologists. This would be a move that has attractions for me as a research worker. Local communities are usually interested in sites situated in their areas, and have an interest that is more vigorous than that of a centralized bureaucracy. Of course if such a scheme comes about, archaeologists will need to learn new ways of consultation, but I see no reason to translate the nervousness that one feels, at having to learn new ways, into a mood of pessimism.

But what *if* the worst happens (worst from the point of view of the archaeologist)? What if fieldwork in Australian prehistory is not permitted, or is permitted under terms that are intellectually unacceptable? We should remember first that only a minority of members of the Prehistory Section of my Department would be affected, though I am sure all would regret the event. We would continue with our established field interests in Old World Archaeology (I am thinking of Michael Walker's investigations into the early settled farming of Spain). We would continue to develop new work in association with colleagues in Melanesia, up into southeast Asia. We would seek to develop a liaison with the Department of Archaeology, particularly in the field of physical anthropological study of the archaeological sites that figure in their major research programmes in the Mediterranean area. We would continue to draw on the theoretical interests of people like Roland Fletcher and Tim Murray, who helpfully nag us with questions such as "why are you doing this?" "what do you mean when you say x, y or z?".

We would, in the field of Australian archaeology, analyse and publish the data that has already been gathered. In this connection we have been able, through our development of computer programmes and facilities, to put into the hands of staff and students easily used (but astonishingly powerful) methods for reducing

multivariate data to comprehensible summary statements.

So prehistory would be alive and flourishing, but Australian prehistory would languish – if it should indeed be cut off from the power that can recharge the batteries of any regional archaeology, namely the power to test hypotheses by means of fieldwork.

Now I do not believe that such days will come. I do not believe that attitudes will become so polarised into Aboriginal interests versus University interests, that we shall have to retreat from the active pursuit of prehistoric archaeology in Australia. But if that retreat did happen it would be distressing, and not only for ourselves. Aboriginal students of this University would find that the archaeology of this Continent was being treated as a second-class citizen among archaeologies of the world; that they could not gain internationally recognised archaeological qualifications by specializing in the archaeology of this Continent. They would see the research laboratories of the N.W.G. Macintosh Centre for Quaternary Dating being directed toward non-Australian archaeological research. As a final irony, they might well ask why prehistory in this University so racistly ignored the prehistoric archaeology of this Continent. If permit-getting becomes difficult, I certainly have no intention of engaging in any backlash that might bring about impoverishment of the richness of archaeology offered by the University of Sydney. Nevertheless the languishing of Australian archaeology would happen, of its own accord.

Universities are the repositories of knowledge that is available for all Australians, including Aboriginal Australians. The ability of prehistoric archaeology to satisfy human curiosity about the past is a major justification for its existence within universities. Many Aborigines are curious about their past and should be encouraged to participate in University activities. Therefore I have offered (and the offer has been accepted) assistance to the Tranby College in the course it is designing to train Aboriginal Sites Officers. But to help an outside institution is not enough. We require Aboriginal students in this University to learn the techniques of prehistoric archaeology and to argue with us as members of this intellectual institution. To this end I shall be writing to headmasters throughout the State asking them to encourage their careers advisors to point out to Aboriginal students that our courses contain a strong component of training in Australian prehistoric archaeology; and to point out that this training leads to qualifications that are recognized when appointments of archaeologists are made, for instance, to the Public Service in New South Wales.

Thus, to conclude, I make no secret of my desire to continue through this University the strong interests I have developed in Australian prehistory. We must not cloister ourselves in academic seclusion, demanding rights to do research without sharing our knowledge with others. At the same time, we must point out the advantages that are inherent in the freedom of enquiry that universities have traditionally enjoyed. Universities are, or should be, places where people express their view freely

– and have them openly criticized just as freely. If we operate in this way there will be no latter day Lactantius, or at least none with any power, who sees Australian prehistory as a threat. We will have anxious moments, but with goodwill, the study of Australia's prehistoric past will have a rewarding future.

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