

Professor emeritus John D. Mulvaney

6 July 2000, recorded at the late Mrs Charles McBurney's home in Cambridge, England, by Pamela Jane Smith pjs1011@cam.ac.uk

*Professor Mulvaney is considered to be "the guiding spirit of Australian prehistory archaeology and the founding father of Australian archaeology".*

This is John Mulvaney. I was born in 1925 in the Victorian country. My father was a schoolmaster and my family had a family of five, and, in those days, teachers were paid very little. He moved around the country and during the Depression we had very little money and I left school at the age of 16 – what would be year 11 – and I became also a trainee schoolteacher in the country. This was during the war and the week I turned 18, I enlisted in the Royal Australian Air force to get away from it all because I did not enjoy the teaching system and I was just waiting to turn 18. Fortunately for me I was sent to Canada, where I was trained at Winnipeg as a navigator; and in September 1944, I went on to England where I was fully trained as a navigator but never had to drop bombs because the war ended before we were fully trained. I mention this because it is vital to my background.

When I came back to Australia, because I had been in the Services, I was entitled to post-war reconstruction training funding and as a result I decided I would go to the University of Melbourne and assumed that I would become a teacher in secondary school. I was interested in history – being in England, it fascinated me – and I decided that history was the only subject I was interested in. So, at Melbourne University between 1946–48 I did an Honours degree in history and specialised in the history of the ancient world and for a special Honours subject I, we, six students, took the study of Roman Britain, and this is how I got interested in archaeology. I wrote an essay during my undergraduate year in studying Roman Britain, reconstructing the economy of Britain at the time the Romans came. And, after graduating, I went on to do an MA degree, a research degree, and my Supervisor suggested that I elaborate on the subject of the economy of Britain. So, I wrote a 60,000 word thesis on Britain,

and the State Library of Victoria had a remarkable run of 19th- and early 20th-century archaeological British literature. Over 60 journals published in Britain in archaeology were held in that library. Came the depression, they cancelled most of them but anyway, I had a marvellous time going through the files of these journals and getting fascinated in archaeology; and during the course of 1950, when I was writing my thesis, I read Grahame Clark's articles on prehistoric economy, which were then coming out. This to me was absolutely exciting work and I read his book, *Prehistoric England*, which was a new approach to writing the archaeology of a country and in the same year Glyn Daniel's *A Hundred Years of Archaeology* appeared and that was one of the most exciting books I had ever read at the time. People criticise it now, but in 1950, it was one of the first books to look at the history and I was a trained historian by that stage with a 1st class degree and it appealed to me.

So, I decided that if there was archaeology in Britain there should be archaeology in Australia and I started reading around at the time and discovered that the only archaeological work being done was by Fred McCarthy, a Curator of the Australian Museum in Sydney who had no training at all. He enlisted, he joined the staff at the Museum at 14 or 15, I think; later in life, he did a diploma in Anthropology at the University of Sydney. He published hundreds of articles that, I suppose you'd say they were amateur studies, but they were very important. The other major figure was Norman Tindale at the South Australian Museum, who in 1917 took a science degree at the University of Adelaide, was in fact an authority on moths, and he, over the period from 1921 on, got interested in Aboriginal people and became more or less expert in linguistics and social anthropology and all sorts of things, but at a very elementary level academically but a very detailed level practically because he moved around with J.B. Birdsell. In 1938-39, he spent an entire year wandering around Australia. Birdsell was doing genetic studies really and Tindale was assisting him. He had such a knowledge of Aborigines that was extraordinary, but he had no theoretical background. Anyway, he and Hale, who was the Director of the South Australia Museum, in 1929, excavated the site Devon Downs that is revolutionary. They

went down about 6 or 7 metres and found that it was stratified. They realised it was stratified. They kept the evidence separately layer by layer and published it in great detail in 1930 and that really inspired me, that here was a site that everybody ignored, just didn't feature subsequently, but there it was. There was archaeology in Australia.

The other person who was working was Edmund Gill, who had been a former Congregational Minister who was dismissed from his church because he believed in human evolution. He was given the job of palaeontologist at the Melbourne Museum and he was working at the site of Keilor in Victoria where he claimed human remains were of Pleistocene age, but he had very little background; but all three of these men, McCarthy, Tindale and Edmund Gill, all published hundreds of papers on all sorts of subjects. Some of them involved archaeology.

Well, that was all I could find but it was enough to convince me that there was archaeology in Australia. Fortunately, at that time the Australian National University in Canberra had just been created in 1950, '49-'50. As there was no university but as there was a great brain drain on Australian academics, they were all going overseas, this was founded as a research institution to bring people to Australia or stop them leaving. So they had a very broad and rich scheme for giving postgraduate research degrees. I applied for one at the end of 1950 and by the time I was awarded a First Class Honours degree for my thesis on Roman Britain, I was awarded this scholarship but I had to state in my application that although I was applying for a Ph.D scholarship, I could not do a Ph.D because I was not an archaeologist and therefore, if I got this degree, I would only take it up on condition that I was allowed to do an undergraduate degree to learn the background of how to be an archaeologist. Believe or not, they awarded me the scholarship to do an undergraduate degree. I am the only one in the history of the ANU to be so privileged, and in those glorious days, you nominated the place that you wanted to go. They didn't tell you where you had to go. So I said that I wanted to go to Cambridge, and I said specifically that I wanted to work there because Grahame Clark and Glyn Daniel were there doing

exactly the sort that I thought an Australian needed to learn, to go back to Australia to apply it. So in 1951 I came to Cambridge and entered Clare College. I was very lucky there. In post-war years, it was hard to get into Colleges, but a staff colleague at Melbourne University who had been at Clare managed to get me in. And I arrived full of great enthusiasm in September 1951 to learn to be a Stone Age archaeologist, and I went to see Grahame Clark, who was my first Supervisor. He had not got his Chair at that stage, and he told me that, in addition to himself, I must go to a young man named Charles McBurney, who was the real Stone Age authority. I hadn't heard of him at that stage and I was very fortunate because I had a degree already, I only had to do Part II of the Tripos and for the two years I was here I was supervised every week by Charles McBurney; and in the first year I had Grahame Clark for most of the year and then he got his Chair and gave up, and for my second year, I went to Glyn Daniel every week. So I just had a Golden Age and that's how I became an archaeologist. That OK for background?

