Archaeology Honours Proposal, Adam Paterson, December 2003

Background

Fishery Bay is located approximately 35km south west of Port Lincoln, it is a small bay situated within the greater Sleaford Bay (Figure 1). Both names have been used to describe the site. This paper will use the name Fishery Bay except when quoting from other texts.

Figure 1. Location of the Fishery Bay Whaling Station within Sleaford Bay, The South Australian Government
The Fishery Bay "whaling station complex" was first documented by Kostoglou and McCarthy in 1991 as part of a regional survey of South Australian whaling and sealing sites. In 1997 a team of Archaeology students from Flinders University under the direction of Mark Staniforth conducted further, more detailed surveys of the structures using a theodolite and GPS.

In September 2001 a second team of archaeology students from Flinders University, under the direction of Dr Mark Staniforth, went to Fishery Bay to determine the stability of the tryworks platform. The location of the site on the coast prompted fears that it could be in danger of erosion. The team from Flinders were accompanied by Heritage SA archaeologist, Terry Arnott. After an initial survey of the western, seaward side of the site it became clear that the ocean had damaged it. Approximately 0.5 metres had been eroded along the western edge of the site since the 1997 survey (Figure 2).

![Diagram of Site and Bed Rock](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Distance along baseline (moving North to South)</th>
<th>1997 site edge</th>
<th>2001 site edge</th>
<th>Loss/Gain between 1997 and 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0m</td>
<td>2.9m</td>
<td>2.9m</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>0.5m</td>
<td>3.6m</td>
<td>3.7m</td>
<td>+10cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>1m</td>
<td>4.6m</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5m</td>
<td>5.5m</td>
<td>5.7m</td>
<td>+20cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>2m</td>
<td>6.6m</td>
<td>7.1m</td>
<td>+5cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5m</td>
<td>7.6m</td>
<td>8.1m</td>
<td>+5cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>3m</td>
<td>8.7m</td>
<td>9.3m</td>
<td>+6cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.5m</td>
<td>9.6m</td>
<td>10.0m</td>
<td>+4cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>4m</td>
<td>10.8m</td>
<td>11.2m</td>
<td>+4cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.5m</td>
<td>11.8m</td>
<td>12.2m</td>
<td>+4cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>5m</td>
<td>12.8m</td>
<td>13.2m</td>
<td>+4cm</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scale 1 : 29**

![Key diagram](image)

Figure 2. Plan of Site Loss Between 1997 and 2001, illustration by Charlotte North
It was then decided that the site should be excavated and recorded before it was
damaged further. The team excavated and recorded the site over five days between
the 23rd and 28th of September.

After the excavation, measures were taken to minimise future damage. The
soil was sieved before covering the site, then shade cloth was laid down and finally
the rest of the soil and rocks from the spoil heaps were added. A sea wall was
constructed from sandbags filled with concrete and reinforced with ¼ inch metal rods.
The wall was built along the western side of the site in an attempt to protect it from
corrosion.

In the past the Fishery Bay “station complex” has received considerable
archaeological attention, however, since its excavation in 2001 it has received none.

Research Questions

It is the intention of this thesis to provide a detailed site report of the tryworks
platform at Fishery Bay. Furthermore, it will ask a number of questions of the
structure found at Fishery bay in order to gain a better understanding of its place in
the Australian whaling industry of the 1800’s.

There are many tryworks built from stone or a combination of stone and brick,
however they are often simple roughly built structures (Kostoglou, 1995). Fishery
Bay is one of two tryworks built with a brick floor in SA and one of five in Australia,
suggesting that the site is somewhat unique. The unusual method of construction
leads us to ask:

Why build out of brick?
What were the costs involved?
Are the local rocks unsuitable for furnace construction?
What quality were the materials used?
Where did the bricks come from?
How efficient were different designs?
Where there any social forces which may have led to its
construction?
In addition to referring to historical and archaeological texts a statistical analysis of the bricks from Fishery Bay is planned to ascertain the quality of the materials used there. This analysis will consider the degree to which the bricks have been fractured the hardness of the materials used and their resistance to heat.

The effect of C and N transforms on Fishery Bay and the wider archaeological record will also be considered.

Have other sites in SA been damaged and Fishery Bay is the only site Left? How effective has the sea wall been in protecting the site?

Significance of the Study

The Fishery Bay tryworks is one of two brick built tryworks excavated in SA and is one of five similarly constructed platforms in Australia, therefore the site itself is of significance. Providing a detailed site report alone would be of value and add to the body of archaeological knowledge. This study intends to not only report on the material remains at the site but to try and gain an understanding of the social, practical, and economic forces which led to its construction. Furthermore, comparisons between the Fishery Bay tryworks and other similar structures will be made in order to place the site within a wider context.

