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APPROACHES TO URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY

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Birmingham's recent paper on urban archaeology is well timed (Birmingham 1988). Historical archaeology in Australia has reached a stage where it is no longer acceptable to permit excavation without a well conceived research design which incorporates explicit proposals for the analysis of the excavated data. It is no longer possible in America to obtain an excavation permit in the absence of such a design. There, as here, methods evolved to process 'rapidly, systematically and cost efficiently the large quantities of material often associated with 19th and 20th century sites (Birmingham 1988 160). The requirement of a research design which incorporates post-excavation analysis has in turn increased the efficiency and cost effectiveness both of post-excavation analysis and of the excavation itself.

In her paper Birmingham discussed some of the major thrusts in urban archaeology in America over the last decade. It is not proposed to repeat them here, but it may be appropriate to review them from a different viewpoint. In so doing, the applicability of American work to Australian circumstances will be examined. The writer should point out that her experience is based entirely on Sydney and Newcastle in New South Wales. Whether what follows is apposite to other Australian cities is a matter for her interstate colleagues.

Birmingham began with a summary of the Alexandria Archaeology programme and of the core-periphery model used to explain patterning in both settlement and artefact distribution (Birmingham 1988 152-4). This was Sjoberg's model of the pre-industrial city which was characterised by dual purpose (work and domestic) land use and which was dominated by an elite who both lived and worked in the central core. Whilst appropriate to 18th and early 19th century Alexandria, the model may not fit a city which, almost from the outset, was dominated by an elite who lived like English squires on the periphery. Ernest Burgess designed quite another model for industrial Chicago. His is also based on concentric circles, but the core is the business district to which the elite commuted from the outermost circle (see Wall 1987 65). Due to our system of land grants, Sydney, it would seem, leant toward the industrial model well before any major industrialisation.

The impact of the Alexandria programme on historical archaeology thought lay in the fact that Cressey and her associates viewed the total city as the site to be investigated. The city was defined 'in terms of a set of increasingly focussed analytical units' (Cressey and others 1987 3). Thus, individual investigations could be integrated into an overall scheme. The city, however, appeared too broad a concept for most archaeologists. To them the household was the basic unit (a concept inherited from prehistory - hence the problems of defining it in terms of 19th and 20th century urbanised America, see Birmingham 1988 156-7). Accordingly, when the Archaeological Preservation Plan for Charleston, South Carolina, was formulated, the Alexandria plan was, as it were, inverted. In Charleston the household/houselot was the prime target and only if the site could not be interpreted on this level were we to fall back on the neighbourhood or, ultimately, the city (Zierden & Calhoun 1984; Birmingham 1988 155).

Beaudry, also quoted by Birmingham (1988 156-7), has long been an advocate of archaeology at the household level. It is pertinent to examine the data on which Beaudry makes her stand. In the 1984 paper to which Birmingham refers, Beaudry cites examples where

a standing structure and a large body of documentary evidence made it possible for the investigators to tie specific archaeological changes to a change in property ownership

and where rich domestic deposits could also be tied to documented changes in occupation (Beaudry 1984 32). Beaudry, as Birmingham rightly says, counsels the use of extensive documentary evidence on which to anchor the archaeological data. What documentary evidence would Beaudry consider sufficient?

Beaudry's more recent work has concentrated on the Boot Mills complex at Lowell, Massachusetts, where two domestic sites have been investigated. At the Kirk Street Agents' House:

using city directories and federal and state census schedules, made it possible to identify the occupants of the house, to trace household age and gender structure ... to gather biographical information, such as date and/or place of birth, place of parents' birth, whether someone was single married or divorced, number of living children, of women, occupation, number of months of unemployment for a given year, and educational activities of the children.

Probate registers were available and, since some of the occupants were socially prominent, there were obituaries and secondary sources. Since the house was part of a corporate venture, the business records of the Massachusetts and Boot corporations were also available. With the exception of obituaries and some secondary sources but with the addition of an oral record, the same information was available for the boarding house excavated. And the authors considered this wealth of material deficient (Beaudry and others 1987a 5-6, 1987b Ch. 5).

This sort of information is simply not available in Australia. Probate inventories and census schedules are treated here with the confidentiality of taxation returns. We cannot even browse through the Births, Deaths and Marriages Register. City directories are available but list only the householder. Birmingham advocates the use of land survey records as a substitute for the American archival record. They are no substitute. Land titles records provide the extent of the title, the price and the names, addresses and occupation of vendor and purchaser. Neither party may have lived in the house in question. Indeed, few except the well-to-do were owner-occupants in 19th and 20th century cities. Furthermore, until the Moratorium and Landlord & Tenant Acts of the 1930s, there was no security of tenure for the poor. An Englishman's home is his castle and an Australian's, for the purposes of historical research, has a virtually impenetrable wall around it. Unless our household was such that it gained the exposure of press or, like the Macarthurs, kept for posterity every piece of paper in its possession, we can know little or nothing about it. In brief, for the voiceless majority, for the very people whom archaeologists claim to give a voice, viable research questions cannot be asked at Beaudry's household level let alone at the life course level advocated by Friedlander (Friedlander 1987; see Birmingham 1988 159).

