

ENGAGING ARTEFACTS

URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY, MUSEUMS AND THE ORIGINS OF SYDNEY

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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CONVICT SYDNEY

A family — mother, father, children — sits down on chairs at a table for a meal. Their table is set with good quality edged-ware, with a blue-rimmed, rather deep-welled dinner plate and matching bread and butter plate for each person, lidded tureens and large meat platters. The walls in the room are tinted pink and there are pictures and ceramic plaques with religious exhortations, decorated with borders of leaves and flowers. The windows are hung with curtains, there is a wash-set with ewer, basin and porcelain soap box and a chest of drawers. On a small table, or perhaps a mantelpiece, stands an elegant, tasteful and expensive piece of *bocage*, a modelled tree with leaves and flowers which supports and frames an elegant figure.¹

Are we peering into the home of a middle-class family, comfortably settled in a stucco and iron villa in one of Sydney's better new suburbs of the 1840s? No, this is the home of a Rocks family, probably that of a tradesman and woman, and it might date anywhere between 1790 and 1810. One or both of the adults arrived in Sydney as convicts under sentence of transportation. In the 1790s the house itself was a wattle and daub hut, with doors hung on leather straps and windows with woven wattle panels instead of glass, and a roof either of fire-prone thatch, or porous, sagging clay tiles.² By 1810 though, this early hut might stand to the rear of a more substantial house of rubble stone, with walls finished in tinted plaster, a shingle roof,

proper glass windows and a large stone hearth and chimney.³

The Rocks, rising abruptly in rugged tiers and outcrops of sandstone on the western side of Sydney Cove, was the convicts' side of the town from the earliest years of European settlement. The neighbourhood that grew there represents the emergence of Sydney from *their* perspective. It also represents the rest of convict Sydney, for the same sorts of people lived in the same way on the east side in George, Pitt and Castlereagh Streets and down to the south. When we remember that convicts made up the bulk of the population, the importance of the view from the Rocks becomes clear: convict settlers were the prime makers of early Sydney.⁴

The recovery of the archaeological record of convict Sydney, together with the archaeology of the documentary record, have revealed the convicts' unequivocal interest in domesticity, cleanliness and comfort, in refinement at the table, and in the consumption of goods which made it all possible. It is a vision which certainly jars with, even upends, the more traditional portrayals of early Sydney. The 'gaol town' is supposed to have been a place of misery and exile, imprisonment and forced labour, poverty and scarcity. Life for the faceless prisoners was supposed to be nasty, brutish and short, and the profile of their material life should include the ball and chain, the wooden bowl, the whips and barred windows, a paucity of food remains. Alternately, or perhaps in addition, the convicts were a proletariat, arriving

with a ready-made sense of class-consciousness and grievance, exploited by the capitalist system dressed up as the convict system, haters of authority, forerunners of the independent, self-reliant, roaming bushmen of the Australian Legend.⁵

A culture of consumption and domesticity is, of course, antithetical to both the prisoner and the proletariat model. Yet archaeologists and historians who explore the *culture* of convicts, rather than their civil condition as prisoners, have revealed a most acquisitive set of people, a society driven by possessive individualism, marked by constant buying and selling, and a strong and lively popular culture.⁶ We know from archaeological evidence and detailed historical research that these convicts, men and women, dressed like dandies in fine figured satins and well-made shoes, drank tea from handleless Chinese porcelain tea cups, stirring in sugar with silver teaspoons, and some of them ate soup from beautifully decorated porcelain bowls.⁷

Perhaps this domestic and consumer culture at the heart of our European origins should not be so surprising. If we look at the findings of Stephen Nicholas and his team in *Convict Workers*, it appears that a considerable proportion of convict men and women had valuable skills, and a higher rate of literacy than their English counterparts. Most came from the recently and rapidly urbanised towns and cities of England, though Irish convicts tended to come from rural areas.⁸ This is reflected in their deep reluctance to go to rural areas once they got to New South Wales. They ‘congregated’ instead in Sydney, grabbing and occupying land, building houses, vigorously leasing and selling as though they held title to it (which many did in the end). And many of those feverishly building, buying and selling, on the Rocks in Sydney at least, were women convicts and ex-convicts. As Portia Robinson and others have exhaustively demonstrated, the women of Botany Bay were energetic businesswomen, marriage partners and family women.⁹ The

household, not the gaol or the gang, was fundamental to both early Sydney’s society and economy.

The convicts, then, were for the main part *not* from the mass of the very poor of Britain, who, as historian Neil McKendrick argues, did not have the means to participate in the new consumer behaviour spawned by the commercial revolution of eighteenth-century England. This revolution was one of *things* and everyday domestic life and its impact was not limited to the wealthy and comfortable ranks. As historian Carole Shammas has shown, over the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even sections of the lower orders, artisans, small shopkeepers, labourers, had begun to seek some measure of comfort in their homes, to own and use ceramic dishes, cutlery, to drink tea and coffee laced with sugar, to buy from shops rather than making at home, and to wear fashionable clothing.¹⁰

But while archaeology shows that early convict Sydney shared a culture of domesticity and consumerism with succeeding generations of middle-class emigrants, it also demonstrates the ways in which these groups were clearly distinct from one another. Rather than being a fixed template, the same in every place and time, consumerism expressed as gentility and domesticity appears to have had as many permutations and versions as there were social and economic groups who practiced it.¹¹ So my opening vignette of the convict household was carefully censored to exclude all the things which could not have occurred in the homes of the better-off, better-educated and far more genteel villa-dwellers of the 1840s and thereafter. I left out the servant, assigned or free, who, as part of the household, probably shared the table, food, drink, crockery and glassware with the family. In later middle class household servants were not thought of as ‘family’ members, and kept much more at arms’ length.¹²

I neglected to mention that this house, though it could be large, probably had only

one or two rooms, with all the functions of the household, eating, cooking, sleeping, dressing, and caring for children, integrated therein. There was little sense of privacy, and few or no separate rooms for designated functions, like halls for receiving guests, rooms solely for beds, drawing or dining rooms and so on. While, as historian Linda Young has outlined in her study of genteel culture in Australia, the hallmark of the middle class was the gendered separation of work and home, in many homes of early Sydney both men and women worked to contribute to the household. Home and work were often seamless, since tradesmen and women, shopkeepers and publicans operated from their own homes and yards. Bakers built stone bakehouses at the rear of their houses, butchers slaughtered cattle in their own backyards, so the fragrance of baking bread or the stench of rotting offal mingled with the smells of the household. The yards were regarded as useful and valuable in a practical sense, spaces for growing fruit and vegetables, drying laundry, storing building materials, rather than as ornamental spaces for flowers, shrubs and paths.¹³

Inside the hotels and around those domestic tables, the neat, good quality individual plates were filled with stewed meat and vegetables ladled directly from a common cooking pot hung over the open fire in the same room. And men and women who were friends commonly shared the 'circling glass', most likely the plain, hand-blown tumbler filled with rum or other spirits from a decanter or bottle. Two or three people passed the glass from hand to hand, mouth to mouth as they talked and sang together. This cultural practice, together with the excise on glass, which made it quite expensive in the early colonial period, may well explain the relatively low numbers of glasses found in this period. It seems that while eating had been somewhat refined, modernised and individualised, drinking still belonged to an older, more communal realm of behaviour. Of course, this was unthinkable for the later

middle classes, who owned not only sufficient glasses for each person, but also different glasses for each type of drink.¹⁴

The culture of the first convict generations thus drew together disparate elements: unrespectable, pre-industrial culture, and the more genteel culture of domestic and personal commodities spawned by the commercial and consumer revolutions. Archaeology reveals much that is surprisingly familiar to us — matched dinner sets, walls painted in soft colours — particularly in the context of common assumptions about life in early Sydney. But, combined with detailed documentary research, it also challenges our mental associations, it reminds us that the past is a "foreign country".¹⁵ The juxtapositions of early Sydney are strange to us: refined, individualised tableware and communal drinking and gambling; crude hand-made pottery hung over the open fire and sophisticated, elegant figurines; curtained windows looking out onto slaughteryards; good clothes, clean bodies and the bloodied noses of men and women unaccustomed to notions of individual decorum and the increasingly constrictive rituals of self control.¹⁶ In these contrasts we can glimpse acceptable lifestyles and behaviour, aspirations, and notions of 'respectability', from the convicts' own perspective, rather than that of their Victorian successors, or from our own standpoint.

