

Archaeology in Hong Kong: A Review of Achievement

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I. Preamble

When I received the notice of the Conference and had accepted the invitation to attend, it occurred to me that this might be a good opportunity to look back at the archaeological research in Hong Kong over the past decades and to make an assessment; also, that I might consider myself qualified for the task, having worked in this field, in Hong Kong, for some 40 years - a link between the past and the present, as it were.

Abbreviations used in this paper:-

- AMO : Antiquities and Monuments Office
CUHK : Chinese University of Hong Kong
HKMH : Hong Kong Museum of History
HKU : University of Hong Kong
Society : Hong Kong Archaeological Society
Team : University Archaeological Team
TL : Thermoluminescence

II. The Pioneers, c. 1925-1940

It all began around the middle 1920s, when Professor Joseph Shellshear, from Australia, was appointed to the chair of Anatomy at the University of Hong Kong. He had earlier distinguished himself in that field, having discovered an obscure small artery in a human brain thus earning a place for himself, albeit in the footnotes, in that Bible of anatomists - the Gray's Textbook of Anatomy. Like many anatomists, he was

also a physical anthropologist of some distinction with special interest in the fossils of early man. From physical anthropology to archaeology is only a small step. In Hong Kong, Shellshear discovered a kindred soul - Charles Montague Heanley - a medical doctor who was also a geologist of no mean ability. Together they explored the beaches and the exposed hill-tops of Hong Kong and the New Territories, and described in several publications their discovery of stone-age relics, hitherto never reported in Hong Kong. Apart from the obvious polished stone implements, they recognized the crudely flaked pebble tools which we subsequently termed "pebble picks". By 1928, Heanley had retired and left Hong Kong. Shellshear remained until 1935, when he too left to return to Australia where he would become a much-sought authority on early aboriginal bones (see Note.) I had the honour to sit at Shellshear's anatomy lectures when I was a young medical student in Hong Kong. It was a fascinating experience, though I recall we learned little anatomy but a great deal about the "Peking Man" and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the latter only just completed. I never met Heanley, but corresponded with him until 1960; he was then well in his 90s, but still retained keen interest in Hong Kong archaeology.

Close on the heels of Shellshear and Heanley there followed Father Daniel Finn, Father Raphael Maglioni, Walter Schofield,

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and Chen Kung-chieh (陳公哲), all working independently. Excavations were conducted in 1933 by Fr. Finn at Tai Wan (大灣) on Lamma Island, by Schofield in 1937 at Shek Pik (石壁) on Lantau Island and in 1931 at Lung Kwu Chau (龍鼓洲), a small tomolo island at the western end of Hong Kong Territory. Fr. Maglioni worked mainly at Haifeng (海豐), on the coast of China about 160 km north of Hong Kong. Chen Kung-chieh, the only Chinese among the pioneers of the pre-war years, excavated on Lamma island, but his archaeological activities generally remain vague. I met him in 1957 when he guided me to the ancient rock engraving at Shek Pik.

These pioneers were talented people, who though untrained in archaeology, and working at the time when the study of Chinese prehistory was still in its infancy, had achieved remarkable results. If by the standards of to-day their excavations were less than competent, their conclusions formed a useful basis for future research. Both Heanley and Schofield were competent geologists and could understand and interpret stratigraphy. Finn and Schofield correctly identified two distinct ceramic horizons - the geometric and pre-geometric. Schofield, in an amazing feat of endurance and observation, had mapped more than 100 sites with evidence of archaeological finds. Few sites known to-day escaped his attention; he had done this on top of his full-time duties as administrative officer in the Hong Kong Government. His excavation in 1937 at Shek Pik yielded human skeletal remains - the first evidence in Hong Kong of prehistoric burials. Unfortunately, the study of these bones was delayed until the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, and they were never recovered.

While my admiration for these men remains high, a slight disappointment in one respect needs mentioning: not a single artefact collected by Heanley, Shellshear, or Schofield remained in Hong Kong. To-day we know better and safeguard our relics by the appropriate legislation. Fortunately, we still have in Hong Kong complete collections of Finn and Maglioni and part of Chen Kung-chieh's.

