

waka kuaka

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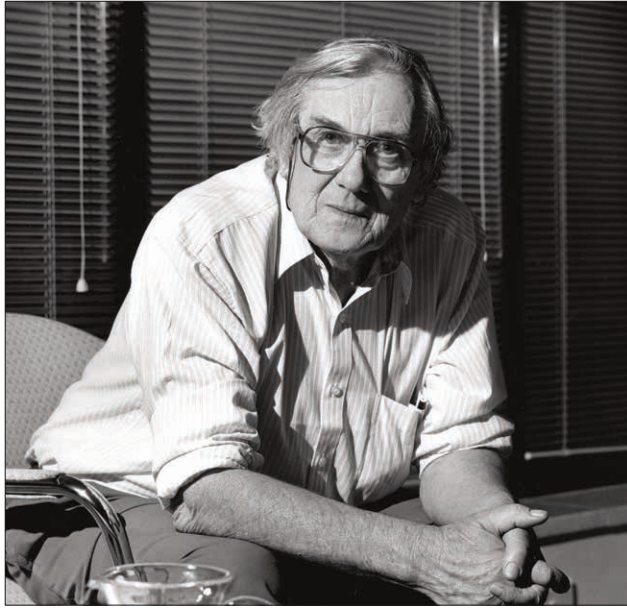


The Polynesian Society

Waipapa Taumata Rau | The University of Auckland, New Zealand

MEMORIES OF JACK GOLSON

13 SEPT. 1926 – 2 SEPT. 2023



Jack, 1998. Photo by Loui Seselja. National Library of Australia.

Professor Jack Golson was a former editor of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* and the 2022 recipient of the Society's Elsdon Best Medal for outstanding contributions to the archaeology of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific (Sheppard 2022). Here former colleagues provide reflections on their time with Jack.

Harry Allen—Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland

Jack was head of department during 1969 to 1972 when I was doing my PhD at the ANU. I didn't have that much direct contact with him as Rhys Jones and John Mulvaney were my supervisors. Access to Jack's office was closely guarded by his secretary, Lois White, and by the clouds of cigarette smoke

that issued out whenever his door was open. Canberra was fairly tribal at that time, and the archaeologists and biogeographers in the Research School of Pacific Studies socialised together, so I often saw Jack at parties. One of the pieces of equipment I took with me to do fieldwork out at Mungo was a surveyor's dumpy level, which had charred tripod legs. I asked Wal Ambrose about this and heard the story of Jack's return from excavations at Sleisbeck (Fig. 1) in the mid-1960s. As Jack, Wal and Ron Lampert were heading home along the Stuart Highway, Jack was smoking and throwing butts out of the window, when Wal yelled "Fire!" The butt had landed on the tarp covering the finds and the equipment and quickly took hold with a good wind as they headed down the highway. I'm not sure how the fire was put out, but the Sleisbeck archaeological material had a mixed fortune after that. Much of it was destroyed in the fire that took the ANU's Weston Store in the Canberra bushfires of 2003 (Swete Kelly and Phear 2004).



Figure 1. Jack at Sleisbeck, 1963. Photo by Wal Ambrose.

Jack made lifelong friends in his time at Auckland. At the ANU, he and Rhys Jones initiated a programme of inviting artists to come and experience archaeological sites, particularly Mungo and Kakadu. Some were friends from the Kiwi Hotel. Hone Tuwhare was one such invitee and Ralph Hotere another. Ralph did the Mungo series of black window paintings based on his time there. On leave at the ANU in the 1980s, I had regularly had coffee with Bill Pearson, author of *Coal Flat*, another beneficiary of the scheme.

Jack was passionate about Indigenous involvement in archaeology and was president of the World Archaeological Congress when it held its third congress in New Delhi. This was at the time of sectarian disputes within Indian archaeology, and it transpired that the monies forwarded for the congress had disappeared. Jack bankrolled the meeting with a major increase to the mortgage on his and Clare's house in O'Connor (see Golson 1995).

Jack Golson was a one-off, an open person of immense charm who was larger than life. His influence on New Zealand archaeology and on that of Papua New Guinea (Fig. 2) and the Pacific was immense. Those who knew him will always remember him with affection.



Figure 2. Jack leads the rowing crew from the front, Kuk Swamp, Western Highlands, Papua New Guinea, 1975. Photo by Klim Gollan.