THE CUMBERLAND/GLOUCESTER STREETS
PROJECT: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO
URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY

The radically new view of convict life, culture and society in early Sydney presented here would not have been possible without archaeological evidence. While references to houses and rooms, bowls and tumblers, shoes and buttons abound in early official reports, letters, newspapers and advertisements, properly researched archaeological sites offer an actual record of material life which can be matched to real people — groups of convict and ex-convict residents with names, families, histories. An archaeological site¹⁷

also offers the kind of integrity that, say, a collection of objects drawn from different places and times cannot. Archaeological investigation allows us to make associative links through observing and recording the patterns of deposition, it insists that we examine the less engaging artefacts along with those that delight us, the ubiquitous fragments as well as the things which survived pleasingly intact. The jarring juxtapositions and the flashes of recognition are essential if we are to grasp the material world of early Sydney in its entirety, rather than only aspects which catch our eye.

In this paper I have drawn largely on the findings from the Cumberland/Gloucester Streets archaeological project (1994–1996), with some comparative and corroborative material from other sites and excavations. The Cumberland/Gloucester Streets site, in Sydney's historic Rocks area, encompasses two half-city blocks and the remains of forty-two dwellings, shops and hotels, together with yards, lanes and outbuildings. Its European residential history dates from the 1790s to the early twentieth century when it was razed and redeveloped for industrial purposes. The site was excavated for the then Sydney Cove Authority in 1994 by a team assembled by consultants Godden Mackay Logan Pty Ltd and directed by Richard Mackay.¹⁸

This project was an opportunity to try a new collaborative and integrated approach to urban archaeology. It drew together the skills and knowledge of the archaeologists and specialists, the broad concepts, ideas and research of social and cultural historians and archaeologists, the local history of the Rocks from my own work, and the detailed research of family historians.¹⁹ A number of components was essential to the project's successful outcome. Most fundamentally, it involved exemplary archaeological method and a high standard of completed post-excavation analysis. The process of excavation and recording in the field was followed by the preparation of coherent accounts of the site's

development, providing a permanent record of how and where the thousands of archaeological contexts had occurred on the site and how they were related to one another. Specialists skilled in various fields — ceramics, bone, glass, metals, building materials, as well as palynology, soils, and macrobotanical remains, also prepared detailed reports. Part of my task as project historian was to integrate these findings for the interpretative volume, that is, to partly dismantle the boundaries between artefact categories, to see across them. This interpretative report was then rewritten for a general audience and published in 1999, while Godden Mackay Logan published the excavation and artefact reports for the specialist audience.²⁰

Archaeological context is of course essential to the interpretative phase. For example, on its own, that marvellous fragment of expensive bocage mentioned above is merely an object which conveys little beyond its own aesthetic qualities and its method of manufacture. But knowing that this particular piece was from a very early context, and associated with a convict hut dating from the 1790s, it takes on enormous cultural meaning. It helps to open up the world of convict taste, consumption and aspiration hidden for so long behind images of chain gangs, floggings and 'desolate shores'.

In order to grasp the significance of this particular artefact, how it changes our ideas about the past, we have to engage with those ideas. We cannot simply 'dig up the past'. Contrary to the more traditional rhetoric of archaeology and of some "born-again material culturalists",²¹ artefacts do not 'speak' for themselves. In the absence of words, and historical and cultural contexts, they sit there "mutely, like toads", to use Jane Lydon's memorable words.²² On their own, artefacts and buildings cannot really tell us much about the people who used them, beyond such basic observations as 'they smoked clay pipes' or 'they bought pickles in bottles' or 'their houses were small'. These historical and cultural contexts were not, and should not be,

ironclad, seamless grids of 'facts' into which archaeological evidence is slotted, allowing it only to 'fill in gaps' or 'illustrate' what we 'know' already. As Graham Connah argued in 1983, "problem oriented research" is needed if archaeology is to yield "increased understanding" rather than being an activity akin to "stamp collecting".²³

Before the excavation commenced, I was asked to develop, in consultation with members of the team, a series of open-ended questions especially for urban sites in Sydney. At one end, these were broad, dealing with the impact of the Industrial Revolution on a city which had begun as a largely pre-industrial town; changes to women's lives and experiences; the debate about standards of living; the changing role of government; and querying the historical reputation of the Rocks as a disease-ridden slum, a place which, it seems, had always been something of a 'separate space'. At the other end, there were 'small' questions, tailored specifically for the site, and focused on, say, buildings we wanted to find, or people we knew about. For example, we wanted to know whether the convict butcher George Cribb slaughtered his beasts in his own backyard, in the more pre-industrial fashion, or whether that noisome work was already carried out far from home in the 1810s (the former was the case). In the middle, there were questions about changing patterns in the built environment and consumer behaviour, readable in the series of artefacts and the buildings. When did houses begin to follow street-lines, when did the town become more orderly? Did people eat in a communal, shared fashion, or did they use the matching sets of individualised crockery we are familiar with today? When did they start buying manufactured toys for their children? How did they dispose of their rubbish? Did the methods change? These questions (there are many more) tried to suggest ways of observing patterns of change and continuity over time, and so make the major questions more accessible.²⁴

At the same time, we also built up a kind

of 'historical assemblage' of the site, by gathering as much data as possible about it, and its occupants. Although it is often said that convicts and the later generations of obscure working people are not recorded, this is not so. With the help of scores of family historians from all over Australia, a database of residents, now numbering nearly 500, was built up, recording names, callings, births, deaths and marriages, period of occupancy and so on. Some people even sent precious photographs, personal recollections and family stories about their ancestors. The database provided a family and community context for the archaeological evidence. It gave us an accurate picture of the residents' socio-economic standing, the gender ratio, family and household structure and how often people moved house. It made women, children, and lodgers visible, countable, it put names, histories and sometimes even faces on the anonymous mass of people who moved over the site for just over a hundred years. This kind of intimate understanding was an essential step, for it allowed us to provenance the artefacts in an accurate and meaningful way, to say, for example, that convicts and ex-convicts were the owners and consumers of the artefacts from the early contexts. In some cases it even allowed us to discern the possessions of particular people on the site.²⁵

At the same time, it is clear that artefacts and structures, and sites as a whole, are not equally yielding in significance and meaning, and also that no single approach, model or research question will serve to access that meaning. The material culture of convict Sydney was complex and diverse, and each strand of this tangled skein — food, drink, houses, personal items, has its own history and 'genealogy'.²⁶ The archaeological record, a fraction of the original totality, is itself shaped by deposition patterns, site formation and incursions, and also by excavation methods and the current, fairly rigid, notions of artefact categories.²⁷ This record, like any other, informs us in different ways and at dif-

ferent levels. Some artefacts tell us a great deal, and offer unique evidence; others corroborate one existing interpretation over another; still others are ambiguous, and suggestive. Some can be read as a single artefact, others must be seen in concert; some seem incapable of telling us very much at all, while others are enigmatic, and leave us to wonder. A good measure of flexibility, a realistic eye, and the avoidance of over-rigid models and approaches are necessary when examining, recording and researching the assemblages.²⁸

It did occur to me as I was working on the interpretative volume that my being directly involved in the project itself, particularly through the regular research meetings, and being completely familiar with the history and archaeology of the site, helped enormously with writing its story. I could also readily consult the other members of the team for further explanations or information. How will a future researcher manage without these advantages, and distanced from the excavation by time and space?

Paradoxically, an archaeological excavation is at once an act of preservation and of destruction.²⁹ Although elements like artefacts, samples and structures may be preserved, the site itself is utterly destroyed, lost forever. This is why recording of the excavation, the site, in as much detail and in as many media as possible, is essential. In the case of the Cumberland/Gloucester Streets site, a great deal of time and effort went into ensuring the adequate recording of the site for posterity. It was exhaustively numbered, mapped, photographed, and recorded. The three-quarters of a million artefacts were entered on a database, which is now available for statistical research.³⁰ The specialists who prepared the artefact reports tried as far as possible to include observation of value to all future research, not only current interests. While the site itself will probably eventually be redeveloped, the artefacts, wrapped, tagged, numbered and boxed, are stored by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, and hopefully will remain safe and intact.

(Not all collections are so fortunate).

But even with the most meticulous recording, recapturing that level of immediacy, the familiarity with the site and its excavators, would be extraordinarily difficult, and take an inordinate amount of a future researcher's time; perhaps it is important excavations provide an interpretative framework, and ask appropriate questions. Briefs and tenders ideally should include costing for interpretative work, something which rarely happens at present.

HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND MATERIAL LIFE

At the core of the innovative approach to the Cumberland/Gloucester Streets project, then, was that concern to integrate history and archaeology, springing from the recognition of the essentially inseparable relationship between things, ideas and experiences, between material and mental worlds. If we think about the nature of everyday life in early Sydney, and the role of material culture in it, it is immediately apparent that material and mental worlds are indivisible. Every artefact has a history, a cultural context, and practically any document from early Sydney contains some reference to material life — bodies, things, food, clothing, buildings, roads, the environment — underscoring the entanglement, then, as now, of things, words and actions. It is artificial, and distorting, to consider one without the other, as separate spheres.³¹

Then there is the role of objects in this particular society. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi argues that, in Western culture in particular, material objects help us locate ourselves, “keep our ideas straight”, acting as the “sensory template that gives boundary and direction”. “Without external props”, he says, “even our personal identity fades and goes out of focus”.³² Surely this is especially true for those who emigrate, willingly or unwillingly, to a new land. Convicts made or bought, left or brought a great range of things to exploit, to make the new land familiar, to hold fast to

who they were, and to remind those they would never see again of their existence. Those about to embark smoothed coins to blanks, then scratched, stippled or engraved them with messages of love, remembrance, promises of fidelity and gave them to the loved ones left behind.³³ Other messages, “puncture[d] with gunpowder”, pricked with ink, were carried on their skin as tattoos whose iconography opens a window onto emotional life: hope, devotion, despair, defiance, humour, a bitter kind of triumph.³⁴ Clothing and accessories brought along found a ready market in fashion-conscious early Sydney. Bought, bartered, stolen and sold, they might allow one woman to get enough capital to start a little shop, while another decked herself in the sort of finery which defied the very idea of the degraded, banished convict.³⁵ Every stage of life has its material dimension, setting, and expression, from the first step out of the jolly boat onto the shingly shore to the hammocks slung in rows at the barracks, or the ticking mattresses laid in the corners of skillions and smoky kitchens; from glances exchanged over a tumbler of rum and water to the exchange of a wedding ring or a pair of earrings, the setting up of a new household; from cradles and baby clothes to shrouds and cedar coffins. At every point, every juncture, in every journey, objects and ideas, things and meanings were inextricable.

So much energy was expended on the sheer, pragmatic quest for material well-being and the accumulation of property in early Sydney. As I have shown above, and argued elsewhere, the convicts were very materially minded people. Their material worlds were not all of a kind, but multifarious, an astonishing profusion of things and structures, each with its own history, with multiple layers of significance and meaning, these in turn shifting and transforming in different contexts. Things, like their owners, moved constantly along their own historical trajectories in the early town, they passed from hand to hand, were arranged in certain ways with other things, shucked off when people moved on,

recycled, exchanged, auctioned, lost, reappeared in other forms.³⁶

People knew their possessions, and those of others, instantly, by sight. They could identify the body of a murder victim by the print of the gown she was wearing, by the cloth-covered wire buttons which had fastened the sleeves at her wrists.³⁷ People described lost possessions in great detail and posted rewards for them: “Reward for a single silver spoon”, ran Daniel Mackay’s advertisement, “1oz weight colonial made plain with an impression something like a lion on the back”. Women in particular had the quality, patterns and textures of fabrics firmly fixed in the minds.³⁸ People also enjoyed simply looking at objects which were artful, unusual or curious. Mrs Ikin had a fine model of a brig on display at her house on the Rocks in 1805. The grief-stricken parents of a child who died of snakebite seem to have taken some comfort in the “stone intended to entomb the relics” which they had carved with a heartfelt poem. It was proudly “exhibited to public inspection” before being erected at the burial ground.³⁹

We even know that the populace was most likely familiar with the term ‘cabinet of curiosities’, for Jane Jones, evidently an incorrigible magpie, had a house on the Rocks in 1805 which was “tolerably furnished with articles which were mostly recognised as having been only borrowed from her benefactors”. The ‘benefactors’ were probably the Atkins family, for whom she worked as a charwoman. *Sydney Gazette* editor George Howe went on, tongue-in-cheek, “Her *cabinet of curiosities* contained a number of toys, to which several members of the junior order preferred an undisputed title”.⁴⁰ Her, evidently irresistible, hunger for things landed her a seven-year stretch in distant Kings Town (Newcastle).

ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE MUSEUM

Perhaps it is appropriate, then, that many archaeological collections, after their strange

and roundabout journeys, come to rest in museums. The sheer bulk of material retrieved from Sydney sites over the last two decades or so presents the formidable and utterly pragmatic problem of where these millions of artefacts can be safely and permanently housed. Without such arrangements, artefacts have a tendency to wander off, continue along their historical trajectories, and we lose sight of them once more.⁴¹ About half the material excavated from other urban sites in Sydney has therefore found its way into museums; the rest is in private hands or with government authorities such as the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority. Museums, more particularly those committed to social history, seem to offer appropriate havens for these collections. Ideally they provide safe and secure storage of both artefacts and supporting documentation, conservation skills, access for future researchers to study them, as well as the hope that archaeology will be made widely available as part of exhibitions.

Museums of social history are appropriate in another important way. As Margaret Anderson and Tom Griffiths have argued, the idea of social history museums is itself relatively recent, for until the infiltration of social history curators, history and museums had little or no common ground at all, museums being more the 'realm of the scientist', and the connoisseur. This shift was also a potentially radical one. Some social history museums began to challenge long-held ideas about empire, nation, race and gender, and about science and progress; hence they turned a critical, searching eye upon the purposes and agendas of the museum itself.⁴² The archaeology of urban sites dovetails with these concerns: it most often deals with the structures and artefacts of workplaces, households, neighbourhoods, and thus women's, family and community lives in extraordinary detail. It retrieves and works from a direct record concerning the lives and experiences of people often entirely omitted from 'dominant consensus models' and unquestioned, 'given' narratives about progress and nation-

hood. Archaeology has the power to shock, to silently but insistently destabilise long-held assumptions about 'the masses' — convict people, 'slum' dwellers, the 'working class'.

Museum curators are assured by archaeologists that archaeological collections are valuable and irreplaceable, that they can 'tell us about people's lives' or have the potential to open 'new views of the past', both for museum visitors and future generations of researchers. And so they do, as our excursion into the material life of convict Sydney reveals.

But some curators can see little evidence so far of these values and benefits, are frustrated by the costs of keeping the material, and impatient with these seemingly dumb, often most unlovely mountains of artefacts. Broken, stained by long burial, frequently mundane and stubbornly unyielding to boot, they seem like Cinderella collections, compared with whole, provenanced and often more artistic, or otherwise engaging artefacts which museums collect.⁴³ Michael Bogle at the Hyde Park Barracks Museum points out that historians, many evidently still convinced of the primacy of the written word, seldom consult any of the collections held at the various properties maintained by the Historic Houses Trust in New South Wales.⁴⁴ More surprisingly, few archaeologists seem to use the collections either. Several thousand dollars a year, and a great deal of curatorial time and space are devoted to thousands of boxes of artefacts which, so far, are mute, and which very few people ask to see. Here it *seems* that archaeology has not been a rich and irreplaceable resource, but simply a financial and administrative burden.

The keen professional and public awareness of the value and potential of archaeology is enshrined in legislation and expressed both by the vast amounts of money invested in it, and in the intense public and media interest whenever archaeological sites are excavated.⁴⁵ Why, by contrast, do some curators throw their hands up in frustration over

the archaeological collections? Why have the collections been ignored once they are 'safely' in the museum? The usual problems spring to mind, of course: inadequate funding, and a consequent lack of researchers available to undertake such projects. But there are deeper cultural explanations as well, concerned with ways of seeing material things, and ways of making histories. For archaeological artefacts still hang in the uneasy, as yet unresolved space triangulated between the idea of museums as repositories for scientific research, their aesthetically-inclined collection and presentation, curation and exhibition regimes, and the more recent, potentially radical inroads of social history.

There have been long-standing problems in the short history of urban historical archaeology in Sydney, concerning the lack of interpretation and integration, problems which the Cumberland/Gloucester Streets project was specifically designed to address.⁴⁶ As archaeologist Susan Lawrence points out, there has been an odd lack of interest in artefacts among archaeologists themselves. In spite of the rhetoric about their importance and research potential, some of the assemblages remain uncatalogued; sometimes reports have been left uncompleted. Countless boxes full of objects, some separated from their archaeological contexts and with dubious documentation, have told us relatively little about the past. Until very recently there were few published articles based on artefactual evidence and fewer major texts.⁴⁷

The beginnings of historical archaeology in Sydney coincided with the rise of heritage movements in the 1970s, and its early efforts were most often similarly focused on the struggle to save and conserve our material inheritance. Many archaeologists entered the varied fields of cultural resource management, while freelance consultants carried out excavations required by the *Heritage Act 1977*, and assessment components of heritage and environmental impact studies.⁴⁸ The essential, increasingly complex battle for heritage and conservation means that archaeolo-

gists, like architectural historians, have tended to focus on structures, their histories, their composite materials and finishes, and their conservation and recording. Scatters of window glass or brick fragments, peeled-back layers of wallpaper, drains and bricked-up doors have eclipsed the rather more problematic, less tightly measurable people who occupied the structures, and the things they lost or threw away.⁴⁹

Archaeologists are thus collectors, compelled by the discovery of sites, artefacts, buildings and landscapes to record, retrieve and inventory for posterity, and for the great desideratum, 'future research'. The early 'rescue archaeology' carried out in Sydney and on the Rocks in the 1970s and early 1980s in particular distills the ethos, the urgency of heritage collecting, for the archaeologists' endeavours were indeed "suffused with a sense of salvage, objects are rescued from out of time itself".⁵⁰ This collecting has had far less to do with iconoclastic social history, than with the eighteenth and nineteenth century traditions of systematic collection. The "great enterprise of collecting the world", as archaeologist Denis Byrne puts it, saw objects of all sorts converge in the great museum, which could then become a microcosm of the world.⁵¹ But in another sense it *constitutes* significant social history, that of the heritage and conservation movement itself. As heritage planner Meredith Walker recently pointed out, actions taken to save, to collect, to salvage were necessarily *political* acts, concerned not so much with meaning and research as with the struggle to ensure that material heritage survived in the first place.⁵² In both these ways, collecting became an end in itself.