III. The Followers, c. 1956-1976

1. University Archaeological Team

The War in the Pacific, 1941-1945, had devastated Hong Kong. The period of occupation which followed brought suffering and privation. There could be no question of archaeological research when chief concern was survival. After the War, recovery and reconstruction were the immediate goals, with little thought of archaeology or, indeed, of any cultural activity while people were busy rebuilding their lives and fortunes. It was not until 1956, when conditions in Hong Kong had improved and stabilized, that the interest in archaeology reappeared. In that year, a small group of enthusiasts, mostly members of the staff of the University of Hong Kong, had formed themselves into a team, to be known as the University Archaeological Team to resume archaeological research started before the War. As one of the founders of the Team, I recall well this diverse group of academics, led initially by Professor F. Drake of the Department of Chinese, and later by Professor S. Davis of Geology and Geography. Archaeology was still a weekend pursuit; the Team, rarely more than 20 strong, re-visited the sites recorded by the Pioneers and searched for new ones. The milestone in the Team's work was undoubtedly the discovery and

excavation in 1958 of a new site at Man Kok Tsui (萬角咀), a late Neolithic and bronze site on the east coast of Lantau Island. The excavation, directed by a geologist (S. Davis) and an art historian (M. Tregear), was technically better than the pre-war work. The subsequent Report was well presented with clear recording and detailed description of finds. Although the results were inconclusive, the Team was able to demonstrate that the "rough" (coarse and cord-marked) pottery was not necessarily earlier than the hard (stoneware), that the two could be contemporary, and that bronze was found in association with hard geometric pottery. I believe that these modest conclusions, fully borne out later, show real progress. The Man Kok Tsui Report adds cautiously that "these problems cannot be solved by studying of one site and were certainly not solved by this excavation.....".

Equally important was the Team's active participation, in September 1961, in the Symposium on Historical, Archaeological and Linguistic Studies held at the HKU. Two members of the Team contributed papers to the Symposium, and with others took part in the discussions at the forum, mixing with such well-known scholars and archaeologists as - J. M. Braga, Roger Duff, Wolfram Eberhard, Bernard Groslier, Jao Tsung-i (饒宗頤) Lo Hsiang-lin (羅香林), Michael Loewe, Wilhelm G. Solheim II, and others. It seemed that the Team, though lacking professional standing, had been accepted into the archaeological fraternity.

2. Hong Kong Archaeological Society

Around 1964, after several years of productive activity during which the Team visited appeared to decline. By 1967 it became clear that the depleted Team could

no longer function effectively and that a wider public participation was needed. Accordingly, the Team was wound up and the Hong Kong Archaeological Society was formed open to members of the public who were interested in archaeological work. Again, as with the Team, I found myself a co-founder of the new Society. I must confess that at the time I had misgivings about opening the gates wide for a multitude of uninformed people, however keen, into a precious field of Hong Kong's relics. Time proved me wrong. The Society thrived and would in time become an important agent of archaeological research, contributing richly to our knowledge of Hong Kong's prehistory. Fiercely independent, and not always in agreement with the official Government policies, it had on occasions stepped outside its avowed interest - archaeology, declaring strongly its support for conservation of Hong Kong's heritage in general and of historic buildings in particular. The Society's journal, ably edited by W. Meacham, is widely known and highly regarded.

In the first 10 years after its formation in 1967, the Society was the only body conducting archaeological work in Hong Kong. No teaching in general archaeology or prehistory was available locally until 1968 when I started a yearly course of lectures, arranged by the Extra-mural Department of the HKU, and entitled "Introduction to Archaeology". The course, which included two field sessions, was elementary but it served its purpose of stimulating interest in and imparting some basic knowledge of the subject. It continued for 12 years and there is little doubt in my mind that it helped to swell the ranks of the Society with keen volunteers.

The milestone in the Society's work during this period was excavations at Sham Wan (深灣) on Lamma Island. There, the undisturbed 8-metre high sandbar above the beach revealed the full profile of Hong Kong's prehistoric levels. The Society's teams, in phased excavations from 1971, established clearly for the first time the relative sequence of local ceramic horizons. Sham Wan excavations were also notable for the careful analysis carried out on the recovered human skeletal, mammal and fish remains, and shell and pollen finds. The Sham Wan Monograph, published by the Society, documents fully and competently this achievement in the progress of archaeological work in Hong Kong.