*That's brilliant. Were you supervised in this house?*

In those days, Charles McBurney lived in, sorry, to begin with when I arrived here, Charles McBurney was not married and he was a Fellow of King's and I went to the Gibbs building in Kings to his study, which was a marvellous 18th-century building, and he had an enormous grand piano in his study and it was all very impressive indeed; and Grahame Clark in those days lived in Barton Road and I went to his house in Barton Road for my supervisions. Shall I continue with this?

Charles McBurney was, of course, working in Libya and in early 1952, he invited me to join his party to go to Libya to dig at the Haua Fteah, the enormous cave which he had put a trial trench in the previous season. So, in June 1952, I think there were four of us and Charles went out in his utility small vehicle and we drove across France to Marseilles and went by sea to Tunis and drove right around North Africa to Apollonia. The site was about 10 miles further on from Apollonia. The British army was in Libya and we were supplied from the British Army base at Apollonia and very fortunately there

was a British Hospital at Darnah (Derna) because I got blood poisoning or something for some reason or other. I had to have a hand lanced, and penicillin injections, and I got back to the camp and because I only had one hand for a time, I did sieving all the time or sorting. Then my toes festered, so I had to go back to hospital again. I had to spend a week in hospital. It was very fortunate that the British Army was there. I mention the Haua Fteah cave particularly because that was the greatest influence on me. The techniques that Charles had developed to excavate a deep site, the year we were there we got down to 27 feet, and he used sieves suspended on stands that he developed, and the way he sorted material separately according to stone, bone, shell and keeping them separately in layers. It might have been standard technique but for me, I had never seen archaeology before in Australia, this was very influential. When I went back to Australia, I adopted his sieves, used angleiron steel, the mountable sections which could be screwed together which were easily transportable for the frame for standing the sieves on. Also for a ladder that could be put together to get in and out of the trench, and I devised a way of using the ladder so it didn't lean on the wall of the trench and so did no damage, and that was my standard technique. I think that nowadays most people sieve, and I think they use finer mesh than I used but nevertheless it was quite revolutionary when I started this in Australia; that we were using sieves and I had to emphasize that stratigraphy really mattered. This is despite the fact that Tindale had demonstrated that years before, but in Australia there had been very little excavation work and such as there was, was just shovelling out deposit. When I returned to Australia – well, could we stop –

*Drink of water break*

These sieves I really followed McBurney who had quarter-inch and eighth-inch mesh. That's what I had, which of course is not really fine enough to get really fine material. I suppose I was aware of that, but likewise I excavated trenches, which today would be regarded as unnecessarily large. In fact, in Australia, we complain that many of the younger archaeologists dig 'telephone box

archaeology'. That is, they dig a trench a metre square because they say they mustn't damage the rest of the site, and it does seem to me that that's got some advantages, but doesn't to my mind give a fair cross-section. You've got to understand, when I started excavating in January 1956, we knew very little about the archaeology of Australia and it was first necessary to prove there was an antiquity in Australia because there were many people around, collectors of stone tools in Victoria, for example, who said that the Aborigines haven't been here long and the culture has never changed, and there is nothing that archaeology will find out. Now today this may seem fairly hard to credit or not worth worrying about, but in 1956 it was absolutely essential to demonstrate to Australians that Aborigines had an antiquity, that there was such a thing as cultural change through time, and that there was such a thing as stratigraphy, so that the way to study the Aboriginal past was to dig systematically and separate your material according to strata.

So my early digs were designed as, if you like, as academic publicity; that there was this past. I dug areas that would be today larger than necessary, but the number of artefacts found was few, so one had to extend the area to do it. The first site I dug at Fromm's Landing at the Murray River in South Australia. The Murray River is Australia's Mississippi, and Tindale and Hale had dug site at Devon Downs; and I selected this site that was ten miles downstream from Devon Downs, partly because it had been shown to me by C.P. Mountford, who was a distinguished amateur anthropologist. He told me about the site and took me to it, and I decided that it was worth digging. In fact, it was. It was about six metres deep, with stratified deposit dated through about 5000 years. I might add that it was tremendous help to me and a coincidence that I started fieldwork in Australia just at the time that radiocarbon dating had been established and was being dated. Not that there were many laboratories. In fact, the first dates from Fromm's Landing, the first samples which I collected in 1956, in the first place I had no money. I had no research funds. I was able, through the good offices of Hallam L. Movius Jr, to get four samples dated in the US, free. They were my first radiocarbon dates.

*Really, he arranged that?*

Yes, he worked in South Australia. His wife was a South Australian. That was a useful contact. I should say also that, when I came back at the end of 1953 from Cambridge with my degree, wanting to do archaeology, there were no jobs in archaeology in Australia and a Professor of History at Melbourne, where I had already worked, offered me a Lectureship in the History of the Ancient World and between 1954 to 1964 inclusive. I lectured in Greek and Roman history and gradually increased the input of archaeology, and history, archaeological theory, and in 1957 he allowed me to introduce, as a fourth-year Honours history option to undergraduates, a course called Pacific Prehistory. That is the first course ever taught anywhere in Australia on the history of our own region, but at that stage there was so little known about Australia that we took Polynesia as our main field and, as the years passed added, sort of, added more and more Australian. So, I had only commenced my own excavations the year before I introduced this course. When I came back, it seemed to me, well, I am rationalising after the event: I think I saw a situation where I needed to do fieldwork to prove that fieldwork was possible in Australia. I also needed to survey the literature and see what had been done and also criticise it and state what was really known, and I was invited by Grahame Clark, who was then the Editor of the Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society, to write a paper on the Stone Age of Australia. The title was his. Nowadays one wouldn't dare use the word, Stone Age. The Aboriginal people would certainly object to being called Stone Age people. Anyway, so over the years I did survey the literature and he published it in the PPS in 1961, and that I think was a useful service. I did survey the literature and criticised Tindale's work quite considerably because he was making claims that were totally unverifiable and I said, well, you have to verify them before you make claims. I was less critical of McCarthy's work than I should have been, I think, because I didn't know it as well. The other thing. The other thing, I was interested in as an historian, but I think it was quite important, over the centuries since the Europeans found Aborigines, they have held various views of them. They became the

models of primeval man and the missing link and all sorts of things. So I went through the literature from the early 17th century when Europeans first saw Aborigines up till the Devon Downs excavation of 1929; I took as my concluding thing of just how people had interpreted Aborigines, how they saw them in the state of nature. That was a straight historical thing, but I published that as a two-piece long article in an historical journal in Melbourne in 1958. Then I published the Grahame Clark survey of the Stone Age of Australia in 1961, and I published my first archaeological report in 1960. So I had quite a busy time on all these fronts.

