

waka kuaka

The Journal of the Polynesian Society



VOLUME 131 No.4 DECEMBER 2022

THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND



AWARD OF THE 2022 ELSDON BEST MEDAL

JACK GOLSON'S FOUNDATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND THE WIDER PACIFIC

PETER J. SHEPPARD

Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland

As one of the key architects of the discipline of archaeology in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Western Pacific, the Polynesian Society is very pleased to have awarded Prof. Jack Golson, at its AGM held 8 August 2022, the Society's Elsdon Best Medal for 2022 for services to archaeology.

Keywords: archaeology history, Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific archaeology

Jack Golson was born in the UK and is a graduate of the University of Cambridge. He was appointed in 1954 as lecturer, then senior lecturer, in prehistory at Auckland University College (later University of Auckland) within the newly created Anthropology Department. This established the first academic position in archaeology in Aotearoa New Zealand outside of museums. While at Auckland he began a programme of fieldwork in the Western Pacific (Sāmoa, Tonga, Fiji, New Caledonia) and in Aotearoa New Zealand focusing on the archaeology of Auckland and the Hauraki Gulf, the Coromandel Peninsula and western Bay of Plenty. He was responsible for developing scientific field methods, and in aid of that he established the University of Auckland Archaeological Society, which continues to function to this day. In the following year, 1955, he was instrumental, as its first secretary/treasurer, in establishing the New Zealand Archaeological Association (Golson 1955). His development of the site recording scheme with Roger Green (Golson 1957) resulted in the database the country uses today and was instrumental in the systematic protection of heritage. Much of the publication of this early research was in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. In 1957–1958 Golson was co-editor of the journal with J.B. Palmer, and in 1958–1960, editor (Sorenson 1992).

While undertaking extensive fieldwork and research capacity building in Aotearoa New Zealand (Allen 2019), Golson also began a programme of research in the Western Pacific to investigate the chronology and



Jack Golson (right) examines a fish hook during a dig at Sarah's Gully, Coromandel, Aotearoa New Zealand, around 1956. Photograph by Wal Ambrose, ca. 1956. University of Auckland Anthropology Photo Archive.

relationships among the peoples of West Polynesia and their neighbours to the west in Island Melanesia. This resulted in a series of programmes of fieldwork focused on dating and systematic comparison of archaeological material culture across the region as well as, through Golson's ongoing interest in Pacific navigation, consideration of how people settled the region. The latter resulted in his editing Memoir 34 of the Polynesian Society, *Polynesian Navigation: A Symposium on Andrew Sharp's Theory of Accidental Voyages* (Golson 1963).

Martinsson-Wallin reports the first serious archaeological research in Sāmoa was carried out by Golson in 1957 when he and Wal Ambrose surveyed and excavated sites on 'Upolu. As she describes it, "The most

extensive excavations were carried out in a large, partly bulldozed mound on the coast at Vailele (SUVa-1). Here several occupation layers were uncovered, the earliest of which featured plainware pottery [dating to the 1st century AD] (Golson 1969b: 108–13)” (Martinsson-Wallin 2007). Golson’s finding and dating of this ceramic along with his fieldwork elsewhere in West Polynesia and on Lapita sites in New Caledonia (Golson 1959) allowed archaeologists to create a systematic framework on which to hang their theories of Pacific prehistory. Golson’s work in Sāmoa, Tonga and New Caledonia with early ceramics led him to consider that an early “community of culture” linked those areas with distinctive Lapita pottery (Golson 1961; Spriggs *et al.* 1993), and that it was out of this that Polynesian culture was ultimately derived (Groube 1971).

Beginning in the 1970s, shortly after his appointment to ANU, Golson turned his attention to New Guinea and began a long-running multidisciplinary project at Kuk Swamp in the New Guinea Highlands which lasted many decades, finishing with a major site report in 2017 (Golson *et al.* 2017). This work was an outstanding contribution to world prehistory



Les Groube, Jack Golson, Andrew Pawley. Motutapu, 1956? University of Auckland Anthropology Photo Archive.

as, through the work of Golson and many students and collaborators, it established New Guinea as an independent centre for the development of food production in the mid-Holocene (Golson and Hughes 1980). Golson's supervision and mentoring of doctoral students, often pioneers in their research districts, has been outstanding.

