Julie Kowlessar - PhD Research proposal – commencement 2011.

Historical Archaeology of Mossman / Port Douglas area – colonial settlement and plantation contexts relating to the South Pacific Islander Diaspora in Far North Queensland 1863-1906.

Introduction / Background / Context:

Historian Regina Ganter asserts that much of the history told about other parts of Australia does not apply in the same way to the far north (Ganter 2006). Although she is referring to pre-colonial contact, early colonial settlement of far north Queensland certainly supports this premise. The area’s initial pattern of cedar gathering followed by mining is not unique in Australia, but the far north’s exceptional elements of geographical situation and wet tropics climate, promoting the establishment of the nation’s major sugar growing plantations is distinctive.

The colonial establishment of the far north’s labour intensive sugar industry could not be supported by the existing local community, resulting in the transportation of about 60,000 Pacific Islanders to Queensland between 1863 and 1904. Some of these Islanders came freely, promised income, although initially, kidnapping and deception may have resulted in Islander ‘sugar slaves’.

General knowledge is often remiss regarding this early use of Pacific Island workers. In fact, it was not until 1994 that Australian South Sea Islanders were officially recognised as a distinct ethnic group. Race relations, being one of the formative issues leading to Federation, brought about the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, often referred to as the ‘White Australia policy’. Most South Sea Islanders were then forcibly deported, although a few thousand were permitted to remain and today more than 20,000 of their descendants (perhaps up to 500,000 hidden under the nationality of ‘New Zealander’) live in north Queensland. Some of these Australian South Sea Islanders are tracking genealogies in Pacific nations and some are seeking advice regarding compensation claims. Currently, brief guest worker schemes are being trialled which allow people from the Pacific Islands to work in Australian agriculture.

Many people in Australia have, and recognize, multiple cultural or ethnic backgrounds, with recognition that Chinese, Japanese, Punjabi, Indigenous Australians and southern European workers also toiled on Mossman’s sugar fields (Willis Burden 2006). This study will concentrate on the high number of Indigenous Melanesians who constituted the largest group, who were recruited under contentious circumstances, and who played a largely un-recognised formative role in the creation of this area as it is today. Acknowledgment of their involvement and the legal status of their thousands of descendants are still uncertain.
An historical archaeological study of the Pacific Islander labourers within this area will inform current understandings regarding related heritage issues, add to existing local social and cultural histories of the area and contribute to the study of the global scale process of colonial expansion. Also, this study will contribute to the local communities, with detailed research into international best practice in managing the archaeology of both museum collection holdings and heritage area management within Australia and the Pacific Islands.

Literature regarding the South Sea Islanders in far north Queensland has predominantly been carried out from historical and sociological perspectives. It has centred on the historical researches of ‘what’ happened, and discussions of ‘why’ things happened. Works have predominantly focused on the ignominious native labour angle including titles such as ‘Cannibal Cargoes’ (Holthouse 1969), ‘The Blackbirders’ (Docker1970) and ‘The People Trade’ (Shineberg 1999), and specific island origins such as ‘Passage, Port and Plantation: A history of Solomon Islands Labour Migration 1870-1914’ (Corris 1973), ‘In the Land of Strangers: A century of European contact with Tanna, 1774 – 1874’(Adams 1984), and ‘Kanaka: A History of Melanesian Mackay’ (Moore 1985).

There have been some studies of ‘how’ things happened, which is where archaeological studies have had some input including ‘An Archaeology of Social Space’ (Delle 1998), ‘The tangible link: Historical archaeology and the cultural heritage of the Australian South Sea Islanders’ (Hayes 2002), ‘The Garden of the World: An historical archaeology of sugar landscapes in the eastern Carribbean’ (Hicks 2007), and ‘Violence and Colonial Diologue (Banivanua-Mar 2007).

To date none have focused on the Port Douglas / Mossman area or the Pacific Island of Vanuatu in particular, which are the areas I propose to study, nor examined from the perspective of legacy; to what extent these people and circumstance have informed the present. These locations have been selected as accessible micro study regions, representative of the greater picture with cultures and descendants of the Pacific Island labourers still in place. Previous works will be used as reference and comparison material and create an addition to this record by combining historical and archaeological methodologies to address the major question of how the past informs the present within these communities, locations, and historic circumstances.

Central Study Focus / Aim / What is this study looking for?