*What was your first archaeological report?*

Well, actually, Fromm's Landing — I excavated at Fromm's Landing in 1956 and '58 and published that in 1960. That would have been my first excavation report. Then I was invited by the Professor of Geography at the University of Adelaide to come back to Fromm's Landing and excavate another rock shelter, because there were six in a row a few hundred metres along. He wanted his students, their interest in geomorphology, and they wanted this, so in 1960 and '63, with the geographers, I excavated another rock shelter. That one turned out to be highly significant because we found, in addition to the stone tools similar to the other shelter, we found the skeleton of a Dingo dog, of about 3000 years old and the tooth of a Tasmania Tiger, an animal which when Europeans arrived only existed in Tasmania and had become extinct probably because the Dingo outhunted it. There they were together in this site, round 3000 years, and the evidence for the highest flood in the history of the Murray River at about 3000 years, and this was what I was really interested in because I had been at Cambridge which was essentially an interdisciplinary place. I attended whole courses by Harry Godwin, the palynologist. I directed the little student dig with Richard West, who succeeded Godwin, the dig at Hoxne. We went out together. West was doing his Ph.D. So I came back full of this interdisciplinary sort of thing. So, to work with geomorphologists at Fromm's Landing seemed to me ideal. In fact, in 1956 I took a palynologist, Sue Duigan, who had done her Ph.D under Godwin here at Cambridge on the Cromer

Forest Bed, I brought her to Fromm's to collect pollen, but there was no pollen in the deposit, which was very, very sad.

*That is very interesting – the interdisciplinary influences. McBurney in 1952 –*

Well, yes McBurney was also interdisciplinary. No, he wasn't looking for pollen, but he had a geologist, Hay, a geologist from Cambridge with him in 1952. It was a great deal of geomorphological work was done on the site. The other thing was in 1952, that was very early radiocarbon dating time, and he was meticulous, and that was another influence on me. In those days one wasn't too sure about contamination. So when we collected carbon, we collected them on silver teaspoons. Our hands didn't touch anything. We put them from the British Army base there were great jars which had contained, I don't know what, but he was able to get these jars. They would hold five pounds of sweets or something, and samples were put in these jars, but before we used the jars, they were washed out with petrol. Petrol being so old that it wouldn't matter. Then they were dried in the sun. The sample was put in a plastic bag and then it was surrounded in the jar by earth taken from the level at which the sample came, so it would be not contaminated, and then they had to be put in 44-gallon petrol drums and soldered and shipped back to England. The care with which these samples were collected had a great influence on me and when we worked in Australia in the early years we collected them with silver teaspoons and put them in plastic bags and we didn't need to go further than that. The plastic bags were kept carefully, and so on. We took far more care collecting charcoal samples than people do these days. It does make me rather angry; at least in Australia they snipe a bit these days about how inaccurate the early samples were, largely because the carbon technique has been improved, but technically I believe nothing could have been more careful than the way these samples were collected; and the ANU established a lab in 1966 and the care with they dated our samples there was quite remarkable. So I think it is a bit excessive to say that our early samples were inaccurate.

*Did Clark offer you a job in New Zealand in 1952?*

In 1953, well, in those days and still people in Britain think that Australia and New Zealand are the same country. They don't realise that Melbourne to Auckland is the same distance from London to Warsaw, and Grahame Clark didn't know much about that part of the world in those days. He came to Australia in 1964 and that was a shattering experience and he was never the same again, but in 1953, he was doing the best he could. I had to, I was to have stayed in Cambridge for a while doing a research project with Charles McBurney on the stone tools from Hoxne site, which is Frere's site, the 1790 site, where he found Palaeolithic tools there and that is where Richard West was doing his Ph.D. Charles had worked there and I was to do something about the stone tools, but in September 1953, after I had graduated, I had met my present wife, Jean. We were engaged. We had visited friends in the north of England and we were in the back seat of the car and we were in a motor accident, and she was very badly injured and I was slightly injured, and when I came out of hospital, I found a message from my parents that my father was dying. So we had to abandon all this proposal of working in Cambridge and went back to Australia as quickly as possible, and as I said, my Professor at Melbourne offered me a job; but getting back to Grahame Clark, I went to say goodbye to him, saying that we had to get back to Australia and he said "Well, oh, I'm sorry you only got a Second, but it doesn't really matter does it? You're going back to Australia." It must have been a little earlier than that, he asked to see me and said that there was a job going in Auckland, in Prehistory. It was the Professor there, Professor Bill Geddes, an anthropologist, was interested in archaeology and felt that there should be archaeology in New Zealand, and they had written apparently to the Department at Cambridge to say that there was this vacancy. So Grahame said that there was this job, and if I wanted it, he would tell them that I was the man; and I had to say that I had to go back to Melbourne for personal reasons, and he said "Very well, Jack Golson will go." Jack Golson was at Cambridge at the same time, but was then working in his first year for a Ph.D on deserted Medieval villages and he was the pioneer archaeologist, the first (along with Hurst) to work systematically on a Medieval deserted village – Wharram Percy in Yorkshire. So Jack had to abandon his Ph.D and

went out to New Zealand, and he founded New Zealand archaeology, and he's certainly the man to interview if you want the history of archaeology in New Zealand. In 1961, however, he was appointed to the ANU Research School of Pacific Studies, and moved across, and in 1965, he was able to engineer an appointment for me. Or rather I applied for a job, and I was appointed in 1965. That was the first time I was able to work full-time as a research worker in the Australia region. Up to then, I had been teaching Greek and Roman history to over 100 students, and so on. So it was a big thing, but by the time I became a professional archaeologist full-time, I had excavated the two sites at Fromm's Landing and published them.

