REVIEW

UNSTRATIFIED ARTEFACTS

HYDE PARK BARRACKS ASSEMBLAGE

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared at the request of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW. It documents a review of the unstratified artefacts which were generated by the excavation of Hyde Park Barracks during 1980 - 1981. It principally addresses the sub-surface artefacts not those recovered from the sub-floor spaces of the barracks building. The main purpose of this review is to assess the value of this assemblage as an archaeological resource as a means of determining an appropriate management policy. The following discussion addresses the context of these artefacts, how they were assembled, it describes and quantifies them and, finally, it presents management recommendations.

The preparation of this report has been made possible by the assistance of Mr Peter Tonkin.
2.0

CONTEXT

In 1980, during initial work on the restoration of Hyde Park Barracks, numerous artefacts began to emerge from the ground floor spaces and between the floor cavities. These were collected by workmen, architects and one archaeologist. The locations of these pieces were not recorded and they became the first unstratified artefacts generated at the Barracks. The so-called "convict shirt" was one of these items.

During 1980 -1981 the Hyde Park Barracks was subject to a lengthy and detailed archaeological investigation. This encompassed excavation and recording of sub-surface areas surrounding the principal barracks, the ground spaces inside several buildings and the floor cavities within the barracks building. A large artefact assemblage was produced by the programme. The artefacts were catalogued at the time of the excavation. In the following decade the collection was stored in several locations, some elements were placed on display, many were disassociated from their archaeological contexts. The latter have increased the original number of unstratified relics. Importantly the two components of the collection, sub-surface and sub-floor, were isolated and were treated as separate assemblages. The physical and psychological separation has done much to obscure the relationship between the two components of what is one assemblage.

In 1991 the sub-surface collection was re-catalogued to a format required by the Department of Planning and placed on the Minark database, the choice of programme again being at the request of the Department of Planning. At this time the unstratified artefacts, that is those that lacked a specific archaeological location and/or co-ordinate (the stratum or unit in which it was found), were separated but not catalogued. The sub-floor collection was re-catalogued at a similar time in a similar format to the sub-surface collection.

The artefact collection is now generally housed in the resource room of the Hyde Park Barracks Museum. Some portions are also found in the Ultimo storage of the Trust. This report has reviewed the artefacts in both locations.
3.0 DESCRIPTION

3.1 The Work

The artefacts currently described as "unstratified" require several cubic metres of storage at both Hyde Park Barracks and in the Ultimo storage area. By inference there are maintenance and curatorial costs involved in the continued upkeep of this collection. With the limited use made of the stratified and catalogued artefacts over the last sixteen years it is expedient to consider the desirability and viability of maintaining artefacts which have only a minimal association with the site. Lack of a specific context, the relationship of the relic to structures, other artefacts and soils, reduces to an almost negligible degree the scientific value of the relic. The latter, that is as an information resource, is the principal purpose of accumulating artefacts during an archaeological excavation.

The unstratified artefacts in the resource room at Hyde Park Barracks are stored in archive boxes. At Ultimo they are stored in a variety of boxes and containers. Each bag and package in every box or container in both locations was opened and examined for the purpose of identifying the types of artefacts encompassed by the unstratified collection as well as their condition. At this time any artefacts that were misplaced from their appropriate parent assemblages were separated for relocation to their correct place if this was possible. These included artefacts from the Royal Mint site, Parliament House (Sydney), the First Government House site and the sub-floor collection of Hyde Park Barracks.

Those artefacts from the sub-surface unstratified collection which were found to have a provenance, that is an archaeological location and co-ordinate, were also separated for future cataloguing.

3.2 Assemblage Description

The following statistics represent broad categories for all the artefacts which, at the beginning of this review, were designated as "unstratified". It will be seen that the majority of artefacts from the sub-floor collection that were boxed as unstratified are provenanced and may be catalogued as stratified relics. A number of sub-surface artefacts boxed as unstratified were found to have archaeological locations; these mainly derived from the Stage I excavation phase.