What is significant here is the *separation* of collection and interpretation. Standard archaeological practice still tends to place them at opposite ends of the procedures: first excavation and the assigning of artefacts into categories, followed ideally by thorough post-excavation cataloguing and analysis; and finally, if at all, interpretation — often

regarded as someone else's problem. Peter Emmett accuses archaeologists of becoming "bored, myopic" once the excitement of the dig was over and the sifting and sorting of artefacts began.⁵³ Research into wider historical and cultural contexts was, as a result, not generally considered essential for archaeology-as-collection. If contextual research was carried out at all, it tended to be rudimentary and site specific: perhaps a list of names of occupants from directories, a timeline of development on the site. Even in the better researched excavations, the focus tended to be upon explaining how the site developed, the more detail the better, rather than on asking what important things it could reveal about the past.⁵⁴

As well, there are inherited intellectual traditions which set things and words along divergent paths. While many historians eschew objects as "merely the brute outcomes of thoughts, feelings and actions, without any active role of their own", some archaeologists, equally, deeply distrust the written word (both primary but more particularly secondary sources) as something which will only confuse, prejudice and corrupt their pure and direct examination of material things.⁵⁵

The separation of collection and interpretation also, ironically, fractures the continuity of collecting itself, that "very human activity".⁵⁶ The work of archaeologists and curators is, after all, distantly descended from the convicts' collecting. They too, as we have seen, were avid hunters, collectors, creators, keepers and arrangers of all sorts of mementos, souvenirs, household goods and objects of monetary, symbolic or sentimental value. In this sense archaeological assemblages are collections-of-collections, steadily diminishing, scrambled, reformed over time with each phase of assembly, loss and recovery. But collecting which is absorbed in itself, concerned only with retrieving and arranging objects for their own sake, cannot recognise this continuity, cannot glimpse the rationale, the desires, the aspirations, the curiosities, the reassurances that shaped those original

collections. As Susan Pearce acutely observes, the "painfully familiar artefactual deadness arises from a failure to integrate the material world and the world of thought and action, and yet this integration is how we all live our lives".⁵⁷

How do these factors, problems and possibilities actually translate in the museum situation? Is it possible to carry out meaningful research on archaeological assemblages? How does one go about it? Imagine the case of a social history curator in one of Sydney's large museums, already busy with diverse projects and the myriad tasks attendant upon caring for, curating, recording and keeping track of the vast universe of things which is a museum. She has been charged with the unenviable task of 'doing something' with sixteen boxes of carefully wrapped artefacts, allegedly from the site of the original wing of the Powerhouse, in Mary Ann Street, Ultimo, or possibly from the Old Sydney Gaol (now the Regent Hotel) site, an early 'rescue' excavation. They appear at a glance to be typical of assemblages from urban sites all over Sydney, indeed, all over the world: broken transfer-printed ceramics, shards of glass, and bones from meals eaten long ago. She asks "old timers" (as she calls long-term staff) where they came from, who excavated or collected them, but no-one can remember. So far there are no site reports, no artefact reports or catalogues, nothing to link these things with the place where they had come to rest, although, in an echo of the first archaeological search and recovery, they may yet be found.⁵⁸

What, then, can be done with free-floating artefacts like this, 'rescued out of time'? One could measure them, weigh them, describe, count and catalogue them, and as there are infinite ways of doing these, this could occupy a very long time. An imaginative museum curator may well find some eye-catching way of displaying them, perhaps in the way china doll parts are displayed at the Museum of Sydney: in a sleek and stylish drawer against a background of newspaper

stories about murder and dismemberment. Neither of these constitutes meaningful research, however, and would not offer us a greater understanding of our past. Depending on the extent of the collection, it might be possible to regard it as a, largely unprovenanced, generic 'slice' of urban material culture, whose numbers and characteristics could be quantified and compared to other Sydney collections, and the material culture profiles of other nineteenth-century cities.⁵⁹ This would be the equivalent of analysing artefacts retrieved from, say, landfill, where the specific place, time and social context of their origins are unknown or lost. The loss of historical and archaeological contexts means that questions would always hover over the material. Where did it come from? What actors shaped its deposition and its recovery? And, perhaps most importantly, *whose* material culture was this?

These have been rather discouraging circumstances, and the potential of archaeology for research, and for informing us about our urban past through exhibition, have clearly been rather limited. For both research and exhibition, the existence and quality of supporting documentation and interpretative framework for the archaeological collections are obviously vital. If they are not available, the question is whether any of this can be retrieved or viably developed. Ironically, it is the disconnectedness of collection and research, between archaeology and history, which has diminished the very value of the material record which systematic collecting is supposed to create, protect and make available.

But here the more recent projects give grounds for optimism. The Cumberland/Gloucester Streets excavation, like other research projects carried out by archaeologists such as Susan Lawrence and Jane Lydon, demonstrates that historical archaeology, in its true sense, is a discipline which broaches the gulf between things and words.⁶⁰ Properly carried out, it connects collecting and interpretation through cross-disciplinary,

multi-sourced research and approaches; through looking outward from sites as well as intensely into them; and through devising and asking 'important questions' throughout the process, rather than shifting them to a chimerical 'future research' phase. The marrying of permanent, intelligible archaeological recording with the desire to 'increase our understanding of the human past' acts as a springboard, a starting point for further research. For example, archaeological collections held in Sydney museums are about to be reinvestigated in an ambitious and timely scheme successfully initiated by La Trobe University in partnership with the relevant museums, and heritage and management organisations in Sydney. Projects like Cumberland/Gloucester Streets have provided meaningful research directions which can be drawn out and further explored through the cataloguing and database analysis as well as the detailed historical research proposed for this new project.⁶¹ These strategies promise to unlock the dynamic potential of the assemblages held by museums by offering conceptual frameworks for understanding them. They 'make history new' by making accessible the stories, the patterns of material life, the great silent underside, which so often runs counter to complacent, unquestioned historical narratives.⁶²

Let us move out of the storage rooms, and visit those museums where archaeology is displayed, to see what is fashioned from them.

THE 'REAL THING FROM THE REAL PAST': EXHIBITING ARCHAEOLOGY

Despite the paucity of research programs and the difficulty of working with the collections, a considerable amount of archaeological material has, nevertheless, been displayed at various Sydney museums. Although curators until recently had few interpretative story-lines to work with, a number of quite successful and visually impressive strategies has been employed in an effort to circumvent the general non-engagement of artefacts and specifically expressed

historical meaning. Themes and approaches include the wonders of archaeological discovery and the processes of excavation and analysis, with archaeologists themselves as key figures. Simple 'lifeways' themes are often employed: 'this is what people ate, wore or used in the past', with artefacts arranged in categories such as 'recreation' (always containing clay pipes) or 'family' (always containing children's toys). Artefacts are sometimes displayed as though they were objects in art galleries, with low-key labels listing artist or artisan, date/s, material, and size. Other displays focus narrowly on the technical aspects of their production. "The tree-like pattern on this large ['Mocha' ware] bowl", its label earnestly tells us, "was produced by a chemical process involving tobacco juice and urine".⁶³

At Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks Museum, a striking display turns back to gaze at archaeology itself, for it recreates, in a glass case, the masses of artefacts as they were found, crammed under the floorboards of the building. Fabrics, clothing, jewellery, medallions and a hundred other things had been dropped, stashed or carried about by rats during the building's occupation by convict men and later by women immigrants. Here viewers may re-experience the astonishment of this discovery, the long-hidden cache coming suddenly to light during the restoration of the building in the 1980s. In the next cabinet, the processes by which archaeologists impose their order on material 'chaos' are displayed. Different types of artefacts are grouped on a vast table engridded with string, representing at once the measured, recorded trench or underfloor area, and the table where artefacts are sorted, examined and recorded. A transparent wall reveals the walls of stored artefact boxes, their colour-coded dots spelling out the time and money put into the endless cycles of conservation treatment.