I had excavated a small rock shelter in Victoria at Glen Aire, which was published in 1961, and had finished the excavations at Kenniff Cave. Perhaps it might indicate just how unsystematical life was in those days, but also how one tried to systematise it, if I explain how I got all of these sites. Well, I've already said that C.P. Mountford told me about the Fromm's Landing site. That's how that site was discovered, but I realised that it had tremendous stratigraphic potential, and it was near the Devon site, so it was a good way of checking the reliability or otherwise of the Tindale interpretation. In 1959, I was told by a historian, forgotten his name – in 1959, I received a letter from a friend who had been doing a Ph.D at Cambridge and knew that I was interested in archaeology. He was then at the History Department at the U of Queensland, Brisbane and he had been out in west Queensland, trying to trace historical records, and met a man named Reg Orr who was the radio operator of the Royal Flying Doctor Service base at Charleville in West Queensland; and Reg had shown him a lot of slides of rock art that he had taken and he so impressed my friend that he wrote me a letter saying that this man Orr, if ever I was in Queensland, that I should contact him. As a result, I wrote a letter to Reg Orr, saying that I was delighted to find that there was somebody in rural Australia who was actually recording Aboriginal rock art and as a result Reg sent me a letter saying thank you and enclosing a box of slides; and I projected them and immediately I was transfixed, because one of them was called Kenniff Cave, named after some bush rangers who

had camped there once. I could see that there was a flat sandy floor and that the wall of the cave was covered with rock paintings but I could see that the wall was going down vertically and here was this level sand, all the potential for stratified site. He also showed me another site known as The Tombs, similar. So I wrote him a letter saying that "This was marvellous, if I could come up, could you take me to them" and just at that time I was awarded a grant of £4000 which was an extraordinary sum of money in those days, the first research grant I had had, by the Nuffield Foundation which in those days had very generous funds in Australia for research. This was for three years to do field work. As a result, I was able to fly up to Charleville, 1500 miles away, with one of my students, and we went out in Reg's jeep. This is the term vacation in July 1960 and he took us to these places and we did test excavations at three sites; one was The Tombs, one was Kenniff Cave, collected radiocarbon samples and then returned. I also, from 1961, was awarded a Nuffield Foundation Travelling Fellowship for a year and I worked at the London Institute of Archaeology. I had made the case that one needed to learn about the conservation of antiquities. That was one of the main reasons I wanted ethnographic stuff in Museums and I had a happy year in London doing these things and I brought radiocarbon samples I had collected with me in a suitcase and I was able through the good offices of Harry Godwin and others to get these samples dated free at the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington. I did six samples. This is one of the famous stories one tells, so I better tell it on tape. In 1962, back in Australia, I returned to Kenniff Cave, this time driving a Land Rover the five days from Melbourne to Kenniff Cave with a small team and others –

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– and then the Royal Flying Doctor Base every morning had a session every morning with Reg. He kept in contact with the base and a telegram came through from my wife, Jean, saying that the radiocarbon samples had been dated and that the dates were as follows, and the oldest one was came as 16,000 years, and I didn't believe it. The site was so fresh looking and the charcoal lumps so

large, I thought that perhaps in the telegram they altered it. So I got Reg to send a telegram via the base to my wife, checking, did she mean 16,000 or 1600, and the next morning we got the response saying, yes, 16,000 and that was really an event because this was the first stratified, demonstrated proof that Aboriginal people had been in Australia during Pleistocene times. Tindale had long claimed it, so had Gill at the Museum. They based it on perfectly reasonable inferences but they hadn't demonstrated it stratigraphically, where you have at Kenniff Cave one stratum above the other and the deeper you get, the older they got.

So that is acknowledged as a significant moment in Australian prehistory, and it was overshadowed almost immediately because people started to get older and older dates. My date in 1962 was 16,000 years, in 1965 other dates became 18,000 to 22,000, in 1969 we got the Lake Mungo remains which were 26,000 to 30,000, in 1973 I did an excavation with Jim Bowder, the geomorphologist, at Lake Mungo and we got a positive date of 32,000 plus or minus about 1000, and then there were clearly older dates than that. Nowadays, it is disputed rather; the dates are 40,000 50,000 or 60,000, but I'm not going into that, but between 1962 and 1973 we moved from 16,000 to beyond 32,000. Remarkable.

*That decade is remarkable in Australian archaeology.*

Yes it is. The thing about Kenniff Cave, it did produce a sequence of artefacts which showed that there was change through time, through Pleistocene time, but it was very acid soil and there were no bones preserved and no pollen preserved, because it was very coarse sand and therefore it doesn't quite have the significance perhaps some later sites have, where you've got faunal; but in its time it was highly significant and a very rewarding thing to produce.

BREAK FOR COFFEE (*We'll have a cup of coffee eh?*)

During my career, there have been enormous changes in the approach to the archaeology of Australia. As I said, Grahame Clark suggested that I write a paper called 'The Stone Age of Australia',

which I did. I was trained in Cambridge, where we assumed that Palaeolithic people were dead. It was all in the past, so I was not an anthropologist. I wasn't trained in anthropology and I quite rightly felt, well, anthropologists study the living ones, so in Australia I'm studying the dead. I don't think that the past is dead, but I am studying the past of people who are deceased, and therefore one didn't think you were associated with the living people. On the other hand, Australia was one of those rare countries where Hunting-Gathering people were still surviving and Clark was aware of that back in 1938 when Donald Thomson, an anthropologist from Australia, visited Cambridge and he talked Donald Thomson into writing a paper on the seasonal changes of a living hunter-gatherer people and it was ignored. Clark published it and it wasn't until the 1966 'Man the Hunter Conference' at Chicago that work like Thomson's, published 30 years before, suddenly became very important. So one should have been aware, but one still separated the living and the past, and I grew up in the State of Victoria where I was led to believe there weren't any Aboriginal people. There were no Aboriginal people of pure descent, but there were people of mixed descent, who were very proud to identify themselves as Aborigines, but I didn't know that, quite honestly, and I believe I didn't knowingly meet an Aboriginal until I saw some in Queensland when at Kenniff Cave in 1960 for the first trip. Now, I doubtless met them in the street, but I didn't know them as Aboriginal people, and this is perhaps a bit surprising that you could – I would have been 35 before I knowingly met the first Aboriginal, but of course immediately after that I started going up into the Northern Territory, doing fieldwork from 1963 on, and one saw them all the time. So I suppose in my own career, I went from this "I was a Stone Age archaeologist, I wasn't dealing with the living" till I started meeting living people and giving greater and greater credit to work of Donald Thomson, work like that. Then with others, Jack Golson and Isabel McBryde, myself, we were campaigning to have site legislation, protection of Aboriginal sites because when I started work in the 1950s, anyone who wanted to go collecting stone tools or to dig in cave deposits was free to do so, and it was finders, keepers, and I established I think a fairly unique situation in 1955 when I wrote to