The Society had long been a firm advocate of legal protection of archaeological sites and of Hong Kong's historical heritage generally. When the Government had at last been persuaded of the need to adopt these measures, members of the Society sat on the Provisional Antiquities Advisory Board, formed by the Government to advise on the drafting of the appropriate legislation. The resulting Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance was promulgated in 1972 and put into effect in 1976.

It has long been recognized that Hong Kong and its environs did not have a separate archaeological identity, but shared a common cultural past with the rest of South China. As contacts with Chinese Archaeologists working in Guangdong province grew more frequent and information was exchanged, it became imperative to integrate Hong Kong's cultural horizons into the framework of South China's prehistory. By the late 1970s, sufficient number of radiocarbon dates was

available for Hong Kong archaeologists to achieve this. Examined in that context, the Early Neolithic period of the cord-ware horizon, presumed to be 12,000 BP- 6,500 BP, has not so far been identified in Hong Kong. Present are the Middle Neolithic, circa 6,500 BP-4,500 BP, of the incised chalky ware, the Late Neolithic, circa 4,500 BP-3,000 BP, of the soft and coarse geometric pottery, followed by the Bronze, or more correctly the Chalcolithic, circa 3,000 BP-2,000 BP, of the hard geometric ware. At 2,000 BP, finds of Han (漢朝) pottery ushers the Chinese historic presence.

The society played an important role in clarifying Hong Kong's prehistory. It continued its activities into the 1980s, its contribution to the archaeological research in Hong Kong being recognized by a permanent office/laboratory in the Hong Kong Museum of History and a modest government subsidy.

IV. The Specialists, c. 1976-

1976 may be taken as the year of the advent of Specialists. In that year, an archaeologist was appointed Curator of the HKMH, the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance was put into effect, and the Antiquities Monuments Office was set up by the Government to implement the Ordinance in practical terms. It was a natural development, in which a new and essential dimension - professionalism - was added to the archaeological research in Hong Kong. Similar change was taking place in other areas of Hong Kong's cultural life.

The Specialists did not displace the Followers, but the two continued to work concurrently and often jointly. With the

Ordinance in effect and archaeological research expanding, the Government now recognized the need to create a cadre of trained archaeologists, initially by selecting the existing staff of the Museum and the AMO for training in the United Kingdom. The Chinese University of Hong Kong had too entered the field by establishing the Centre for Chinese Archaeology and Art within its excellent Institute of Chinese Studies. By the middle 1980s, the AMO, the HKMH, and the CUHK had qualified archaeologists on their staff. At the same time, there was also a growing number of skilled volunteers, not all from the ranks of the Society, who had acquired sufficient experience in field work to be used as site assistants or supervisors. I had worked with them on several projects and found their ability and enthusiasm of the highest order.

The Antiquities Ordinance brought legal protection of the Hong Kong heritage and strict control of archaeological excavations. Only licensed excavations were allowed and their conduct was strictly regulated. Far from restraining archaeological activity, it seemed to spur on research and demand higher standards of work. The media, too, reacting to the upsurge of public interest in Hong Kong heritage, reported new excavations, sometimes sacrificing accuracy to sensationalism.

The AMO was working hard identifying and recording all items of archaeological and historical importance. The extended interest now covered historical sites, forts, and newly identified Tang (唐朝) and Song (宋朝) sites. To name but a few: Sham Wan Tsuen (深灣村) on Chek Lap Kok (赤鱗角) Island, excavated 1979-1984 by the Society, has greatly enlarged our knowledge of the Tang dynasty lime kilns; at Penny's Bay on

Lantau Island, excavated by the Society (1986) and later by the AMO (1990), a hoard of 16th century blue-and-white export ware was uncovered, hinting at trade links which passed through Hong Kong; The Qing (清朝) dynasty fort on Tung Lung (東龍) Island was partially restored by the AMO between 1979 and 1982, revealing for the first time details of the Chinese coastal defences of this area.