TO SEEK EVIDENCE OF SPECIFIC SOUTH SEA ISLANDER PARTICIPATION IN THE CREATION OF COLONIAL FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

TO SEARCH FOR LONG TERM / PRESENT DAY LEGACY DUE TO THIS INTERACTION

TO ADD TO THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RECORD OF THE LOCAL AREAS
TO DETERMINE HOW THE USE OF PACIFIC ISLANDER LABOUR IN COLONIAL QUEENSLAND INFORMS THE PRESENT?

TO INVESTIGATE THE MECHANICS OF ACCULTURATION BETWEEN THESE TWO CULTURES

TO ASSESS ACCEPTANCE OR RESISTANCE BEHAVIOURS OBSERVABLE REGARDING COLONIAL HEGIMONIOUS ACTIVITIES

TO ADD TO THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

TO CREATE A CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE PORT DOUGLAS / MOSSMAN AREA

TO CREATE A PLAN OF HISTORIC LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

TO CREATE A DATA BASE OF LOCAL MUSEUM HOLDINGS

**Methodology**
This historical backdrop with accompanying present-day perspective provides the ideal rationale from which to investigate the historical archaeology of this area. Evidence will be sought in particular of the contribution and legacy of South Sea Islanders to the overall formation of colonial settlement and industry building in far north Queensland.

This study will be organised around physical analyses of museum assemblages, historic sites, sugar plantations, documentary and cartographic records, and socio-cultural resources possibly including oral histories and/or outstanding personal stories.

**Material artefact analysis** will include an exploration of local museum collections to ascertain whether they include artefacts regarding these people and time. This will add further material evidence, while perhaps telling stories of cultural exchanges, ideologies contained within the material culture, such as labour, race, or gender identity, agency and resistance, technology and social agency, and reveal European social themes and colonial imagination. (I have even heard of an object called a ‘Kanaka Whacker’ held in a Pacific Islands collection!)

**Landscape analysis** will include an examination of present day physical infrastructure and landscapes, searching for specific Pacific Islander contributions (such as in the erection of buildings, bridges, plantation lay-outs, interactions with residential landscapes including imported and/ or traditional plantings (Hayes 2000:375-377), Islander built stone walls, dedicated cemeteries, churches etc.) which will be embedded within a study of the contemporary colonial settlement building of the Port Douglas and Mossman area.
Global colonial process analysis  Archaeologist James Delle contends that colonial processes are historically rooted and are by nature international in scope, prompting the possibility of comparisons on a global scale (Delle, 1998:2). Possibly this investigation may broaden to incorporate more sugar areas in Australia and/or involve global comparisons of other colonial sugar establishments of the era with the intention of discovering similarities or peculiarities between locations which may be linked with Pacific Islander contribution or requirement. Some Pacific Islanders were transported to Hawaiian sugar plantations for example, which may provide a means of comparison of actual interaction between dominating culture and input from labourers, informing of actual mechanics of colonial hegemony.

Documentary research  An investigation of documentary and cartographic resources, such as historic records held in heritage centres, government offices, immigration/deportation records, Government papers/Acts relating to Pacific Islander peoples, newspaper items, and plantation archives.

Socio-cultural factors  which may have played a role in local identity building, such as contributions to local life styles or Australian mythology (such as identifiable stories of Pacific Islander origin which may have found their way into Australian oral histories and myths or stories about Pacific Islanders in this situation which may have been passed down. Historic records, literature, and oral histories will be examined.

Cemetery and funerary analysis  will also be considered, as a form of non verbal communication which can be read to reveal information reflecting the societies and cultures which created them. Necro-geographer Francaviglia sees cemeteries as an evolving cultural landscape, ‘microcosms of the real world’, which change with changing generations and exhibit architecture, ‘town planning’, displays of social status, and racial segregations (Francaviglia 1971). Archaeologist McGuire claims that as ideology, burial ritual is an active part of the negotiation and struggle between the powerful and the powerless in society – reflective of social stratification in the community (McGuire 1987). Historian Jalland contends that colonials were forced to disconnect with traditional European culture and so funerary practices and cemeteries are an insight into Australia’s cultural and social history (Jalland 2006).

Through examination of historic cemetery and mortuary practices, both colonial and Islander burial practices will be assessed and comparisons between customs in colonial Australia, contemporary Britain, and the Pacific Islands evaluated for evidence of adaptation, indication of cultural modification or identity adjustment, and for signs of cultural assimilation or acculturation. Identifications and analyses of observable burial practices of Pacific Islander graves in Australia to compare with those traditional of their home culture will be made asking ‘Did local adaptation occur? Did attitudes to death and bereavement change through
acculturation as evidenced in physical mortuary expression? Were (if any) differences based on ethnicity or religious belief? Concomitantly, were burial customs of the British influenced or changed by those of the Pacific Islanders?