Norman Tindale at the Museum in Adelaide, saying I was proposing to work at Fromm's Landing and of course I would give all my finds to the South Australia Museum; and in response he gave me a whole bunch of museum numbers so that I could number my finds according to the Museum. This was absolutely unique. So we were running conferences.

As late as 1968, we ran a big conference in Canberra on the requirements for site legislation. You have to understand that, like the USA, Australia is a federation, and each state has its legislation and the Commonwealth has certain overriding rights, but the states have their own rights as regards things like site legislation; and between 1965 and 1975, every state in Australia introduced some kind of legislation to protect Aboriginal sites. It was an even greater struggle to get legislation to protect European sites. Nowadays there is legislation but depending on state, depends how much they get implemented. This has been one of the big changes, the realization there is such a thing that in Australia we call heritage sites that require registration, but, of course, because white people were the ones who led the campaign, the early site registered are all Mulvaney's sites.

All these sites are registered and protected and it was only beginning in the 1970s really, not to the '80s, that the Aboriginal viewpoint became more established. They couldn't care, many of them, about Mulvaney's sites. There are to them more significant sites that aren't archaeological at all. They may just be a rock or a land feature where creation events occurred, or dreaming story of great significance to that particular clan, and they are more important than an archaeology site five metres deep. This was one of the other great central problems. These sites are secret and sacred. They don't want people to know about them. Even many sites where male ceremonies occur without female people, would be pain of death to have seen them. So it is all very well to have a heritage list, publicly listed. So we went through a stage where you had to have sites that were not publicly registered, that were secret and sacred. Well, if they are

secret and sacred, how do you register? Gradually, led by the state of New South Wales, Aboriginal people were appointed to Administration and consultation. In early '70s, there was the beginnings of Aboriginal activism generally in politics. In the archaeological field, it was particularly represented by the campaign to have the remains of the Tasmania Aboriginal woman, Truganini, who was the last Aboriginal Tasmanian of full descent to die. 1876, I think she died. Her remains, her skeleton was displayed at the entrance of the Tasmanian Museum for decades. Not a very tasteful thing. It was taken away. In the 60s, there was this movement for her reburial. A traditional Aboriginal burial technique was cremation, so there was a campaign to have her remains buried. That was the original thing that happened in Aboriginal activism towards archaeology.

*Were you involved in establishing the Institute of Aboriginal Studies?*

The Institute of Aboriginal Studies was begun through a conference in 1961. I was in England, but I contributed a paper to it and in 1964, an Act establishing it was passed by the government and I was elected to the Council at the first election of Council, and subsequently I was elected to the Executive Committee and between 1964 and 1980, I served permanently on the Council. I acted for quite a while as its Deputy Chair and Acting Chair when the Chairman was ill and again in 1982 I was elected to Council and appointed to Chair for two years. I could have had a four-year term but by that stage Aboriginal activism and the realization by archaeologists and anthropologists that Aborigines must be brought in more, it was quite clear that a very prominent Aboriginal, Ken Colbung from West Australia, was on our Council and it was quite clear that he was more than capable of acting as Chairman. So when my first two-year term ended, I just stood down, on the knowledge that he would be elected, and since 1984 there hasn't been anyone but an Aboriginal who has been Chair and the majority of Council is Aboriginal. So we went from, in 1964, a Council entirely of white academics to a Council of the majority of Aboriginal people. This has met many good things, but it has also met that their emphasis has changed. They are more

interested in welfare, health, petrol sniffing is one of the terrible things in central Australia. Young children sniff petrol and it ruins their brains. So it is not surprising that these welfare issues, in Australia, in prisons, it is totally disproportionate. So they are tending to emphasize this and downplay the more academic, and downplay the archaeology, linguistics, the sites I'm interested in, but it is understandable.

One of the more important things, there are Aboriginal people now going to the universities. In about 1965, I think there were 70 Aboriginal in tertiary education in all of Australia. By 1975, it had risen to 700 and now it runs into thousands, but tending to go into law or social welfare, not archaeology or anthropology, but there are some. Marcia Langton, an Aboriginal lady who came to our Department at ANU, and did Archaeology and Anthropology but mainly Anthropology, she is the first Aboriginal person to graduate with First Class Honours in the history of Australia, and she is now a Professor of Aboriginal Studies at the U of Melbourne. That is a revolutionary change. We've have had a big struggle in Australia concerning the reburial or the return of relics and I am regarded as a reactionary in all of this. I think a lot of younger academics have got 'bleeding hearts'. They are very worried about the way Aborigines were treated in the past and so am I and my publications, I have many publications which have detailed how Aboriginal people have been treated, not ignoring it, but it seems to me that it is no good jumping from one side to the other overnight and in so destroying evidence. In the late 1980s there was a campaign in Victoria for the reburial of the Kow Swamp human remains. These date from about 8 to 15,000 years ago and they came from one cemetery and I believe there were about 40 human remains, one of the largest groups in existence from the Pleistocene from one local group.