In other displays at the Barracks, and at the Sydney Visitor's Centre, curators and designers have generally selected artefacts from their archaeological collections which

illustrate particular themes. The displays are visually highly sophisticated and pleasing, while the themes themselves are often fairly loose in focus — the female immigrants of the Barracks, for example, or a collage-like material 'slice' of 'life in early Sydney'. The objects chosen — neat bonnets, paisley shawls and bits of pretty jewellery — are, understandably, generally those which appeal to the eye, to the senses, for what they convey in these ways about the fabric of past lives.

At the Sydney Visitors' Centre, the former Sydney Sailors' Home in George Street at the foot of the Rocks, a similar exhibition begins to recognise (albeit still rather dimly) the potential of historical archaeology. Here some new interpretations of early Sydney springing from archaeological assemblages *had* been undertaken, and 'story lines' and themes were available to curators and designers in one form or another. What is intriguing is that, despite this, history and archaeology are often literally, curiously, bifurcated, reflecting the continued gulf between the historian, archaeologists and the museum designers employed for this exhibition. On the first floor, along relatively narrow galleries which were once lined by sailors' tiny cubicles, glass cases of archaeological artefacts from various Rocks sites⁶⁴ stand on one side, while historian Max Kelly's poetic historical narrative proceeds on the other. The two move literally parallel, now disengaged, now crossing, sometimes unintentionally contradicting one another, at other times consciously so. The words portray early Sydney as "a gaol ... at the world's furthest end ... another planet ... the cruellest penitentiary on earth", but the things beg to differ. The cases blithely display the solid clay tiles from the houses where convicts lived, oyster shells from the oysters they gorged themselves with, blue and green edged-ware from their dinner sets (relatively plain, but by no means cheap and nasty), a simple, full-bellied creamware jug. Do the visitors who come to the Rocks to see 'the birthplace of a nation', moving from side to side,

between words and things, catch sight of this marvellous rebuttal?

Further along, an attempt has been made to fit the archaeology into the standard historical understanding of the nineteenth-century Rocks as rigidly separated by class and topography — the wealthy lived on the heights of the ridges and the poor lived on the lower reaches. Accordingly, one case, entitled “Living on the Ridges”, gathers together seemingly “impressive” and “luxurious” items, stemmed wine glasses, a Chinese porcelain statuette, some fine Egyptian and Greco-Roman collectors’ pieces, the display crowned by a large, pink, exuberantly transfer-printed ewer. These are meant to demonstrate “the material comfort of those living high up on the ridge”, well-off people whose goods were “intended to affirm their status”. Links are made with such wealthy Sydney collectors as Charles Nicholson and the Macleay family. The next case, entitled, “Overcrowding” features much more modest pieces — earthenware bowls, tinware plates and teapots, blacking bottles and some endearing sewing equipment, demonstrating the lives of the poor who inhabited the lower streets of the Rocks. It is conceded that “contrary to the historical information” archaeology reveals “living standards ... were higher than, say, similar areas in London or Manchester ...” but overall, the ‘slum’ image prevails, for this display concludes that “poor sanitation and a low standard of building ... certainly earned the Rocks its slum reputation”.

But many Rocks sites are mazed with sewerage, water and drainage pipes, and with the foundations of solid and substantial buildings, alongside some of poorer quality. And what the designers completely missed in their search for suitable artefacts to illustrate this ‘historical’ dichotomy was the fact that these ‘fine’ and ‘modest’ wares alike came from *exactly the same sites*. Ordinary middling and working people of Cumberland Street, and not wealthy upper and middle-class people, were the owners of the faience

Ushabti figure from Egypt, the large, flowery ewer, the elegant stemmed glasses, as well as the blacking bottles and the tinware.⁶⁵ Archaeology forces us to look more closely at the idea of strictly class-based residential patterns gleaned from the scribblings of nineteenth century outsider observers. That so-called ‘slum-dwellers’ should so clearly aspire to, and often achieve, their preferred form of gentility, made available by consumer culture, industrialisation, and by their interest in collecting, is the sort of ‘shock’ insight archaeology delivers. It challenges long-held ideas about the culture and stance of working people, about the Rocks as a ‘slum’, about the very notion of ‘slums’ itself.⁶⁶ It is indeed ironic that such an exhibition did not quite grasp these most obvious insights — new insights which are important for understanding our social and urban past. The problem here is one of museum practice, for clearly if historical/archaeological contexts are ignored, archaeological collections become merely vast repositories of things from which ‘appropriate’ selections are pulled out to ‘illustrate’ the very concepts or models they actually subvert.

Hence the power objects have in conveying a “more archaeological understanding of our history”⁶⁷ is also dispersed, lost. As Pearce observes, words are such a clumsy, ineffective substitute for what the eye falls upon and grasps in an instant. No amount of written description can substitute for these treasures, for the sight of the elegant *blanc-de-chine* bowls from George Cribb’s well, delicately traced with red enamels and silver flowers.⁶⁸ Displayed objects offer “sensuous enjoyment”, the wonder of the three-dimensional “real thing from the real past” which connects past and present.⁶⁹ It is this sheer physicality which looms largest for curators, and so their focus is upon “the poetics of space ... the relation of things and senses, spatial and sensory compositions” in order to “exploit the sensuality and materiality of the museum medium”.⁷⁰

But looks are not everything. The deeper “erotics of the museum” as Julie Marcus observes, lies with both the pleasures of the material forms *and* with the “flashes of understanding which bring to light an unseen order with a bearing on daily life ... a moment of *new knowledge*”.⁷¹ The jolt of recognition partners the excitement of discovery through the “quick spirit that moves between people”,⁷² that arcing link museums provide between those who study, interpret and display the artefacts and those who come to see them. Marcus argues that the moment of enlightenment springs from the engagement of objects with narrative, and thus with connections and evaluation.

In the beautifully designed archaeological displays at the Museum of Sydney, however, such narratives, connections and evaluations were deliberately erased or avoided. There were no meanings here, only vague, pulsating themes such as ‘power’ ‘environment’, ‘trade’, and criss-crossing voices, murmuring and indistinct. Here, the separation of material from words, collecting from interpretation, reached its apotheosis, and intentionally so. The exhibition of historical archaeology took a strange, expensive, full-circle journey, for the deficiency in interpretation was transformed into a kind of virtue. It was argued that we cannot ‘know’ the past, that all our accounts of it will inevitably be mere constructs reflecting our own obsessions, and so archaeological artefacts were, for the main part, presented as a plethora of beautiful, curious, unexplained objects, jumbled flotsam and jetsam from an unexplainable past. The great glass wall encasing the major archaeological display is a reversion to the cabinet of curiosities, to ‘pure show’, eschewing classification (scientific, historical or functional) by arranging objects in deliberately improbable ways.⁷³ Historical and archaeological contexts and provenance are evidently regarded not as the keys to understanding the material, but as yet more distorting encrustations, and so they are not offered. Apart from some Sydney place names and compass points artfully

printed on the glass wall, viewers are not even told where the artefacts came from. They are ‘freed’ to make own conclusions from what they see, filtered through individual experience and cultural background, so all meaning collapses into individual response, each as valid as any other.

But how can this approach, this refusal to narrate, to inform, fulfil the important, critical objectives of the social history museum? How can it overturn oppressive narratives about race, class, empire, nation, power and science, the very narratives this museum especially sought to critique and subvert?⁷⁴ What can the visitor seeking an insight into early Sydney as it was lived, rather than as the authorities portrayed it, discover from a profusion of things floating in “text-free innocence”?⁷⁵ Concerns of this sort seem to have prompted the museum’s curators to reconsider, for more recent exhibits do offer narratives. One of them, a space “dedicated to the Cadigal people and all surviving Aboriginal descendants of the Sydney region” acknowledges, documents and memorialises the fate of Aboriginal people dispossessed by European invasion. The story is told simply and firmly, with words and things.

The additional archaeology exhibit does not fare so well. Mounted beside the first, it attempts to provide some themes and contexts for further ‘small things’. A range of small artefacts is set in glass boxes accompanied by contemporary pictures and maps, some archaeological plans, labels and text. Close-up, though, we find the display has relapsed into simple collage, with the familiar, myopic, now perplexing disengagement of history and archaeology. A brief paragraph of historical data is followed by an equally brief paragraph describing archaeological sites and artefacts. Some of the artefacts have nothing to do with the themes outlined, apart from a rather tenuous geographic proximity,⁷⁶ while some of the themes do not ask the obvious questions: those about power and negotiation. “Redemption”, dealing with the

building of St James' church, makes no mention, for instance, of the convicts' spiritual beliefs, or lack of them, or of the complex and contradictory role of the church in maintaining the rule of governors, law and administration. Despite the availability of interpretative research on Rocks sites and artefacts for some years now, the theme entitled "Rocks" once more focuses lightly on the social heterogeneity of the area. The text mentions ironwork and snuff bottles, which stand for a convict blacksmith and residents of an "affluent dwelling" respectively. It wonders idly whether a pair of discarded shoes found in a well is "perhaps the handiwork of an 1830s cobbler?"