Geoff Irwin—Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland

There were frequent informal cricket matches between departments at ANU and a yearly match with the Anthropology Department of the University of Sydney, held alternately at Canberra or Sydney, and played for a trophy called the Beckett Nut (named after social anthropologist Jeremy Beckett), which was a silver-mounted coconut.

In one year at about the time of the photo (Fig. 3), Jack received this message from Sydney (from memory):

To Captain Jack and his motley crew on the banks of Lake Sinecure,
We send a challenge for the Beckett Nut to be played in a Sydney sewer.
So leave behind your deciduous trees, your carefully manicured grasses,
We'll hammer you on to your bended knees and whack one up your arses.

Note: Lake Sinecure is Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra. Sinecure refers to the fact that Jack's department was research only—there was no undergraduate teaching.



Figure 3. ANU interdepartmental cricket match, ca. 1973. Back row, left to right: John Chappell, Jim O'Connell, Alan Thorne, John Head, John Mulvaney, Howard Morphy and John Beaton. Front row, left to right: Geoff Irwin (and daughter Kate), Wal Ambrose, Jack Golson, Ron Lampert and Graeme Ward. Seven players are now dead; five are still alive. Photo in author's possession.

Jean Kennedy—Australian National University

I first met Jack Golson in the Bay of Islands in January 1965. Jack and his family arrived in time to reinvigorate the tired stayers of Les Groube's Otago undergraduate student crew, as we sweated to finish the long excavation of Paeroa Pā, on Moturua Island. Jack's overview of the site and acute stratigraphic eye helped us finish plan and section drawings, and he organised us into rowdy bucket-and-shovel brigades, filling in by lamplight.

Clare Golson, pregnant with Toby, rested on the beautiful little beach below the site, while the hyperactive two-year-olds Kate Golson and Kristin Groube played in the water, under watchful eyes. We were all housed in dilapidated tents behind the beach, with no running water, too few buckets and unreliable food deliveries topped up by abundant gifts of fresh fish from friendly locals. Jack, clearly enjoying himself, would have been used to all these conditions; if Clare was not, she seemed unperturbed.

Immediately after the excavation, the 11th New Zealand Science Congress, combined with the New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) Biennial Conference, was held in Auckland (the programme is outlined in Green 1964). Jack had a major role in this, notably as discussant of Les Groube's paper, "The Classic Maori: Prehistoric or Protohistoric", and as chairman of the session of which it was part; and, with Les Groube chairing, in presenting the closing paper, entitled "Ends Are Means: Theory and Practice with Reference to New Zealand Archaeology", later revised and published (Golson 1965). I remember an overwhelming sense of excitement at the issues so vibrantly discussed, and not surprisingly, very little of my own first conference presentation. The Kiwi pub overflowed with archaeologists.

In this heady atmosphere, I was about to start my final year of a BA in anthropology at Otago. I had seen Jack's ideas, amplified through my teachers Peter Gathercole and Les Groube, as the foundation of a newly emergent picture of New Zealand prehistory. Jack's return from Canberra for the Auckland conference, after a three-year absence, came at a time of energetic theoretical debate, as archaeology had become firmly rooted in New Zealand universities.

Jack's influence had spread throughout New Zealand in the 1950s, his presence ever alert and unassuming. The NZAA Newsletter, of which I was an early reader, documents his expanding network. At the second NZAA conference in Dunedin, in 1957, Jack presented a paper, and later summarised the proceedings (Golson 1957). While in Dunedin, he dropped into a barber's shop, where the chatty barber, Bill Hackett, introduced him to my father, a Medical Research Council boffin. Jack assured him that local things archaeological would shortly pick up, with the arrival in Dunedin of his good friend Peter Gathercole. He was right: Dunedin was ready for Peter's arrival in 1958. By the time I started my BA in 1963, I had already been on several excavations, and was hooked.

Jack Holloway, a friend of my father's from student days, also gave a paper at that early NZAA conference. Holloway's prescient ideas on climate change, aired in our house, were the context in which I began to hear about Māori prehistory. Holloway's NZAA presentation, relayed to Douglas Yen by Jack, influenced Yen's pioneering work on kūmara (Yen 1961).