Between 1982 and 1985, a full-scale Archaeological Survey of the Territory, commissioned by the Government, was conducted by two archaeologists (B. Peacock and T. Nixon). All previously recorded sites were re-examined and a number of new sites was reported. The recommendations of the Survey were thorough and far-reaching and dealt with conservation of sites, establishment of archaeological archives, and conduct of excavations; a number of legal recommendations was also made. Newly re-examined, archaeological sites were divided into categories: those to be designated (legal protection), to be protected by administrative action, or those simply monitored.

By 1986 at least three independent archaeological teams could be mustered for field work - the AMO, the Society, and the CUHK, while the HKMH could also field a team if required. However, the overall policy of conservation of sites limited the scope of work to mainly rescue excavations of sites threatened by development or construction work. Then, in 1989, the new Airport Project was announced. The archaeological impact of the Project was immense. For the construction of the Airport, Chek Lap Kok Island would be totally levelled and large areas of North

Lantau and south-western New Territories - all containing many important archaeological sites - would be severely affected.

All available resources were thrown into this colossal rescue operation. Funds were made available by the Government and private companies employed in the construction. With minimum delay, the AMO had prepared a schedule of works allocating sites to the teams participating in the rescue. Soon all were hard at work surveying and excavating the sites marked for destruction.

The rescue work is still going on to-day. The results, some still being evaluated, have so far exceeded all expectations, both in terms of material recovered and information obtained. Some existing concepts are being re-examined and fresh problems have appeared. At Chek Lap Kok, the Society team worked hard for 9 months, in 1991. It has found strong evidence that the painted pottery is the earliest cultural marker, at circa 6,500 BP; discovered two new types of kilns, as yet of undetermined function, and a bronze level of considerable extent with axe moulds confirming yet again that bronze objects were manufactured in this area. Yung Long (湧浪), across the channel on the mainland, excavated by the AMO and the Society between 1992 and 1994, turned out to be an extremely rich site revealing burials with ceremonial objects, and multiple foci of kiln furniture indicating a possible large production site. At Pa Tau Kwu (扒頭鼓), on North Lantau, the excavating CUHK team had postulated a possible village settlement. At Fu Tei Wan (虎地灣), on Chek Lap Kok Island, a fragile, semi-preserved Tang dynasty lime kiln was successfully excavated and removed to Tung Chung (東

涌) opposite, by the Gurkha Engineers with the AMO supervision - a remarkable feat of engineering, probably never accomplished before.

Two other events must be mentioned, both indicative of the Government's Recreation and Culture Branch - effectively the AMO's - efforts to maintain the progress of archaeological work in Hong Kong: In 1990, a standard recording form, produced by the AMO in consultation with other involved parties, was introduced as a requirement for all excavation reports; and in January 1991, a 10-day field course on excavation techniques was organized by the AMO, and conducted by Dr Peter Drewett of the Institute of Archaeology, London University. Aimed at non-experts, the course attracted over 20 participants and was very successful.

I believe it is fair to say that the early 1990s saw the overall standard of archaeological research in Hong Kong reaching close to a professional level of competence. There are several qualified archaeologists working in the field, while many volunteers have also become experienced and skilled team members. There is a great deal of work ahead, especially in the Airport Rescue Excavations, and a reasonable financial support has been available. Links with archaeologists working in the neighbouring China have been developing well, and the future appears generally bright.

So far I have dealt with the positive aspects of Hong Kong's archaeological work in its steady progress towards professional maturity. The account would be unbalanced, however, if I were to omit some areas where in my view Hong Kong

has lagged behind. First, is the total neglect of underwater archaeology. In a place with a predominantly coastal distribution of sites, this seems to me a serious omission. The second is our comparatively poor record in Microanalysis. It is not enough to boast of a floatation machine in operation; it is also essential to develop the expertise in this difficult procedure, or at least to have an easily accessible panel of experts for advice. The third one is beyond my understanding: with both the HKU and the CUHK having Radiocarbon and Thermoluminescence laboratories operating, why are the local specimens sent abroad for dating? I recall that the TL laboratory was set up in 1974 at the HKU largely as a result of the campaigning by the Society.