The term "box" refers to the archive boxes used for storing the majority of the collection. The use of the term "box" does not necessarily imply that each box is full; in some cases a single item only is stored in it. For the purposes of this report,
however, it was the only means of producing some means of quantitative comparison.

- Sub-floor and stratified: 52 boxes
- Sub-floor and unstratified: 2 boxes
- Sub-surface and stratified: 6 boxes
- Sub-surface and unstratified: 21 boxes
- Sub-surface, catalogued but duplicate numbers: 1 box
- Unidentified items (no site or provenance): 2 boxes
- Other sites: 3 boxes

In addition to these items there is one box of artefacts that derives from monitoring work undertaken by G. Wilson in 1990. These artefacts have locations which may be sourced from the report on the work. There is a large collection of artefacts and structural fragments amassed by the Trust during 1994 -1995. Finally, there are approximately six crates of bricks brought to the site by the Department of Public Works as part of the refurbishment work.

3.3 Sub-Surface Stratified Artefacts

These artefacts derived from both the Stage I test excavations and the Stage II rescue excavation carried out in 1980 -1981, principally the former. Their failure to be catalogued with the rest of the stratified collection is probably due in part to the different trench and unit designation used during Stage I which may have been confused by volunteer sorters. The artefacts comprise a typical variety already identified in the catalogue. As well, this assemblage contains a large collection of soil samples taken from various parts of the site.

3.4 Sub-Surface Unstratified Artefacts

These artefacts generally comprise single relics or groups of artefacts that derive from both the first and second stages of the excavation. Typically they have a trench location but no unit or stratum designation. Therefore, while they may be located horizontally in a general area of the site (at the back of the barracks, under the cafe floor as examples), they have no vertical location in relation to the structures, other relics and soils in their immediate vicinity. As such, they have no archaeological provenance. This group also includes surface collections (gathered
prior to the excavation of any trench) and some taken from baulks (the unexcavated "wedges" left between trenches or parts of trenches).

The artefacts comprise a cross-section of the types of artefacts which are well represented in the catalogue of stratified material. They encompass glass, ceramics, metal items, clay pipes, a few small fragments of fabric and leather. There is also a wide selection of building materials including concrete and bricks. The majority of the artefacts are relatively nondescript; bases and necks of glass bottles, small fragments of plates or cups, pins, nails and the like. In a few instances there are some items that have a greater visual or antiquarian appeal principally through their more complete state or the quantities involved, for example, several dozen clay pipe fragments that display a variety of makers' and source marks. Cutlery items found in several places in the ground floor space of the barracks building are noteworthy as are a few items of jewellery, clothing or personal effects such as belt buckles and some whole or near complete bottles and ceramic items.

The more durable artefacts, glass and ceramics in particular, are in a stable condition. Relics made from metal and textiles especially are in poor condition. Large quantities of iron artefacts have completely fragmented and are now unidentifiable. The majority of the unstratified artefacts have not been cleaned and this has not been conducive to long term maintenance.

3.5 Sub-Surface Artefacts - Duplicate Numbers

Very few artefacts fall into this category and are typical of the rest of the assemblage.

3.6 Sub-Floor Stratified and Unstratified Artefacts

The majority of the uncatalogued sub-floor assemblage described as "unstratified" was found to have archaeological locations, that is, a room and joist space designation which, in this case, approximates the trench and strata co-ordinates of sub-surface relics. As such this material may be considered to be stratified; mainly it comprises building materials and some miscellany including a few rats' nests. Those artefacts which are unstratified comprise a wider group of types; cutlery, jewellery, fabric etc. Although in every case I am unable to positively identify the source a large number were certainly the product of the first investigation of these spaces by C. Powell in 1980 prior to the formal archaeological investigation of the site. Most of the artefacts are likely to have derived from the third floor but at least some would have come from the second floor. There are no forms of identification on any of the bags or containers.
3.7 Unidentified Locations and Other Sites