Anyway, there was a campaign for their reburial and I opposed it on the grounds that in the future Aboriginal people may want this evidence, and of course we were just beginning DNA studies then. I said in an article in *Antiquity* in 1990 that in the future, DNA studies

may be very important to land rights. Aboriginal people are claiming land because they have been there and DNA may be one legal means to prove this. So the Kow Swamp people were all buried, their remains are now unstratified and will never be useful again, and I opposed it, and most of my colleagues didn't wish to be identified. I'm retired, so I can speak. They are afraid, and in my most recent addition of my prehistory Australia book, we've presented the case that there is an obligation on all people. We are one human race and there is an obligation and the UN approaches, world heritage approaches, so on, not to destroy evidence. At the same time we quote from Australians who hold totally opposite views. If the Aboriginal people, it is their material, if they want things returned from museums, if they want humans buried, it is their material.

My argument is, this may well be in this generation but is it true of 2000 generations back? Because we can now say that people have been in Australia 2000 generations, and it does seem to me to be nonsense to assume that the present people own remains so old. Now that is my view. Other people have other views and fair enough, but I am willing to fight for this on the grounds that future generations of Aboriginal people are going to say that those who campaigned for the reburial of Kow Swamp were vandals. I believe that, but the point is they are campaigning for political reasons. That is the point. So archaeology in the early 1970s got involved in this, and in 1974, it reached the stage that archaeologists needed to talk to Aborigines and I did a bit of that. I talked to a group of over 100 Aborigines at one stage to try to explain what archaeologists do. In 1975 there was a big conference in Canberra. Isabel McBryde, myself and Jack Golson organised for a group of Aboriginal people to come and discuss as to what one should do. Subsequently in more recent times it has gotten to my mind a bit out of hand. One has to consult reasonably. That's all right, but what do you do at the ANU, we take a student to do a thesis, a Ph.D, who wants to do fieldwork 1000 miles away. They have to consult with the Aboriginal people. They are young, inexperienced, where do they get the money from? Perhaps they have come from overseas. You just can't send them up to talk like that, because Aboriginal people like you to stay for some time. So it

has involved a lot of problems, and there is less fieldwork at the moment than in the more 'heroic age' when we didn't ask any- body.

Let me give an example, when I first worked in Arnhem Land in 1965, up in the top of coast. That was an Aboriginal reserve, so you might think that Aborigines had some say. Not at all. There were Christian Missions had settled centres and the system was that you first of all had to get the permission of the particular mission where you wanted to work, and then if they said yes, you had to get the permission of the Northern Territory administration, and then you had have an X-ray to show you didn't have TB, and with that you would be given a warrant to enter this reserve, and never ever ask the Aboriginal people themselves. That was 35 years ago. Nowadays, of course, the only people you would ask would be the Aboriginal people. That is fair enough, but one of the problems, though, is whom do you ask in the Aboriginal society. They like to sit down and talk for a long time. Their chronologies are not ours, and they have their ways of doing things, so it has made it more difficult, but as time goes on and there are more Aboriginal archaeologists, maybe they'll be able to resolve it also, but there again there are problems because Australia is a huge continent. It is the size of the USA, and there are many different tribal and linguistic groupings. So an Aboriginal, say, from northwest, west Australia who did an archaeology degree and wanted to work in the top of Cape York in Queensland might find it more difficult to get Aboriginal permission to work than I would. It has made Australian archaeology move from a thing of Stone Age where you just worked where you liked, when you liked, on the past, to a situation where you can never get away from the present and it has made many of us more activist than we used to be, and that is one of the other things that has involved me very much.

I have become active in some areas that I never dreamt I would be involved in. One example: in Arnhem Land there is a world heritage property called Kakadu National Park. In that region of some thousands of square kilometres, we have some of the oldest dated sites in Australia, perhaps back to 60,000. We have almost certainly

the oldest rock art in Australia, which is undoubtedly of Pleistocene age, but one can't say much more than that. I regard some of the art there as some of the most significant scenes depicting the prehistoric past from anywhere in the world. It is being analysed now. So it is an archaeologically significant area. It also has tribal living people with their own beliefs and sacred sites, so it is significant in that way. In addition, it is one of the great nature wonders of Australia, a breeding ground for birds. Unfortunately, uranium occurs right through the area and uranium leases were granted before all this knowledge existed; and there is uranium mining going on, and three years ago the Government said that mining could go on at a place called the Jabiluka Lease which is within about, less than two kilometres of one of the oldest 60,000-year-old sites. It is an area that contains significant rock art, and more particularly it is an area with dreaming tracks of great significance to the living people. I was one of those who, acting with specialist knowledge, sworn an affidavit in the Supreme Court case in Darwin on behalf of the Aboriginal people who say the site is significant. We didn't succeed. The mining is going ahead, but there you are, you see, I began as a Stone Age archaeologist and ended up in the Supreme Court in Darwin in 1998, testifying what Aboriginal people were saying is in fact true, not made up, and I quoted from historical literature on this as well as from field evidence.

*So it is reconcilable at times?*

Yes, absolutely, this has been one of my claims and I hope it gets resolved. Aboriginal people believe in creationism. They were all created at various times. There wasn't just one divine creation. There were hundreds of creations all over the place, and if you analyse the traditions and dreaming tracks, time and time again, you find that they have come from the sea or they come from the north, and in fact there are sacred sites that are under the sea today. One would like to believe that they relate to lower sea levels perhaps, at least 5000 years old, and the dreaming tracks, these ancestral beings didn't just sit down in one place, they moved. So I believe it is possible to say that Aborigines came to Australia from somewhere else and moved

across Australia, and this is not in conflict with Aboriginal creationism, but most people don't agree; but it is not a necessary contradiction, but I do not accept and absolutely oppose the view that what Aboriginal say about their oral traditions is absolutely true and must be accepted as holy rite. They don't need archaeology and that, they know it all, and I do not believe that their traditions go back 2000 generations.

*How are you for time?*

Well, it is all right.