V. Conclusion

I have attempted in this paper to trace, however sketchily, the development of archaeological research in Hong Kong during past several decades. Beginning with those marvellous dilettante-Pioneers of the pre-war years, to the post-war serious and dedicated Followers, and finally to the Specialists - it has been a steady advance, punctuated by milestones of achievement. I have tried to emphasise that the advent of Specialists has not displaced the non-experts; the latter continue to play important, even essential, role in the local archaeological scene. There are still deficiencies to be filled, legal loopholes to be erased; it would be surprising if there were not, but seen as a whole, Hong Kong's achievement in archaeology has been very significant. It carries out its share of the regional research of prehistory of China and Southeast Asia. I have no doubt that it will continue to do so in future.

Note

Shellshear's collection of primate fossils is now housed in the Shellshear Museum at the University of Sydney.

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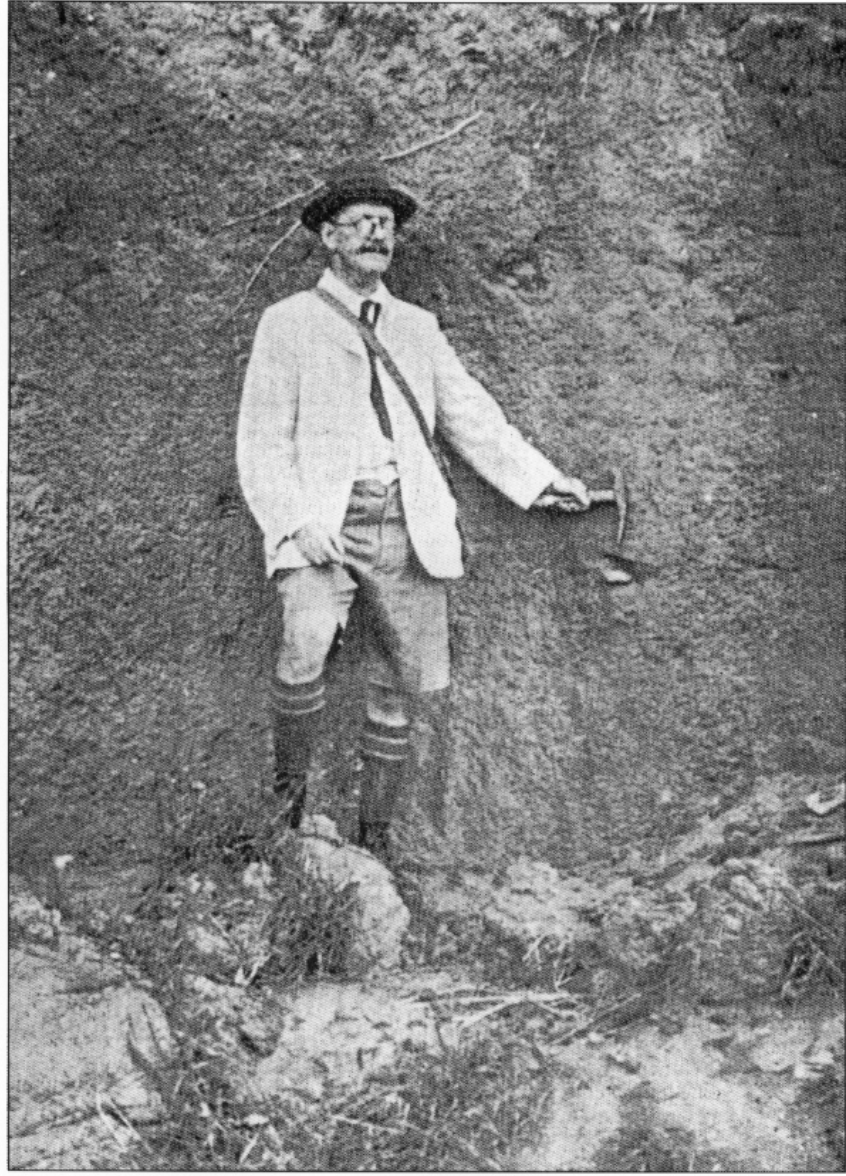