There is a small group of artefacts which has no provenance at all, that is, even the site from which they were retrieved is no longer known. Those elements which have derived from other known sites were generally brought to the Hyde Park Barracks by the project architects at the time of the work. The elements from Parliament House were architectural details from portions of the building now demolished; similarly some of the Mint artefacts have an architectural source. Leaflets from this site were located in the basement of the Mint and were collected by the project architects in 1980. The archaeological items from the Mint and the First Government House site have been returned to their parent collections.
4.0

MANAGEMENT

4.1 Sub-Floor Artefacts

The majority of the artefacts identified as unstratified were found to have a provenance and, as such, may be catalogued according to the existing system. It would be advisable to carry out this work. It restores "balance" to the catalogue of these relics which, to date, has concentrated on the more visually appealing, quaint or complete items. Inclusion of the non-catalogued material which generally comprises building materials, architectural components and small miscellany will provide a more complete picture of the processes that have occurred in the barracks. It is a far more complete picture of building works and other processes than the sub-surface collection will provide; artefacts of this nature were not systematically collected as they were from the floor cavities.

The unstratified elements of the sub-floor collection in many cases are of a type that will appeal to visitors and students because of their integrity; this makes them more easily "read" than the fragmented remains. While they have little value archaeologically in the strictest sense, having lost their locations, they may have a use for display or hands-on exhibits. Using these pieces would save some wear on the provenanced collection. To maintain some record of these artefacts a register could be produced; they should not be entered into the formal catalogue which should remain as a record of fully provenanced artefacts. Those unstratified artefacts which have no value for display or educational purposes should be deaccessioned and removed from the collection.

4.2 Stratified Sub-Surface Artefacts

The majority of these artefacts have been catalogued and are available for reference in the Minark database. The remainder of the stratified artefacts that have not been catalogued should be processed in this manner. This should also apply to those artefacts retrieved by G. Wilson in 1990. Reference should be made to his report for the precise locations and some indication should be made in the data base to identify the programme of work which produced this assemblage.

The exception to this work should be the numerous soil and dust samples which were collected in 1980. The value of maintaining this material is dubious. The physical qualities that may have provided some information for interpreting the processes of the site is likely to have been diluted or lost after sixteen years. As well, the soils and dust may have acquired various fungi and moulds. Lack of a comprehensive site report which would put this material, as well as the artefacts, in a meaningful context further compromises its value. The limited value of the
material in respect to the space and cost of its long-term storage would indicate that it should be deaccessioned and removed from the collection.

4.3 Unstratified Sub-Surface Artefacts

In general artefacts from archaeological sites which have no firm provenance are useless as evidence or information; the precise context of their location and their associations with other artefacts, soils and structures provide meaning and value. The collection of non-provenanced artefacts has little or no value to an archaeological interpretation of a site and is generally discouraged on most sites. The accumulation of material of this type says more of archaeologists' behaviour than of the site.

In this instance it is a particularly biased collection of artefacts. The preponderance of building materials, for example, identifies one particular archaeologist's interest. The number of whole, near complete, attractive or unusual items is indicative of an antiquarian approach rather than an archaeological perspective.

There would be little or no reason to maintain a group of unstratified artefacts for archaeological purposes, particularly if the implications of storage and costs are considered, unless those items demonstrate some aspect of the site that is so unusual or rare that it would be worth the record even without a firm provenance. In the case of the unstratified material from the sub-surface areas of the barracks, this is not the case. The majority of the material is common-place, broken plates, bottles and rusted metallic elements that are so corroded they are now unidentifiable. This tells us no more at best than bottles, crockery and metal were used at the Barracks; this is amply demonstrated by the provenanced collection. In this instance there is no justification in maintaining the collection of unstratified relics for archaeological purposes. It has no precise location and adds no more to the information already contained in the sourced collection. These artefacts should be deaccessioned and removed from the collection.