EXPECTED OUTCOMES / Why is this useful?

The overall aim of this study is to contribute to local social and cultural histories and to the current historical archaeological record of the far north’s colonial beginning and pioneering sugar industry. Apart from information about the local dynamics of northern Queensland, this study will also contribute to the archaeology of British colonialism in far north Queensland, tracing a sequence of environmental changes as the early sugar landscapes emerged. A detailed and extended case study of the plantations, their ownership, employment histories, chronological histories, spread or demise, modification and negotiation with the environment will be chronicled.

Specific focus will be on the actual mechanics of the area’s identity building and construction of society and industry, particularly involving Melanesian contributions and legacies. Also, attention to acculturation, the exchange of cultural features that results when groups having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact will be sought, which may inform of colonial cultural interactions on a global process scale. Robert Paynter states that ‘A major challenge facing historical archaeology is the construction of culture histories of the past 500 years that simultaneously recognise global scale processes and respect the particular contradictions, tensions, and unstable resolutions characteristic of an particular place’ (Paynter in Burke 1999:v). This study will further inform culture histories of the far north by concentrating on a particular group which, although unique in terms of spatiality, were also reflective of a global scale process, that of colonial plantation and industrial accumulation strategies and expansion. The unique location, racial mix and associated colonial pressures and characteristics, although a micro-study, will add to the record of this global scale process.

This study will explore the way this period has been remembered and how the memory of those events has been transformed over time, how events have been used, forgotten, or mythologized. It will look at how this intersection of cultural identity and colonial history inform and relate to popular memory and cultural narratives and histories in the present day. Clive Moore claims that historic discourse has coloured the actual memories of the descendants of the Kanaka workers and that attempts to change the present are structured by particular historic ties. This study will provide tangible links to the past as it traces chronologically from past to present day, the involvement of Pacific Islanders in Australia through media, government records, artefact collections, stories, images, semiotics, literary and cartographic sources and explores how the history of cultural contact has informed current relations.
This study will also inform from the Pacific Islander perspective, in particular the ni-Vanuatu ni-Vanuatu people. Local data using historical and artefactual methodologies as mentioned above will be sought, as will a connection with the local university. Issues of personal identity, cultural heritage, patriotism, cultural pluralism and effects of 'Kanaka' history on Indigenous heritage and lifestyle may be raised by examination of historical materials. For example, a problem resulting from the loss of large numbers of a community is depopulation, also confusion regarding the motives and treatments of visiting missionaries, settlers and traders. Did this translate in a physical way that can be accessed via artefacts, landscape changes, or oral histories? Can evidence of this massive upheaval to traditional life be found in the material culture on the islands? Did the returnees come back changed, bringing new ways of doing things, new attitudes, religious systems, burial methods, vocabulary?

The identification and analysis of the Pacific Islander contributions to the history of the far north, will inform the interpretation of historical artefacts in museums, and local heritage centres, and associated teaching and public programs. An outcome of this study will be the development of ways to present connections with Pacific Island material cultural heritage to the public. Heritage management methodologies, assessment and detailed studies of existing collections including possible data base development and publication of public information sheets and interpretive information plaques are expected.

Although some well run and organised public tours of the mechanics of the sugar milling process are in place and operating, plantation sites are heritage places for people of both European and Pacific Island backgrounds. As such, comprehensive heritage management of these sites will be aided, designed and/or recommended by this study. The expansion to facilitate the historical and heritage related aspects of these sites are a dimension for consideration, with tours and/or interpretative information produced and accessible on a culturally sensitive and politically correct standard imperative. The memorialisation of the colonial multicultural background on a publicly accessible level will aid cultural and social histories of these areas.

This material culture approach to Pacific Island labourers in colonial Australia will provide an important linkage to local histories, accessible to people of Pacific Island heritage and European backgrounds, highlighting connections between people, place and material cultural heritage, and informing current debates of identity, migration, employment conditions and citizenship.

**Major budget items** may include archaeological site investigation(s) and travel costs to examine and compare historical burial practices/sites and carry out research associated with this thesis in the Pacific Islands and/or Great Britain.
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