Well, as you know, I was trained in humanities, particularly in history. I do believe that humanities do matter to us. People are thinking beings and one of the, also I am a Christian, one of the papers I thought is particularly important which people have mocked is a paper written by Sir Mortimer Wheeler, I think in *Antiquity* in 1950, which was called "What matters in Archaeology?" and I used to cite that to my classes quite a lot. Now, what does matter in archaeology? Is it the sort of Binfordian new archaeology, rational statistics, or is it where more spiritual aspects and that to me is the exciting thing about Aboriginal Australia. The Aboriginal Australians are certainly extremely spiritual all their dreaming tracks. This rock art, art is beginning to suggest interpretations about past belief systems and that seems to me, as a historian, one looks at the society, you don't just describe the kings and queens. You try to present the whole fabric of functioning society, and that is what we have got to do with archaeology and I think that people who are studying rock art in Australia are beginning to do that. I also held the belief that the study of prehistory is a marvellous introduction for undergraduates to anything. It's interdisciplinary, so in the course of the first year course I used to teach, I would emphasize the importance of environmental factors and at the end of the first year, if you didn't want to go on, you could go on to linguistics or geography or history, or many other subjects, with an understanding of something of a background to it, and that I think is its great value. I would almost make it compulsory for first-year students, but it did work and quite a number of our students combined courses of

archaeology and geography. So I think the value is very great, but then there is another aspect that we always stressed – just like historians, you are dependent on evidence. You have got to quote your evidence. It is no good speculating. You have to analyse your sources and many of the sources may be historical. This is what impressed me about Grahame Clark's early economic articles. He was going back to early historical literature about bee-keeping or about various things and he was combining historical sources with archaeological sources.

*Because Mrs Glyn Daniel has recently died, could you say something about the Daniels?*

Glyn was one of the best features of my life in Cambridge. Charles McBurney was one of them. He was great. My trip to Libya was one of the great influences on my career, but Glyn Daniel was such a friendly, jolly man and he had many critics. In fact, it took years before he was elected to the British Academy, and I think that was wrong. When one looks back, one might say some of his work on megalithic tombs doesn't stand up to, is dated, but he was an all-round man and he was interesting in teaching, and I think his teaching method was tremendous to undergraduates. He would give you a lecture in a very informal friendly style. You could take notes on it, and then at the end, and only at near the end, he'd come out with a whole series of slides. Now most lecturers use slides all the time and so many of them get so bogged down with what they've got on the screen they are just sort of describing, but he revised his lecture by a series of well-chosen slides and I think he deserves great credit. He was a great man to go to for supervisions too.

I was very lucky that in my second year that I went every week to him, with the man who later became Sir David Wilson, who became the Director of the British Museum. He would give us a glass of port or something. It was a very civilised experience, but you'd do some work; but his great influence on me was his interest in the history of the subject and that is one of the reasons I came to Cambridge, as I explained, because of his *Hundred Years of Archaeology*. At the time it was quite path-breaking, that he was surveying such a range of

literature and so many of his conclusions, even if they are just odd sentences, were very appropriate and stand up. So his interest of the history of archaeology certainly determined me and I suppose is one of the things that led me, when I went back to Australia, to look at how people have explained Aboriginal society through the ages, from the first Dutch experience in the early 17th century on. Yes, he was a very humane man, and he took his students seriously, and he had a very large number of students going through John's, and as an Editor of *Antiquity*, again I think he did a marvellous job. Later on, as he got older, it tended to be a bit repetitive. He took a view against the New Archaeology, which I sympathised with, very much along my views. He published an article by J. Hawkes which I think had a lot to be said for it, but like the article by Wheeler, most of my colleagues derided them as being emotional and subjective. Well, they are subjective, but prehistory and history are subjective things, and it is one of the clichés that every generation rewrites its past and there is no reason why every generation shouldn't rewrite its prehistory. I've done that. I produced a prehistory book in 1969, rewrote it in 1973, published in Penguin in 1975. It was a totally different book, light years different. That was because so much had happened in Australia at that time and I saw the light of beginning to be ethnographic of the living Aboriginal people, the tremendous antiquity in the past of Australia and the tremendous environmental changes, and all this was happening. Now I resisted rewriting it, but with Johan Kamminga, younger colleague, last year we did produce *Prehistory of Australia*.

It is totally rewritten and it is just so different. I suspect that is the last *Prehistory of Australia* to be written for some time, because to cover a continent in one book is impossible. We had to leave so many important things out because of publishers' space requirements. It would be so very easy now to write four or five regions of Australia and fill a book. You could write one on Tasmania alone.

*Your life spanned enormous growth and changes.*

It certainly did. Well, to be the only archaeologist to be employed in academic life in Australia in 1954 to now, where I'm not sure —

Australian academic life is going through a bit of revision lately. The government is not funding it adequately, but archaeology is now taught at quite a number of Australia universities and consulting archaeology is universal, because under the State legislations now it is necessary to have it done. So there are some hundreds of archaeologists in Australia now.

Tape 2 side 1

*I have a few questions. In your MA thesis you discuss the Teutonic influence in the 1930s, and I wondered if you understood why there was this very quick change that you detail, where people begin to say that there is this Teutonic note?*

Yes, I think that that was the most significant. I think the fact is that, in the 1930s with the depression, people were greatly influenced by Mussolini's developments in Italy and also Hitler's in Germany. Not only did Italian trains run on time, but in Germany they had roads that were marvellous and everyone seemed to be jolly and this is perhaps the reason also there was a tremendous amount of archaeology fostered. We now know it was the wrong kind of archaeology, but archaeologists were uncovering Neolithic villages in Germany. They were wanting to prove that they were the original Aryan folk, but the fact is the techniques being used were very impressive to English archaeologists who had seen so much amateurism here; and men like Christopher Hawkes and Collingwood, I think, they were just influenced perhaps unaware by certain racist, the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon people crept in and it was only when I started reading this literature that one began to realise that they used as self-sufficient explanations that these were progressive Aryan people as opposed to these autocratic Romans.

*It is very interesting because it is during the 1930s there is a rebirth of interest in British archaeology, using this German model as an inspiration to become interested in their own Teutonic past.*

Yes, I think so, and Grahame Clark in my day was regarded as an extremely right-wing man, but it is a great credit to him that he doesn't use any of this. He didn't stress the superiority of the Aryan

race.

*But certainly his cohort did. Hawkes and Curwens –*

Yes, they did. Curwen was just a local doctor. It was very common in all sorts of things. The whole attitude, the Neville Chamberlain attitude, that you could negotiate with the Germans, they were reasonable people. The Second World War put an end to this, but it is there all right.