Outside of his pioneering fieldwork Jack Golson has throughout his career been instrumental in the development of archaeological research communities. In his later career he took a very strong interest in the development of the World Archaeological Congress, serving as its first president, also supporting the push for the development of indigenous archaeology capability and especially fostering development in New Guinea, work that was recognised with the awarding of an honorary doctorate from the University of New Guinea in 1992.



General view includes Jack Golson and Rude Sunde. Pig Bay (?), Motutapu, 1958. University of Auckland Anthropology Photo Archive.



Jack Golson excavating in Vailele, north coast of 'Upolu island in Sāmoa, 1957. Visiting the site are members of the I'iga Pisa family. University of Auckland Anthropology Photo Archive.

Appointments

President of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association, 1980–1985

President of the World Archaeological Congress, 1990–1994

Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, from 1975

Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, 1987–2002

Service on a Working Party on Archaeology of the Pacific Science Association, 1968–1987

Awards

Honorary Doctorate, University of Papua New Guinea, 1992

Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for “service to education, particularly in the fields of pre-history and archaeology research in Asia and the Pacific Region”, 1997

Australian Centenary Medal, 2003

Inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award, World Archaeological Congress, 2009, with his partner, Clare Joe

PhD Supervisions: 39

Papers Published: Over 115

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Louise Furey and Harry Allen for review and contributions.

REFERENCES

- Allen, Harry, 2019. The first university positions in prehistoric archaeology in New Zealand and Australia. *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 29 (1): 2.
- Golson, Jack, 1955. Dating New Zealand’s prehistory. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 64 (1): 113–36.
- 1957. Field archaeology in New Zealand. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 66 (1): 64–109.
- 1959. L’archéologie du Pacifique Sud: Résultats et perspectives. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 15: 5–54.
- 1961. Report on New Zealand, Western Polynesia, New Caledonia and Fiji. *Asian Perspectives* 5 (2): 166–80.
- (ed.), 1963. *Polynesian Navigation. A Symposium on Andrew Sharp’s Theory of Accidental Voyages*. Memoir No. 34. Auckland: The Polynesian Society.
- Golson, Jack, Tim Denham, Philip Hughes, Pamela Swadling and John Muke, 2017. *Ten Thousand Years of Cultivation at Kuk Swamp in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*. Terra Australis 46. Canberra: ANU Press.
- Golson, Jack and Philip J. Hughes, 1980. The appearance of plant and animal domestication in New Guinea. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 36 (69): 294–303.
- Groube, L.M., 1971. Tonga, Lapita pottery, and Polynesian origins. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 80 (3): 278–316.
- Martinsson-Wallin, Helene, 2007. Samoan archaeology: A review of research history. *Archaeology in Oceania* 42 Supplement: 11–27.
- Sorrenson, M.P.K., 1992. *Manifest Duty: The Polynesian Society over 100 Years*. Auckland: The Polynesian Society.
- Spriggs, Matthew, Douglas E. Yen, Wal Ambrose, Rhys Jones, Alan Thorne and Ann Andrews, 1993. *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific*. Canberra: Dept. of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU.

THE ELSDON BEST MEMORIAL MEDAL

The Council of the Polynesian Society considers possible recipients of this award at the end of each year but does not make an award annually. The Medal is for outstanding scholarly work on Aotearoa New Zealand Māori and may be in the fields of Māori ethnology, social anthropology, archaeology, prehistory or linguistics. The Medal is normally presented at the Society's mid-year Annual General Meeting, and the recipient is asked to present a paper on that occasion.

Previous winners of the Elsdon Best Memorial Medal:

- 1970 • Don Stafford
- 1973 • Roger C. Green
- 1976 • Anne Salmond
- 1977 • Mervyn E. McLean
- 1978 • Dave. R. Simmons
- 1981 • J.M. McEwen
- 1983 • Hirini Moko Mead
- 1985 • Bruce G. Biggs
- 1986 • Janet M. Davidson
- 1987 • Joan Metge
- 1989 • Helen Leach
- 1990 • Douglas Yen
- 1992 • Sir Hugh Kawharu
- 1994 • Atholl Anderson
- 1997 • Ranginui Walker
- 1999 • Mason Durie
- 2003 • Roger Neich
- 2009 • Judith Binney
- 2013 • Geoff Irwin
- 2015 • M.P.K. [Keith] Sorrenson
- 2021 • Ngāpare Hopa