Jack and I have written about how we were both drawn into the Southeast Asian network of Bill Solheim, Jack through direct approach from Bill, me through the influence of Ham Parker, another of Jack's early Auckland recruits who later taught at Otago (Golson and Kennedy 2004). Solheim, alert to the growing reputation of New Zealand for skilful stratigraphic excavation, had sought Jack's advice, and Ham's participation in Southeast Asian research was mediated by Jack's recommendation. Jack was the second president (1980–84), after Solheim, of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association. This grew out of an earlier association that Solheim had revitalised by active recruitment of Southeast Asian and Pacific scholars. Jack's move to Canberra and concentration on New Guinea research was thus part of an ever-expanding network, into which he drew many of his New Zealand friends, Wal Ambrose, Win Mumford, Les Groube and Douglas Yen among them. Canberra was very well connected to archaeology in New Zealand and Hawai'i, and my post-PhD shift from Southeast Asian to New Guinea research felt like a homecoming.



Figure 4. Jack talking to Korup, Rei village, Lou Island, Manus Province, 1983. Photo by Wal Ambrose.

I recall an evening in the Staff Club of the University of Papua New Guinea, sometime in the mid-1980s, sharing an SP beer with Jack, Les Groube, Jo Tumble Mangi and John Muke, along with other congenial regulars, mathematician, biologist, linguist; someone lined us up for a family portrait, raising glasses to a lineage of archaeologists. I've lost the photograph, but am proud to have been included with my young UNPG colleagues as one of Jack's academic grandchildren.

On both sides of the Tasman and beyond, Jack's appreciation of people, combined with an insatiable curiosity about ideas, built enduring, collegial friendships, from a wide range of disciplines, into the rhizomatous network on which the community of Pacific archaeology has continued to flourish.

Glenn R. Summerhayes—Te Whare Wānanga o Ōtākou | University of Otago

I first met Jack Golson over 40 years ago. As an MA student I ventured from Sydney to the ANU with Jim Specht to sample modern pottery Specht had collected from Buka in the 1960s. Meeting Jack for the first time was an unforgettable experience. His legendary status preceded him. He was a working-class boy from northern England who ended up in the coal mines as one of the "Bevan Boys" during World War II. He was known as having a strong social commitment, being a member of the Communist Party. He was the foundation lecturer in archaeology at Auckland and moved to the ANU to take up a fellowship, becoming a full professor in archaeology. He was a person with a vision for archaeology in the western Pacific. Jack was a legend. He was also the most important archaeologist working in Papua New Guinea, with his students marking out the knowledge we base our research on today. Both my mentors and supervisors in Sydney (Jim Specht and Peter White) were his students, not to mention others like Ron Vanderwal, Brian Egloff and Peter Lauer, to mention a few.

For someone who had a busy schedule, Jack provided plenty of time to talk about my MA research and to provide sage advice. He was compassionate and also demonstrated a common touch—something that he never wavered from. When I first moved to Canberra in 1988, and later again in 1995, we met up at the university and at social events. I first met his wife, Clare, at a party they held at their O'Connor residence. I turned up very late, and Clare, thinking me a gate crasher, was defending the entrance to their house with a broom in hand, waving it menacingly at me. In hindsight I must have looked a mess with hair halfway down my back and a number of earrings in both ears—and not exactly sober. Thankfully someone from inside came to my assistance and told Clare that I was indeed invited. We became friends after that, in particular after she found out I was a twin, which she thought was good luck. Other events that bring back memories was Jack's giving up smoking. He was a chain smoker. Indeed Craven A (a brand of cigarettes)

had a cigarette dispenser just outside his office door for his personal use. Giving up must have been a problem, and afterwards when we were at events and I was smoking, Jack was behind me taking in deep breaths. He had a great sense of humour.

One of my last acts in 2004 as head of archaeology and natural history at the ANU before moving to Otago was to approve airfares for Jack to attend the New Zealand Archaeology Association's 50th anniversary, held at New Plymouth. It was a special occasion for a number of reasons, not least seeing Jack with Peter Gathercole, Roger Green and Wal Ambrose. Unfortunately, I did not record the event. Another similar event took place two years earlier in 2002 at the Lapita conference in New Caledonia organised by Christophe Sand. Here we had Jack, Roger Green and Richard Shutler together (Fig. 5)—all legends indeed!

So what are my memories of Jack? A great scholar, a visionary, a person with the common touch who treated all people equally. Someone who encouraged Indigenous archaeology in the Pacific and was adamant that the results of archaeology be returned to the Pacific community. A person who definitely left their mark.



Figure 5. Lapita conference, New Caledonia, 2002. Left to right: Jack Golson, Richard Shutler, Roger Green. Author's photo.

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