Let us pause to look closely at one particular artefact, the age-blackened cedar coffin from the early Sydney burial ground, now located in the first, large display, the process of its decay suspended surreally by careful conservation and clear perspex props. The new display offers some explanation of this item. We are told of its archaeological discovery, and something of the old Sydney Burial Ground where it was first interred. The accompanying quote tells of the burial ground's poor, neglected and disorderly condition in 1849. The small display box holds some cedar fragments and corroded iron coffin-handles. But no questions are asked of the coffin itself, or, despite the theme-title "burial", about what a burial like this might have signified in early Sydney. Proper coffins, with nameplates, handles and rows of coffin nails or studs (still evidenced by the groove around the perimeter of the lid and the retrieval of some studs), were unambiguous marks of care for the dead person, of concern for the security of the corpse. This coffin means that a proper funeral and burial had taken place, and this in turn indicates that the deceased (who could easily have been a convict or ex-convict) had at least some means, as well as a circle of family and friends to mourn him or her. These are sympathies and communal networks which run counter to the images of a brutal penal soci-

ety, inured to death and suffering, incapable of human sympathy and care. Here, then, is an eloquent artefact which informs us about early Sydney's deathways, about an aspect of popular culture determinedly established in the new country, in a way which documents alone cannot.⁷⁷ Again, the point of what archaeology is about has somehow been missed. Despite the Museum's courageous decision to step outside the historiographical scaffolding of empire and authority, order and progress, these excursions do not ask the very questions of the material which might reveal the 'lived town', the town of the people, surging beneath.

CONCLUSION

Historical archaeology, in reconnecting objects and meaning, integrating things and words, in examining changing or continuous patterns of use and discard over time, has the potential for much more than "straightforward show-and-tell presentation".⁷⁸ It can move beyond the slightly self-absorbed displays about archaeological processes, or uncritical 'lifeways' themes which somehow miss the meanings of the material evidence itself. Historical archaeology can challenge both disabling historical stereotypes and more complacent, comforting visions of the past, the notion that past peoples were "little different from us".⁷⁹ It can convey those startling recognitions — a lively consumer culture among people portrayed as degraded prisoners or hapless slum dwellers, for example. But at the same time, it reveals the equally significant discontinuities, the now-unfamiliar outlooks and habits which make us realise that the convicts of early Sydney, with their eighteenth century pre-industrial culture, were in many respects not "like us" at all.⁸⁰

Museums are slow-moving bodies, as Griffiths cheerfully observes, for they "can only reinvent themselves slowly" and find it difficult to erase the outlines of their "earlier selves".⁸¹ It is not surprising, then, that the demonstrated potential of archaeological

collections, the new insights, the journeys into past material and mental worlds have yet to work their way through the “stilling qualities of minds and institutions”,⁸² the inertia of accepted curatorial practice and ways of seeing and displaying objects, not to mention the *realpolitik* of dominant narratives and interests which often decree who and what is represented in museum exhibitions.⁸³

Most archaeological excavations attract thousands of visitors interested in seeing the structures and artefacts resurrected slowly from the earth, and in watching the archaeologists and volunteers at work. Especially popular are the boxes of (unstratified) artefacts which people can pick up, hold in their hands, and examine closely. Over 10, 000 people came to see the Cumberland/Gloucester Streets excavation in 1994, while intense media coverage brought the site to tens of thousands more. Public interest in archaeology, the way people are drawn to the earlier places, structures and artefacts of their city, and to gaze into the glass cases of museums, suggests that the funding of genuine interpretative research projects is justified and worthwhile. But this will involve a considerable shift in the way much public archaeology is currently carried out, both during the excavations and in the museums. It requires an incorporation of genuine interpretative work into the processes of meticulous collecting and recording, a heightened awareness of the human context of rediscovered artefacts, and a recognition that “sensuality and materiality” must partner “rational analysis and synthesis”.⁸⁴

For archaeological understandings, we also need real conversation, interchange and collaboration between archaeologists, historians and museum curators, rather than compartmentalised approaches. We need to set aside the defence of disciplinary and institutional boundaries, to see what lies beyond the confines of narrow specialist interests, to continually confront the entanglement of “the written and the wrought”.⁸⁵ We must write and speak so that others can

understand us; we need to be generous, to keep open minds, to exchange, to cross over.

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Endnotes

- 1 Drawn from Graham Wilson, “Ceramics and Tobacco Pipes Artefact Report”, and Kevin Barnes “Building Materials Artefact Report”, in Godden Mackay Logan and Grace Karskens, *The Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site, The Rocks: Archaeological Investigation Report*, 6 vols (Sydney, Godden Mackay Logan, 1999), vol. 4 pp. 133, 162, 311–15, 317, 322. References to curtains, pictures and furniture from advertisements, auction lists and reports in *Sydney Gazette*, 1803 c1810. For fuller discussion and references see Grace Karskens, *Inside the Rocks: The Archaeology of a Neighbourhood*, (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger 1999), pp. 50–74.
- 2 Graham Wilson “Trench A Report”; Martin Carney, “Trench C Report”, in Godden Mackay Logan and Karskens, *Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site*, vol. 3, pp. 32, 35, 144–6, 157; J.M. Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History*, (Melbourne, 1968), pp. 18, 28; P. Bridges, *Foundations of Identity: Building Early Sydney 1788–1822*, (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1995), pp. 11ff.
- 3 Carney, “Trench C Report”, Nadia Iacono, “Trench D Report”, Dominic Steele “Trench F Report”, Barnes, “Building Materials”, Carney “Glass and Bottle Stoppers Artefact Report”, in Godden Mackay Logan and Karskens, *Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site*, vol. 3, pp. 146ff, 200, 257–61; vol. 4, pp. 102, 162. See also series of advertisements for sale of houses in *Sydney Gazette*, 1803–1810, for example 12 October 1811.
- 4 Grace Karskens, *The Rocks: Life in Early Sydney*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1997), chapters 3–6; Grace Karskens, “The Dialogue of Townscape: The Rocks and Sydney, 1788–1820”, in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 28, no 108, (1997), 88–112.
- 5 See for example Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia 1788–1868*, (London: Collins Harvill, 1987); R. W. Connell and T. H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narrative and Argument*, (Melbourne: Longman & Cheshire, 1986), chapter 2; Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright, *No Paradise for Workers*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), chapters 2, 3 and 4;