*I think it began to change in the 1940s.*

Oh yes, Grahame Clark's very great book *Archaeology and Society*. I don't think that he has gotten enough credit for that. It was published before the war, and he was showing that totalitarian beliefs had problems. It was the first really good synthesis of what archaeology exactly, what it was, that *Archaeology and Society*. That was another book that I had read before I came here. I found a copy in a, second-hand copy in a book- shop in Melbourne.

*Did that book influence students of your generation?*

I don't know. Well, yes, Grahame Clark's lectures were along those same lines.

*Could you say something about the Cambridge connection?*

Well, yes, the Cambridge connection in Australia has become something of a vexed problem, but put in perspective we have the situation in Australia and New Zealand where there is no archaeology and if you go back to the 1950s, where were archaeologists being produced? Well, presumably in the USA, but in those days Australia and New Zealand had no cultural contact at the level of universities, very little indeed. So except for the British Isles, we in Australia didn't have much contact. Now, if you examine the departments in England at that time, the Institute of Archaeology in London hardly had anybody, didn't produce very much. Oxford was very inward and did very little undergraduate teaching of archaeology. Edinburgh was producing some students.

So if they were going to come from Australia to anywhere, given the cultural ties of Australia, they had to come to Cambridge. So I don't think it was necessarily just Cambridge or imperialism or Grahame Clark's imperialism, which he undoubtedly had. In a sense he appreciated that there was a great need for prehistory to be done in other parts, and quite remarkable really that undergraduates, particularly British ones, were, if they wanted to go on in research, it was almost "Go west, young man, go overseas, young man, you must do archaeology somewhere else". People went to Africa and became Africanists, from Cambridge. It is quite understandable that the Department at Auckland would write to Cambridge seeking somebody; having done that then there was the Cambridge influence. Jack Golson was there, and Wilfred Shawcross and Peter Bellwood were the next appointments, and then a revolution occurred. Roger Green, an American, was appointed. Once he was there, it established an American axis. Peter Gathercole went to Dunedin. He was replaced by Charles Higham. In Australia, well, I was the first one.

I was Cambridge-trained, but I would emphasize that I had two Honours degrees from Melbourne, so I really am a Melbourne person. The next Australian was Isabel McBryde, who in 1968 paid her own way to come to Cambridge to do a Diploma, but already had two university degrees from Australia. The great deluge occurred around 1961. The Australia Institute of Aboriginal Studies was gradually being established, and in 1961 Jack Golson was appointed from New Zealand to Australia, but of course Jack Golson was Cambridge; and Isabel McBryde started teaching prehistory in 1960. I was already teaching it, but then Vincent Megaw was appointed from Edinburgh to the Sydney Department of Archaeology, which is the European, not prehistory. He was teaching Iron Age Archaeology in a Department, which is primarily Middle East and Classical Archaeology. He was a graduate of Edinburgh. Then Ian Crawford, who was a student of mine in Melbourne and went to the London Institute in 1960. He was appointed to the West Australia Museum in Perth in 1961-62 as Curator of Archaeology. He was the first Curator of Archaeology in an Australian museum. He was Melbourne and

London, and Megaw was Edinburgh. Richard Wright at the same time was appointed to the Anthropology Department in Sydney, to lecture in prehistoric archaeology, so by 1962 we had Golson, Wright, myself, McBride, as Cambridge archaeologists, and Crawford and Megaw as non-Cambridge archaeologists. About a year or so later, John Clegg was appointed to a post in Queensland, moved to Sydney and then of course we started taking students to do Ph.Ds; and not unnaturally, given the numbers at Cambridge and the attitude at Cambridge that you should go overseas to do research, quite a number came from Cambridge. But then one of them was Peter White, who was one of my students from Melbourne who went to Cambridge, and the other was his then wife, Carmel Schrire, who was the one who produced 20,000-year-old dates from Kakadu Park for her Ph.D.

*Sylvia Hallam?*

Sylvia Hallam, her husband, Bert, was appointed to the Professor of History in the University of West Australia in 1970. She came out, not in her own right. She came out as the wife, but started work and eventually was appointed to lecture in prehistory in the Anthropology Department, but you know, nowadays we have people from all over the place, American, and John Campbell, an American who did his Ph.D at Oxford.

*Did you train a generation in Australia?*

Well, a lot of people, in academic life certainly, I had as students. Ian Crawford and Peter White in Melbourne would be two who have gone on professionally, but most of my other students have gone on in history. Greg Denning, who is one of the more notable of the contemporary historians he was the brightest student I ever taught. He did his MA on the voyaging in the Pacific. Jack Golson was his Examiner. He has now gone on to be preeminent as a Pacific historian. When I went to Canberra, I supervised some Ph.D students there, most notable would be Jim Allen who became Professor of Archaeology at La Trobe, and Ian Glover who worked in what was then Portuguese Timor and went on to be a Lecturer in Archaeology,

at London, and this was the great moment, wasn't it, when an Australian-trained person got a job at the hub of the Empire; and then Campbell MacKnight became a Professor of History in Tasmania, and he has just retired this year. Ian Glover retired a couple of years ago. Time has caught up on us. Now any other questions?

*One question. You have throughout your work, there is this great admiration for human diversity and that somehow through archaeology this is expressed, that there is spiritual value, that it points us to our common humanity and this seems to go through all your work.*

Yes, I think it does, and it is because I do believe in the common humanity that I am so worried about the present Aboriginal assertions that they are a separate group from the rest of the world. If, in fact, there were a totally separate creation, the whole thing about rules, about United Nations and how you treat – we are all one human race. Slavery is wrong. When the southern states were defending slavery, they ran the line that Negroes were a separate creation. They had no relation to white society. They were subhuman, and we get back to that unless we accept the rule of a common humanity, and that the best way we can handle it is through the UN; and if you are an archaeologist or interested in history, the best way to do that is through bodies such as UNESCO with its concept of world heritage. Unless you are going to support them, I don't see you are going to get anywhere, and it worries me at the moment that quite a number of archaeologists in Australia are sneering at the whole idea of world heritage.

*That is a theme. The other thing that interests me is your belief that historical analysis can teach, that through that understanding how we make our conclusions we can become more self-aware. That seems to be another theme. Do you agree?*

Well, it probably is. I'm not really a Hodder-like theorist who write books on how we work but I think it is true, yes. I just say, yes.

*Thank you for the interview.*