Beaudry and Friedlander apart, American archaeologists working in urban areas have tended to move from household to neighbourhood as the focus of attention. Birmingham cites the work of Zierden and Calhoun when faced with a deficiency of hard documentary evidence at the household level (Birmingham 1988 155). Others have done so because post-depositional disturbance has so muddled the archaeological data that it could not be related to specific occupation however well documented or because rapid changes in occupants made it impossible to determine which household left which deposit. Honerkamp, whose 1981 experience of 'coherent ... archaeological remains which dated from the 17th century through the 20th centuries' in downtown Charleston led him to chastize urban archaeologists for their apparent lack of faith, has now swung firmly behind the neighbourhood concept. His later sites proved less coherent.

Most urban sites are not miniature Pompeiis and instead reflect diachronic site formation processes. This means that data attributable to individual households become indistinct due to successive occupation horizons and consequent disorganization ... since household-specific linkages ... are generally so hard to come by in urban settings, ... it behoves us to concentrate on a higher level of organisation: the neighbourhood in which the household resides.

Furthermore:

both above- and below-ground data are usually abundant and interpretable at this higher level. ... With neighbourhood parameters firmly in hand it becomes possible to meaningfully interpret household artifact assemblages derived from the "known" neighbourhood, even when the household in question is undocumented. (Honerkamp 1987 1-4, 7)

Precisely what comprises a neighbourhood has been subjected to almost as much debate as the household. Among the more recent work is that of Rothschild in New York. Rothschild, in the course of a survey of downtown Manhattan, defined neighbourhood by reference to a series of attributes which boil down to a self-contained community, at least for the purposes of domestic life. Within the neighbourhood we find shops, schools, churches, possibly a police station and fire brigade (Rothschild 1985 165-8, 1987 31-2). To her the neighbourhood embraces a number of specific site types which may or may not be indicative of the neighbourhood as a whole. Honerkamp, faced with excavation in Charleston and Savannah, Georgia, suggested a smaller area though, like Rothschild, emphasised that the area must have clear demographic boundaries. Whatever the definition, it is clear that at this level we can generate research questions with some anticipation of being able to answer them. Furthermore, at the neighbourhood level we can generate research questions which go to the core of urbanisation and industrialisation, the social dynamic of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the early part of the 19th century the basic unit of production in the urban environment was the shop or workroom attached or adjacent to the house. Clerks, journeymen and apprentices were hired for specific skills, indented to their masters and either lived in the master's house or boarded nearby. By the end of the century household and workplace were no longer integrated. The employer had moved his household to the city's periphery (emulating the first elite). His workforce had been left behind in what had become exclusive working class areas. Indentures had been replaced by wages paid not so much for specific skills as for the ability to slot into a productive system that would culminate with the 20th century assembly line. The capitalist bourgeois ethic of individual acquisition was countered by working class collectivism as expressed in the trade unions. Employer and employee had polarised as a working class with its own sub-culture which emerged in defiance of established order. At the same time the household had changed from a unit of production to one of consumption. The bourgeois housewife, freed from participation in the productive unit, devoted herself to raising children and household management giving rise to the Victorian cult of domesticity and the place of women. The Family consumer economy had begun. Indeed, a whole new world had been born. That this revolution is reflected in the archaeological record is abundantly clear. This is the reason for the mass of ceramics and glass which characterise 19th and 20th century sites.

The process was dynamic. Although in part reflected in the constructs of social stratification and status with which archaeological literature abounds, these concepts are too static for Australia's fluid and ever changing class structure. The same data, however, can be interpreted as evidence of social change. This is what has and is being done in New York. Reports first presented at the 1984 SHA Conference at Williamsburg were expanded and published as Vol. 5 No. 3 (1985) of *American Archaeology*.

Ceramics from three domestic sites dating respectively to 1788, 1799 and about 1819 were examined by Wall and Pickman who demonstrated an increase in expenditure in terms of 'real wages' of 7.4% and 24.3% in the intervening periods. New York, by then America's largest city and busiest port, was doubtless ahead of other cities in terms of social change. It was that growth with its consequent pressure on downtown, harbourside land that led to the bourgeois movement to the suburbs earlier than elsewhere. These differences apart, we have here clear evidence for the emergent cult of domesticity characteristic of late 19th century Australia. And the documentary evidence of the respective 'households' was no more than is available here, viz., city directories which listed the occupation of the householder. Levin examined the ubiquitous liquor bottle in terms of working class defiance of employer demands for temperance, demands that were to culminate in the bourgeois dominated temperance movements of the late 19th century. Even urban land fill, so often ignored by archaeologists because the artefacts are not in situ was seen as capital investment in a saleable commodity against a background of escalating urban land values. Archaeologists can no longer complain about lack of comparable data - Geismar produced a model of the evolving 18th and 19th century seaport from a single site - but if they still seek such data they can find it in American studies (Wall & Pickman, Levin, Sagan, Geismar 1985).

This brings us to the latter part of Birmingham's paper, the relationship between historical archaeology and 'the

new wave of Australian urban historians and sociologists ... concerned with social and economic aspects of the urban community' (Birmingham 1988 160-1). This neither history or sociology at the household level but at the level of neighbourhood and beyond. That historical archaeology can make a real contribution to these fields of study has been amply demonstrated in America. We can do the same, but not if we continue to ask questions which cannot be answered by archaeological evidence. The sooner we abandon the search for unknowable households in favour of the neighbourhood approach the quicker historical archaeology in Australia will be recognised as a valid historical and sociological discipline.

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