- Russell Ward, *The Australian Legend*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958).
- 6 Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture since 1788*, (Sth Melbourne: Longman Australia, 1995), chapter 1; Karskens, *The Rocks*, chapters 7, 14, 18; D. Hainsworth, *The Sydney Traders: Simeon Lord and his contemporaries 1788–1821*, (Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1968); Jane Elliot, “Was there a convict dandy? Convict consumer interests in Sydney 1788–1815”, in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 104, (1995), pp. 373–92.
- 7 Karskens, *The Rocks*, pp. 152–3, 206–7, 238; Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, chapters 1 and 2; Elliot, “Convict dandy?”; Wilson, “Ceramics”, pp. 312–13; Rebecca Bower, “Leather Artefacts Report”, in Godden Mackay Logan, *Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site, the Rocks*, vol. 4 pp. 123, 131; Wendy Thorp, “Report on the excavations at Lilyvale”, (draft), unpublished report prepared for CRI, (Sydney, 1994), section 4.2; silver teaspoons were often reported stolen in *Sydney Gazette*, for example 7 April 1810.
- 8 Stephen Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past*, (Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 9 Portia Robinson, *The Women of Botany Bay: A Reinterpretation of the Role of Women in the Origins of Australian Society*, (Sydney, Macquarie Library, 1988); see also Monica Perrott, *A Tolerable Good Success: Economic Opportunities for Women in New South Wales 1788–1830*, (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983); Karskens, *The Rocks*, pp. 28, 85, 207ff, 235.
- 10 Nell McKendrick, John Brewer & J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth Century England*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982); Carole Shammas, *The Preindustrial Consumer in England and America*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
- 11 Compare with Linda Young, “The Struggle for Class: The transmission of genteel culture to early colonial Australia”, PhD thesis, (Flinders University of South Australia, 1997).
- 12 Young, “Struggle for Class”; Karskens, *The Rocks*, chapter 15; compare with Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789–1860*, (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1987), p. 12.
- 13 Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, pp. 52–5; Karskens, *The Rocks*, pp. 220–1; compare with John Demos, *Little Commonwealths: Family Life in Plymouth Colony*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). p. 39 and
- Stephen Mrozowski, “Landscapes of Inequality” in Randall McGuire and Robert Paynter (eds), *The Archaeology of Inequality: Material Culture, Domination and Resistance*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 79; Young, “Struggle for Class”, Introduction.
- 14 Wilson, “Ceramics ... Artefact Report”, pp. 312–14, 327; Martin Carney, “Glass Artefact Report”, pp. 85, 94–5, 99, 100, 102; R. J. B. Knight & Alan Frost, in *Journal of Daniel Payne 1794–97*, (Sydney: Library of Australian History and National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 1983), p. 30; Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, pp. 69–74; Linda Young, “Staying British: The continuities of middle class culture in colonial Australia”, paper read at Australian Historical Association conference, (Sydney, July 5–10, 1998).
- 15 David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge, 1985).
- 16 Karskens, *The Rocks*, chapters 7 and 19; compare with Young, “The Struggle for Class”, especially chapters 3 and 6.
- 17 By ‘site’ I am referring not only to the area investigated, but also to all its archaeological contexts, features, structures, and the artefacts and samples drawn from it.
- 18 See Godden Mackay Pty Ltd with Grace Karskens, “The Cumberland Street/Gloucester Street Site Archaeological Investigation: Archaeological Assessment and Research Design”, report prepared for the Sydney Cove Authority and the NSW Heritage Council, (Sydney, 1994); Godden Mackay Logan and Karskens, *The Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site, The Rocks: Archaeological Investigation Report*; Grace Karskens, “Crossing over: Archaeology and History at the Cumberland/ Gloucester Street Site, the Rocks, 1994–1996”, in *Public History Review*, vol. 5/6, (1996–97), pp. 30–48. The contextualisation of the project and the resultant richness and depth of the findings from this site, directly counter Lydon’s claims that “archaeological reports ... do not, or cannot, contextualise a site within a broader social and physical picture” and that “no one site, however significant, can tell us very much about the past”, see Jane Lydon, “Sites: archaeology in context”, in *Museum of Sydney, Sites: Nailing the Debate, Archaeology and Interpretation in Museums*, (Sydney: Museum of Sydney, 1996), p.141.
- 19 See Lydon, “Sites”; and Grace Karskens, “The Cumberland Street/Gloucester Street Site, the Rocks: An Historical Discourse”, report prepared for Godden Mackay Pty Ltd and the Sydney Cove Authority.

- 20 Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*; Godden Mackay Logan and Karskens, The Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site.
- 21 John Dixon Hunt, "The Sign of the Object", in Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (eds), *History from Things: essays on material culture*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 294.
- 22 Jane Lydon, *Many Inventions: The Chinese in the Rocks 1890–1930*, (Melbourne: Monash Publications in History, 1999), p. 176; "Artifacts by themselves do not produce questions, discourse or answers", see Mark P. Leone and Barbara J. Little, "Artifacts as Expressions of Society and Culture: Subversive Genealogy and the Value of History" in Lubar and Kingery, *History from Things*, p. 161. See also Tim Murray, "Historical Archaeology loses its way: Bairstow at the crossroads", in *Australian Archaeology*, Vol 20, (1985), pp. 121–32.
- 23 Graham Connah, "Stamp collecting or increased understanding? The Dilemma of Historical Archaeology", in *Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology*, vol. 1, (1983), p. 15.
- 24 See research questions and discussion in Godden Mackay, "Archaeological Assessment and Research Design", pp. 72–6, Karskens, "Historical Discourse" pp. 71–80, Karskens "Crossing Over", pp. 30–8. Most of these questions were developed from those suggested in Grace Karskens and Wendy Thorp, "History and archaeology in Sydney Towards integration and interpretation", in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 78, parts 3 and 4, (1992), pp. 52–75.
- 25 Grace Karskens, "Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Archaeological Investigation: Database of Residents", unpublished database, (1994–1999); and "Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Archaeological Investigation: Detailed Occupancy List", unpublished typescript, (June 1994). A list of family historians who participated appears in Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, pp. 223–4, in which see also discussion of the possessions of the Byrne and Cribb families, for example, chapter 1.
- 26 Compare with Brian Egloff, "From Swiss Family Robinson to Sir Russell Drysdale Towards changing the tone of historical archaeology in Australia", in *Australian Archaeology*, vol. 39, pp. 1–9; and with Matthew Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 202–8.
- 27 The collections themselves are sorted and catalogued not by historical period or by thematic or functional relationship, as they might be from a social history perspective but largely by material, so that specialists find themselves researching objects which are incidentally related, for example, ceramic tea-sets and clay pipes, or metal pots and bronze drawer handles, rather than tea-sets and teaspoons, or butchered bones and the pots in which they were cooked. See artefact reports in Godden Mackay Logan, The Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site, The Rocks: Archaeological Investigation Report vol. 4; for further discussion see Birmingham, "A Decade of Digging: Deconstructing Urban Historical Archaeology", in *Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology*, vol. 8 (1990), p. 16 and Lydon, "Sites: Archaeology in Context", pp. 143–4.
- 28 Compare with John Dixon Hunt, "The Sign of the Object" in Lubar and Kingery, *History from Things*, p. 293.
- 29 Sharon Sullivan, "Archaeology, Sites and Museums" in *Museum of Sydney, Sites: Nailing the Debate*, p. 49.
- 30 Godden Mackay Logan, The Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site, The Rocks: Archaeological Investigation Report, vol. 6, "Artefact Database" CD-ROM, (Redfern, NSW: Godden McKay Ltd, 1999).
- 31 This debate has a huge literature; compare for example Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), p. 195 with Graham Connah, "Historical Reality: Archaeological Reality: Excavations at Regentville, Penrith, New South Wales, 1985", in *Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology*, vol. 4, (1986), pp. 29–42; and essays in Lubar and Kingery, *History from Things*; see also note 49 below.
- 32 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Why we need things", in Lubar and Kingery, *History from Things*, pp. 22–23.
- 33 Michael Field and Timothy Millett (eds), *Convict Love Tokens: The Leaden Hearts the Convicts Left Behind*, (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 1998).
- 34 Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Ian Duffield, "Skin Deep Devotions: Religious Tattoos and Convict Transportation to Australia", in J Caplan (ed.), *Written on the Body: the tattoo in European and American History*, (London: Reaktion Press and Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 129; see also James Bradley and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Embodied Explorations: Investigating Convict Tattoos and the Transportation System", in Ian Duffield and James Bradley, *Representing Convicts: New Perspectives on Forced Labour Migration*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pp. 183–203.