Fig. 1 1931 : Walter Schofield during an excavation at Lung Kwu Chau.
1931年 Schofield 在龍鼓洲進行考古發掘

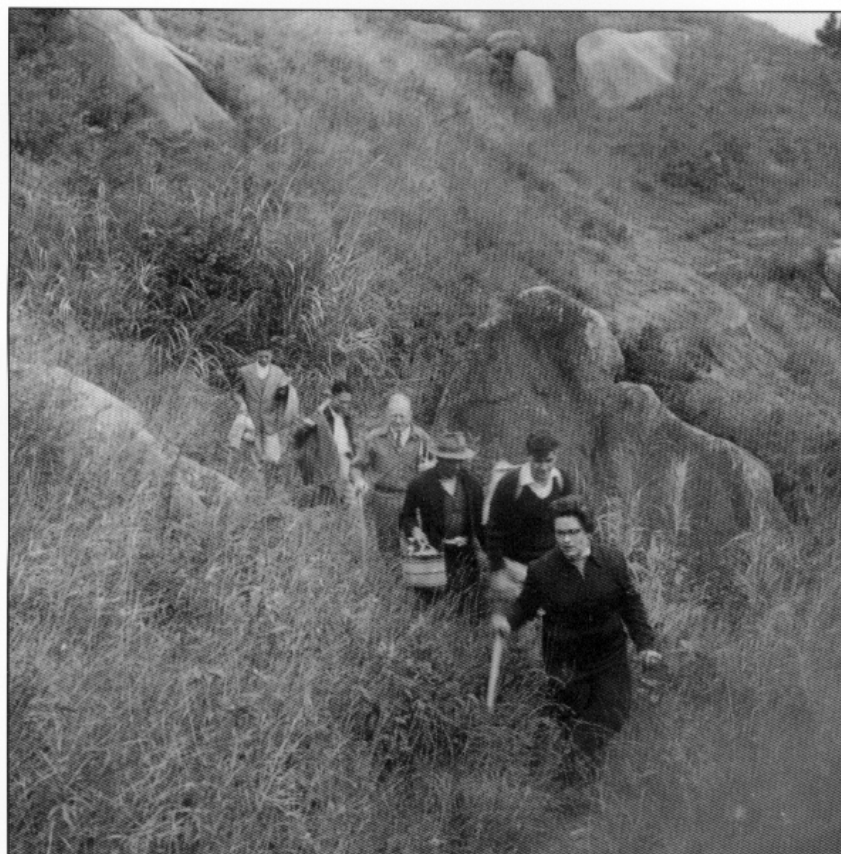


Fig. 2 1956 : Members of the University Archaeological Team on a field walk, led by Mary Tregear; fourth behind her is Professor F. S. Drake, Head of the Team.
1956年香港大學考古隊成員進行野外考察