The only exceptions that might be retained are those artefacts which may have some use for the Trust for display purposes or hands-on education programmes. Those whole items or groups, such as marked clay pipes, might have value for these reasons. The Trust should review the unstratified collection and select those artefacts which might be used for this purpose. It would be helpful to create a register of them but this should be kept quite separate from the catalogue of provenanced artefacts.
4.4 Artefacts from Unidentified Sites and Other Locations

Those artefacts which come from other sites and which have no parent collections to which they may be returned, for example, the cornice moulding from Parliament House, may be deaccessioned and removed from the collection. Generally the artefacts which had parent collections, the Mint and First Government House, have been removed and restored to those assemblages.

4.5 Structural and Other Elements 1994-95

The purpose of this assemblage is unclear as is the degree to which it represents a comprehensive collecting policy or a clearly defined sample. It is also unknown if all the material has provenances. The Trust as the initiator of the collection should review its objectives in amassing the assemblage. If the material is considered to have value a separate register or catalogue should be created for it; it should not be added to the catalogue of provenanced archaeological material. The several crates of bricks brought to the site by the Department of Public Works should be removed from the collection. They have no connection to the site.
RECOMMENDATIONS

From reviewing the unstratified artefacts now held by the Trust the following strategies are recommended for implementation:

- catalogue the artefacts from the sub-floor collection which have been found to have provenances according to the established system.

- use those pieces of the sub-floor collection which are unstratified and which have display or hands-on appeal for those purposes. A register or catalogue may be prepared to record these items. This register should be kept separate from the database of provenanced archaeological relics. The remainder of the unstratified sub-floor artefacts are to be deaccessioned and removed from the collection.

- those sub-surface artefacts which have a provenance should now be catalogued in the same manner as the rest of the assemblage and entered into the Minark database. This should also be the case with the artefacts recovered after the 1980-1981 programme from archaeological monitoring works. Reference should be made in the database to which programme produced the artefacts.

- soil and dust samples collected during 1980 are likely to have lost any physical properties which would have been of value to the site interpretation. Although having a provenance these samples should now be deaccessioned and removed from the collection.

- the Trust should review the collection of unstratified sub-surface artefacts and select those which might have value for display or teaching purposes. A register of these artefacts may be created; this should be maintained separately from the catalogue of provenanced artefacts.

- those unstratified artefacts from the sub-surface collection which have no provenance and no value for teaching or display purposes should be deaccessioned and removed from the collection.

- those artefacts which have duplicate numbers are to be checked against the catalogue and renumbered and entered into the database.

- those artefacts from sites other than the Hyde Park Barracks which have parent collections should be removed to them. Those artefacts which have no parent collections should be deaccessioned and removed from the collection.

- the Trust should review the structural and other elements collected in 1994-95. If they form a provenanced collection a separate register or catalogue could be made; this should be maintained separately from the provenanced artefact database.
Review of Unstratified Artefacts

- The crates of bricks acquired by the Department of Public Works for refurbishment purposes should be removed from the collection.

- A finders' index which lists the various catalogues, registers and other records available in the resource room and elsewhere should be prepared for the Trust and deposited with the assemblage in Hyde Park Barracks.

- The Trust should give consideration to commissioning a comprehensive archaeological report for Hyde Park Barracks using the evidence gathered during 1980-1981 as well as later archaeological monitoring programmes. The production of a document which provides a context and chronological framework for the artefact assemblage may make it more accessible and attractive to potential students and researchers.

- To attract more use of the assemblage the Trust should give consideration to the preparation of a small leaflet or brochure which outlines the contents of the assemblage and its accessibility. The production of a report in this context would make it an even greater information source. The brochure could be made available to museums, universities and advertised through appropriate journals. Launching this along with a report and, perhaps, a small exhibition may generate a new or reviewed appreciation of the assemblage and its resources at the Barracks.