- 35 Sarah Bird, Letter to her father c 1798, published in Helen Heney (ed.), *Dear Fanny: Women's letters to and from New South Wales 1788–1857*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1985), pp. 16–17; Karskens, *The Rocks*, p. 153, 207–9; Perrott, *A Tolerable Good Success*, p. 56; D. D. Mann, *The Present Picture of New South Wales*, first published London 1811, facsimile edition (Sydney: John Ferguson, 1979), p. 44.
- 36 Karskens, “Historical Discourse”, pp. 1–2; Grace Karskens, “Revisiting the world view: the archaeology of convict households in Sydney’s Rocks neighbourhood”, in Susan Lawrence and Grace Karskens (eds), in *Historical Archaeology (forthcoming 2003)*. The constant movement of things in the early town is especially apparent in the *Sydney Gazette*.
- 37 Accounts of murder of Mary Smith, *Sydney Gazette*, 18 and 25 January 1807. Smith was murdered by John Kenny when she pursued him for the return of some property he had stolen from her some months before.
- 38 *Sydney Gazette*, 14 August 1803; 2 July 1814 (evidence of Mary Anderson at trial of Dennis Donovan); 7 February 1827 (evidence of Thomas Sidderson at trial of Samuel Pasfield).
- 39 *Sydney Gazette*, 13 January, 17 February 1805.
- 40 *Sydney Gazette*, 20 May 1805; 30 June 1805, 27 April 1806; Robinson, *The Women of Botany Bay*, p. 169. Sentenced to seven years transportation, to follow on from her original sentence, she was sent to Kings Town (Newcastle) in April 1806, but not before Mrs Rafferty (most likely Rocks dealer Elizabeth Rafferty) successfully charged her with having in her possession yet more “sundry articles ... stolen from her house”.
- 41 See, for example account of the artefacts from the “Little Lon” excavation in Melbourne, Tim Murray and Alan Mayne, “(Re) Constructing a Lost Community: “Little Lon”, Melbourne, Australia”, in Lawrence and Karskens, in *Historical Archaeology (forthcoming 2003)*; Lydon, “Sites: archaeology in context”, pp. 143–4.
- 42 Margaret Anderson, “Selling the past: History in Museums in the 1990s”, in John Rickard & Peter Spearritt, *Packaging the Past? Public Histories*, (Carlton, 1991), pp. 130–41; Tom Griffiths, “Social History and Deep Time”, in *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Vol 7, no. 1, 2000; Peter Emmett, “WYSIWYG [what you see is what you get] on the site of First Government House”, in *Museum of Sydney, Sites: Nailing the Debate*, pp. 110–20.
- 43 Compare with Birmingham’s wry description of historical archaeology as an “aesthetically challenged discipline” whose possibilities in the museum were “never marketable”, Judy Birmingham, “Museum of Sydney: An Archaeological Focus” in *Museum of Sydney, Sites: Nailing the Debate*, p. 257–8.
- 44 Including the collections at Rouse Hill House, Rouse Hill, Vacluse House, Vacluse, Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta, Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney. Personal comments from Michael Bogle, Curator, Hyde Park Barracks Museum, (April and November 1999). The museum nevertheless does feature some fine displays of archaeological material.
- 45 Richard Mackay, “Political, pictorial, physical and philosophical plans: Realising archaeological research potential in urban Sydney”, in *Museum of Sydney, Sites: Nailing the Debate*, pp. 126–7; Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, I. 17–18; Sullivan, “Archaeology, sites and museums”, pp. 52–3; Richard Mackay and Grace Karskens, “Historical Archaeology in Australia: Historical or hysterical? Crisis or creative awakening?”, in *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, vol. 17, (1999), p. 112.
- 46 Mackay, “Political, pictorial, physical and philosophical plans”, pp. 128–9; Egloff, “From Swiss Family Robinson”, pp. 3–4; Karskens and Thorp, “Historical Archaeology in Sydney”, pp. 52–3.
- 47 Susan Lawrence, “The Role of Material Culture in Australasian Archaeology”, *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, vol. 16, (1998), pp. 8–15. In response, the following volume of *Australasian Historical Archaeology* published a number of papers focused on artefacts, as well as soils and pollens, see vol. 17, (1999).
- 48 Tracey Ireland, “Excavating National Identity”, in *Museum of Sydney, Sites: Nailing the Debate*, pp. 90–1; Mackay and Karskens, “Historical Archaeology in Australia”, pp. 110–15.
- 49 Richard Flanagan, “Crowbar history: Panel games and Port Arthur”, in *Australian Society*, (August 1990), pp. 35–7; compare with discussion of “archaeological preciousness” in Sullivan, “Archaeology, sites and museums”, pp. 54–5.
- 50 Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 25; Jane Lydon, “Archaeology in The Rocks, Sydney: From Old Sydney Gaol to Mrs Lewis’ Boarding -house”, in *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, vol. 11, (1993), pp. 33–42.
- 51 Denis Byrne, “The Ethos of Return: Aboriginal Visibility in the Historical Landscape” in Lawrence

- and Karskens, in *Historical Archaeology* (forthcoming 2003); Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, pp. 68–88, 91.
- 52 Meredith Walker, response to Alan Mayne, “Ethnographies of Place: ‘Slum’ Stories From the Inside Out”, paper given at “Engendering Material Culture—Fifth Women in Archaeology Conference”, (Sydney, 4 July 1999).
- 53 Peter Emmett, “WYSIWYG”, p. 115.
- 54 As Birmingham observed, the archaeological and documentary evidence usually “go past each other without apparent engagement”; see “A Decade of Digging”, p. 14.
- 55 Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, p. 195, and see discussion Chapter 2; Bernard Smith, “History and the Collector” in his *The Death of the Artist as Hero: Essays in History and Culture*, (Melbourne, 1988), p. 97. Compare with Flood’s discussion of the debates among prehistorians regarding ethnographic versus ‘pure’ archaeological approaches to interpreting Australian rock art; see Josephine Flood, *Rock Art of the Dreamtime: Images of Ancient Australia*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1997), pp. 20–24.
- 56 Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, p. 91
- 57 Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, p. 205. Compare with discussion in Sullivan, “Archaeology, sites and museums”, pp. 52–3.
- 58 Personal comments by Wayne Johnson, Archaeologist, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority; the curator wishes to remain anonymous.
- 59 Personal comments by Eleanor Casella, (29 October 1999).
- 60 Susan Lawrence, *Dolly’s Creek: An Archaeology of Goldmining*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000); Jane Lydon, *Many Inventions*.
- 61 Personal comments by Tim Murray, Department of Archaeology, La Trobe University; the project is entitled “Exploring the historical archaeology of the modern city: Sydney 1788–1900”.
- 62 John Dixon Hunt, “The Sign of the Object”, p. 294.
- 63 For discussion of the usefulness of ‘lifeways’ themes in interpreting archaeological sites and artefacts, see Karskens, “Crossing Over”, pp. 37–8. The mocha ware bowl appears in case 3 (item 4) of the historical and archaeological exhibition at the Sydney Visitors’ Centre, George Street, the Rocks.
- 64 For an overview of these sites, see Lydon, “Archaeology in The Rocks”; see also Max Kelly, *Anchored in a Small Cove: A History and Archaeology of the Rocks*, Sydney, (Sydney: Sydney Cove Authority, 1999).
- 65 See Thorp, “Report on Lilyvale”; compare with similar findings in Godden Mackay Logan and Karskens, *The Cumberland/Gloucester Streets Site* and Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, chapters 3–5.
- 66 Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, chapters 4 and 5; Grace Karskens, “Small Things, Big Pictures: New Perspectives from Sydney’s Rocks Neighbourhood”, in Alan Mayne and Tim Murray (eds), *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes: Explorations in Slumland*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 67 Smith, “History and the Collector”, p. 100.
- 68 The well was excavated on the Cumberland/Gloucester Streets site, see Carney “Trench C Report”, pp. 154–7; Wilson, “Ceramic ... Artefact report”, pp. 313–14; Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, pp. 40, 138–40.
- 69 Smith, “History and the Collector”, p. 97; Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, pp. 22–24; on sensory response and reading of artefacts see also Jules David Prown, “The Truth of Material Culture” in Lubar and Kingery, *History from Things*, pp. 1–19. Compare with Birmingham’s assertion that, for archaeologists, “visual appeal is no substitute for intellectual-based rational analysis and synthesis”, Birmingham, “Museum of Sydney: An Archaeological Focus”, p. 258.
- 70 Emmett, “WYSIWYG”, p. 115.
- 71 Julie Marcus, *A Dark Smudge Upon the Sand: Essays on Race, Guilt and the National Consciousness*, (Sydney: LhR Press), pp. 37–50.
- 72 Helen Garner, *True Stories: Selected Non-Fiction*, (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1996), p. 174.
- 73 Grace Karskens, “A Visit to MoSotSoFGH: Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House”, in *Phanfare*, no. 117, (November 1995), pp. 1–3; Marcus, “Erotics and the Museum of Sydney”, p. 42; Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, p. 24.
- 74 Marcus, “Erotics and the Museum of Sydney”, pp. 42–3; Emmett, “WYSIWYG”, pp. 111–12.
- 75 D. P. Dymond, *Archaeology and History: A Plea for Reconciliation*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), p. 83.
- 76 For example, the theme ‘Toll’ is focused on the early toll-gate on George Street West, but the sole link with the artefacts displayed seems to be that they were found in same general area (site of

- Dixon's steam mill on Darling Harbour, the Brickfields, and University Hall, Glebe).
- 77 Judy Birmingham and Carol Liston, "Old Sydney Burial Ground 1974", in *Studies in Historical Archaeology No 5*, (1976); Anthony Lowe and Richard Mackay, "Old Sydney Burial Ground", in *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, vol. 10, (1992), pp. 15–23; Grace Karskens, "Death was in His face: Dying, Burial and Remembrance in Early Sydney", *Labour History*, no. 74, (1998), pp. 21–39.
- 78 Birmingham, "A Decade of Digging", p. 13.
- 79 John McPhee, "Bleak Colony in Close-up". review of "Convicts" exhibition, Hyde Park Barracks Museum, *Sydney Morning Herald*, (8 November 1999).
- 80 Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, pp. 4, 340–5.
- 81 Griffiths, "Social History and Deep Time".
- 82 Greg Denning, "Between Worlds", in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 112, (1999), p. 172.
- 83 Anderson, "Selling the Past", pp. 134–41.
- 84 Emmett, "WYSIWYG", p. 115; Birmingham, "Museum of Sydney: An Archaeological Focus", p. 258.
- 85 Mary Ellin D'Agostino and others (eds), "The Written and the Wrought: Complementary Sources" in *Historical Anthropology, Special Edition of the Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers*, no. 79, (1995).