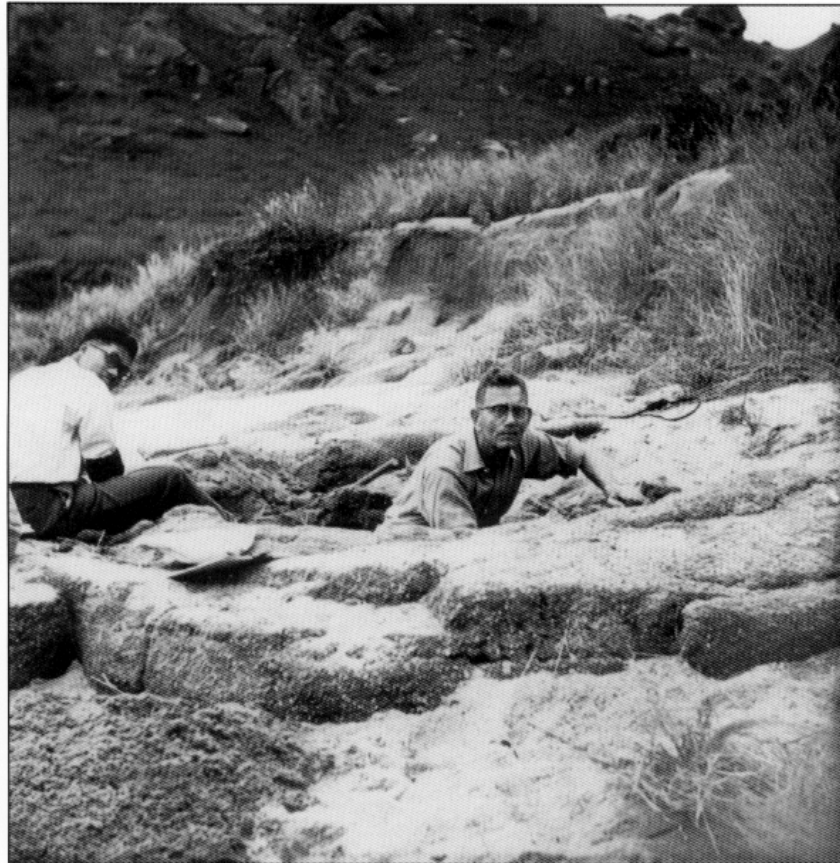


Fig. 3 1957: Members of the University Archaeological Team investigating an ancient lime kiln on Lantau Island.
1957年香港大學考古隊成員在大嶼山一處灰窯遺址進行考察



Fig. 4 1973: Hong Kong Archaeological Society excavating at Sham Wan, Lamma Island. At far centre: the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Murray MacLehose, and Lady MacLehose visiting the site; in the centre, standing-Professor W. G. Solheim II, of the University of Hawaii, also on a visit.
1973年香港考古學會在南丫島深灣進行考古發掘



Fig. 5 1973 Sham Wan excavation photographed from the air
1973年深灣遺址鳥瞰圖



Fig. 6 1993 : Excavation by the Antiquities and Monuments Office's archaeological team at Yung Long, south-west New Territories facing the Deep Bay.
1993年古物古蹟辦事處考古隊在湧浪遺址進行發掘

香港考古工作的發展及成就

白爾德

【摘要】

香港的考古工作始於二十年代，先有Heantley及Shellshear撰文描述一些於海灘和山頭發現的新石器時代遺物，繼有Schofield, Finn, Maglioni及陳公哲等熱心加入研究工作。這群考古學先驅從未接受過有關的正式訓練，但對考古學卻懷著滿腔熱誠，不斷鑽研，終於喚醒了人們對香港史前文化的關注。據Schofield及Finn的發掘資料顯示，香港的史前陶器有兩個不同的發展期—幾何紋期及前幾何紋期。Schofield是一名全職政府公務員，業餘埋首考古研究工作，勘測並繪錄遺址不下百處，實在難能可貴。

香港淪陷時期及其後十多年，考古工作難以展開，至1956年香港大學考古隊成立後才得以繼續。隊伍的主要成員為香港大學的學者，他們於1958年發掘萬角咀，進一步掌握了香港的史前發展資料，尤其是證實了本地的青銅文化與硬陶文化是同時期的文化。然而，經過一輪努力後，研究工作又鬆懈下來。1967年，考古隊的剩餘成員成立了香港考古學會，並歡迎社會上其他人士加入，才再展開一番新面目。

1971-77年深灣遺址的發掘，成績斐然，成功地建立了本地文化的年代序列，又憑碳十四年代測定數據將香港不同時期的文化套入華南地區的史前文化架構。此外，學會在鼓吹立法保護香港文物方面貢獻良多。

1976年，香港政府終於認識到文化財產的重要性，立例保護文物，成立了古物古蹟辦事處。隨後又保送有關人員到英國留學，積極訓練考古專材。1982-85年間，又委托兩位專業考古學家在香港展開全面性的考古調查工作。現時，除了考古學會外，致力於本地考古研究的還有古物古蹟辦事處、香港中文大學和香港博物館。1989年，政府決定於赤鱸角興建新機場，全港的考古隊立刻在大嶼山北部和新界西南部展開一連串的搶救挖掘，現時工作仍然持續，出土器物及數據非常有價值。

在考古專家與後進的攜手合作下，香港的考古工作漸達專業水平。雖然仍有不足處，如缺乏水下考古方面的研究及有關微量化學分析等，但總體來說，成就足以自豪。