



Canberra Archaeological Society Inc
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Greetings again, members and friends!

2008 has been a very busy year for us all.

Our intrepid committee has worked with grace and good humour and I thank them for their support, Wendy took over from Kat as treasurer half way through the year and has brought in our audited statements in time for the AGM. Kat is on notice to talk to us next year about what she dug up overseas. Sue has helped organize events, with Faye, as well as keeping the bookwork up to date. Tegan brought Old News into the 21st century and has won accolades from many members. Our other members have helped with planning and bringing our schemes home.

This year we completed the work on the three 2006/07 ACT Heritage Grants gained with the National Trust (ACT). The reports are all on our website: Crinigan's Hut conservation and guide; Consultation for interpretive signs on two Aboriginal stone procurement sites and an inventory of the archaeological collections in the ACT Heritage store.

The project on the ACT Store was a sad business; the 'store' is a steel shed and the participants had to work with no tables, chairs, toilet or kitchen facilities and no electricity, so no light, cooling or heat. Morning starts were delayed until the fog lifted and artefact containers could be dragged into the sunlight to be examined. Cold mornings and hot afternoons made working conditions unpleasant. The worst shock was on opening two shipping containers in which some items were stored and finding that they had been leaking rustily for years, ruining some literature and objects. Although most of the items belonged to the ACT Museums side, we salvaged some furniture from a historic site and stored it in slightly less damaging conditions in the shed. For our trouble we received reprimands from the custodians and instructions to put everything back. Naturally we ignored this instruction and we did not notice any change to the remaining soggy contents of the containers in all the time we worked there.

ACT is not the only heritage authority with storage problems for its historic collection. Governments are not eager to commit funds to looking after this material; heritage may be considered as a 'boutique' item, only getting dribbles of funding after all the hospitals, schools and roads have been sorted.

This is an issue that should be considered by heritage professional organizations with a view to targeted lobbying for secure, environmentally sound storage for heritage objects and facilities for researchers. There is no way a student could be expected to undertake further study of this material without at least basic hygiene facilities and power. We recorded everything by hand and Llanon spent half of his life entering the data; we would have preferred to start electronically but with the lack of power and abundance of dirt, spiders and damp, this was not possible. We have started discussions with other heritage professionals and organisations to see if we can find an appropriate front on which to lobby.

One of our other grant projects was a coup for CAS; with the assistance of Dave Johnston consultation was achieved with all four of the Representative Aboriginal Organisations recognised by the ACT Heritage Council and the two interpretive signs were installed at Girrawah Park in Ngunnawal and Mulligans Flat. CAS salvaged an

Aboriginal site at Gungahlin about 16 years ago and I think this is the first project on Aboriginal heritage sites in ACT to be completed by a community group since that time. The guidelines (available on our website) may assist other groups and individuals to take on projects and studies on Indigenous sites.

Currently I am analysing the Crinigans artefact collection for the next ACT grant and networking with museums and other archaeologists to see if there could be some standardising of recording formats. CAS is also working with the Conservation Council on a joint project to research and prepare cultural and natural heritage visitor brochures for the Gungahlin area. Anyone wishing to help may contact me by phone, email or in person at meetings.

I would like to mention another issue which troubles me and is making it difficult to uphold CAS's aim to encourage local archaeological studies. There is very little if any research on local project being undertaken by our local universities. The Pacific seems to be the choice place for research, and who can deny the allure of warm seas and blue skies. But our own backyard has not had the benefits of modern archaeological studies and techniques. How thrilled we all were when Jo Flood produced Pleistocene dates in our mountains. Many CAS members assisted with her research and some archaeological careers were launched in the process. What research has there been since? ANU has field schools some years at Kiandra, which I am sure will make an interesting publication one day. But students seek good supervisors to ensure that their studies gain the best results and promotion – and these supervisors are not interested in local projects.

This is another facet of the lack of adequate storage and curation of the ACT's archaeological heritage objects, no interest from the bureaucracy and no impetus from academia to prompt them to action.

However CAS has sailed through this year financially secure and rich in presentations from a wide range of speakers, from bananas to shipwrecks and everywhere in between. At least we keep interest in all aspects of archaeology alive.

And we owe much to John and Maria Crinigan for building their hut and producing descendants with a love of history and commitment to conserving and promoting their part of our heritage! Crinigans Hut has provided CAS with opportunities to excavate an early historic site, to learn to record, store and analyse the artefacts and to practice cultural heritage management. We have been involved for 17 years with aspects of this journey with the descendants, and the grants have paid our insurance bills allowing us to undertake the research and conservation. Marilyn and I gave a presentation to the recent ASHA conference and had some positive feedback on our community archaeology. This week we were interviewed for a film to be distributed to ACT schools on early Canberra.

So be proud, CASers, of our achievements and please don't be shy about offering to help. No experience necessary, training on the job provided and a pleasant experience guaranteed.

Helen Cooke
President, 19 November 2008