Literature Review

Historical Material

It is widely held that the first historical reference to whaling at Fishery Bay was made in 1837. "The South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register, 1837, Nov. 11" States that...

"The Siren went from Port Adelaide a few days ago to Sleaford Bay, near Port Lincoln to take in a cargo of oil from the station there..."

The South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register, 1837, Nov. 11, pp. 1, Col. 2
Obviously a "station" is operating at this time, however there is no reference to costs/profits, who owns the station, or which port the cargo of oil is destined for. There is no mention of who is working at the site or if it was more than a transitory exploitation of the bay.

There are no newspaper accounts of whaling at Fishery Bay in 1838 which seems to suggest that the site was abandoned during this year or it was not an officially recognised venture. On June 12th, 1839, the year that Port Lincoln was officially surveyed and settled, "The South Australian" reported that six whales had been captured at Fishery Bay. Again there is no mention in the newspaper report of who was running the operation at this time or the costs/profits which were incurred.

Kostoglou and McCarthy (1991) suggest that in 1839 the South Australian Company and Messrs Hack and Co. combined to form the United Fishing Company of Adelaide and during this year they were operating a whaling station at Fishery Bay.

The "South Australian Register 1840, July 4" states...

"Accounts which have been received from Stanford Bay state that five whales had been taken there early in June by four boats belonging to the United Fishing Company of Adelaide."

**South Australian Register 1840, July 4, pp. 6, col. 1**

It is clear that by 1840 whaling operations at the Fishery Bay station were being carried out by the United Fishing Company of Adelaide. The single party operating at Fishery Bay took 113 tons of oil, enough to incur a modest profit (South Australian Register, 1842).

In 1841 whaling at Fishery Bay was not as successful, with...

"...the whales not having set into the bay in such numbers as in former years; besides this the party was opposed by a ship from Sydney. The catch there with three boats has only been 30 tons of oil and 1 ½ tons bone, value 71½ pounds, while the expenses being 997 pounds, leaves a loss of 285 pounds upon that station."

**South Australian Register, 1842, Jan 1, pp. 3, col. 4**
Kostoglou and McCarthy (1991) suggest that the station operated for two years under
The United Fishing Company of Adelaide until in 1841 the South Australian
Company sold off its interests in the Whaling Industry, several months later Messrs
Hack and Co. also sold their interests.

Archaeological Material

The first archaeological survey of the area carried out by Kostoglou and
McCarthy (1991) identified the site as part of the Fishery Bay "Station Complex".
They suggest that the complex was composed of two functionally separate sites: a
habitation area "Site A" and a processing facility "Site B". There was also a well
that was very close to the habitation area, however its relationship to the other two sites is not
immediately obvious. There are two fresh water streams close to "Site A"; one flows
year round from an aquifer while the other is a seasonal stream (Bradbury et al 1997).

In 1997 a series of surveys were carried out by Flinders University students,
they provided an accurate record of a number of features at Fishery Bay (Bradbury et
al 1997). In the "Geological Report" Bradbury et al (1997) establish that the area
surrounding Fishery Bay consists of a wide sandy beach backed by an oolitic calcareous
limestone cliff approximately four to six metres high. A belt of vegetated sand dunes,
roughly fifty to sixty metres wide separates the beach from the cliff line. The
suitability of this Limestone for furnace construction needs to be investigated further.

A number of tryworks platforms with a similar method of construction to the
Fishery Bay tryworks have been identified and recorded by archaeologists. The
Bathers Bay Whaling Station in Fremantle, Western Australia (Mello, 1986) is an
example of a brick built tryworks established within an existing settlement. A
tryworks built with a brick core surrounded by a masonry shell has been excavated at
Adventure Bay in Tasmania (Lawrence, 2002). The Davidson Whaling Station in
Queensland was brick built, although it may not be suitable for comparison with
Fishery Bay as it was established in the early 1900's (Bickford, et al 1988). Finally
the tryworks, excavated and recorded by Heritage SA, at Trial Bay, Yannerhle, was
built of brick (Amott, 2003).
References


Bickford, A. et al, 1988, *Ben Boyd National Park Bicentennial Project*


Lawrence, S., 2002, “Whaling in the South Seas”, *Mahs’ Haul*

McIlroy, J., 1986, “Bathers Bay Whaling Station, Fremantle, Western Australia”, *Australian Historical Archaeology*, vol. 4, pp. 43-50

South Australian Register, 1840, July 4, pp. 6, col. 1

South Australian Register, 1842, Jan 1, pp. 3, col. 4

The Southern Australian, 1839, June 12, pp. 3, col. 5

The South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register, 1837, Nov. 11, pp. 1, col. 2