MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY,
23 NOVEMBER, 1970 AT 8.00 P.M.,
In the Museum Education Building.

The President, Mr. G.L. Pretty, was in the Chair, and there were 43 members and 21 visitors present.

1. APOLOGIES


2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the 1969 Annual General Meeting were taken as read and confirmed.

3. PAPERS AND JOURNALS received from other Societies were tabled.

4. ELECTION OF NEW MEMBERS

The following new members were announced:

Miss S.F. Abbott
Mr. J.H. Crowther
Mr. D.F. Elliscott
Mr. J... Flaherty
Mr. J. Hodges
Miss H. Roth

Dr. B. Boettcher
Mr. A. Dumcius
Mr. R.W. Ellis
Dr. O. Gostin
Mr. E. Kalibatas
Miss C. Stroeh.

5. HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Honorary Secretary read the following report:

"On behalf of the Council, I have the honour to present the 44th report of the Society:

1. Elections

At the Annual General Meeting in November 1969, the following members were elected to office:
5. HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT (Cont'd.):

President: Mr. G.L. Pretty
Vice President: Dr. C.J. Ellis
Honorary Secretary: Mr. R.D.J. Weathersbee
Honorary Treasurer: Mr. S. Kuusk
Councillors: Mrs. M. Nobbs
Mr. O. Broughton
Mr. R. Edwards
Mr. J. Leung
Mr. V.A. Tolcher
Hon. Librarian: Mr. K.P. Sherlock
Hon. Auditor: Mr. F.J. Rowett.

2. Membership

In addition to 4 Honorary Life memberships, there are 107 ordinary members, 26 of whom joined during the current year. This is a decrease of 17 members since last year.

The death of two Honorary Life members, Mr. H.M. Cooper and Mr. E.V. Dix, occurred during the year. Tributes were published in the July and April Journals.

3. Activities

The following meetings were held during the year:


27 April: Prof. N.B. Tindale: "Impressions of Recent Archaeological and Anthropological Work in the United States".

25 May: A Commonwealth Film: "Desert People".

22 June: Mr. L.F. Murphy: "Beachcombers".

27 July: Mr. J.R. Black: "The Hagen-Sepik Patrol of 1938/39".

24 August: Mr. A.J. Morley: "Individual Differences in Aboriginal Children".
5. **HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT (Cont'd.):**

28 September: Prof. G.M. Maxwell: "A Pediatrician looks at Aboriginal Health Problems".

26 October: Prof. A.A. Abbie: "The Development of Anthropology in South Australia".

28 November: Presidential Address by Mr. G.L. Pretty: "The Excavations on Roonka Station, 1968/1970".

4. **General**

Following the comments on the declining membership in the 1969 report of the Society, the Council made special efforts to retain members' interest in the Society.

Members were invited to participate in the meetings by showing exhibits from their private collections, to show slides or to give short talks on subjects of common interest. They were also asked to submit articles for publication in the Journal and to make suggestions for the Annual Field Trip.

Finally, a Sherry Party was arranged in the hope that social gatherings would create a more active Society.

Council feels that it is necessary to point out, however, that no matter how active a Committee may be, the success of any Society depends upon the degree of participation by its members.

Efforts to increase membership by inviting people who were working in the field of Social Anthropology to join the Society met with some success.

5. **Acknowledgements**

The Council record their appreciation of the work of Mr. F.J. Rowett as Honorary Auditor, the ladies who have assisted in the preparation of suppers and Miss S.R. Davies in the typing of the Notices and Journals."
6. **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Honorary Treasurer submitted the following report:

"The Society commenced the financial year with a bank balance of $386.64. Income for the year totalled $526.88 of which $511.00 was derived from membership subscriptions. Expenditure for the year totalled $553.67 resulting in a loss of $26.79. Payments were made as shown on the statement of Receipts & Payments. There is also an unpaid account of $10.94 thus giving a total loss of $37.73. The bank balance now stands at $359.85 less the unpaid account.

The increased costs arose due to higher printing costs, increased size of the journal and for extended secretarial services. The Council has investigated ways of reducing expenditure, especially in relation to secretarial services and Mankind. In the past, the N.S.W. Society posted Mankind to unfinancial members, this practice will cease, thus reducing costs to this Society. Voluntary secretarial assistance will also be sought. If these measures are successful, then subscriptions can remain at the present level. Should, however, a loss occur next year, then the annual subscription will have to be increased, or Mankind divorced from the annual subscription.

I wish to propose that the annual subscription remain at $5.00."

The Honorary Treasurer's proposal was seconded, and carried unanimously.

7. **ELECTION OF COUNCIL FOR 1971**

In the absence of other nominations and in accordance with Clause 22. of the Rules and By-laws, the following officers were elected:

- **President:** Mr. G.L. Pretty
- **Vice President:** Dr. C.J. Ellis
- **Honorary Secretary:** Mr. R.D.J. Weathersbee
- **Honorary Treasurer:** Mr. S. Kuusk
- **Honorary Librarian:** Mr. K.P. Sherlock
- **Honorary Auditor:** Mr. F.J. Rowett
- **Council:** Mr. R. Edwards
- **Mr. O. Broughton**
- **Mrs. M.F. Nobbs.**
8. OTHER BUSINESS

The President extended a welcome to Mr. Soubert Son, a UNESCO Fellow in Conservation visiting Adelaide.

9. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The President, Mr. G.L. Pretty, Curator of Archaeology, South Australian Museum, gave an illustrated address on "THE EXCAVATIONS AT ROONKA STATION, LOWER RIVER MURRAY, S.A. 1968-1970."

(see attached)

The meeting closed at 10.00 p.m.

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(Date)

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(Chairman)
The following is a precis of The Presidential Address delivered at the Annual General Meeting on Monday, 23rd November, 1970:


by Graeme L. Pretty, Curator of Archaeology, South Australian Museum.

Excavation of this site commenced in November 1968. Prior to this, excavations on the Lower Murray had been carried out at several sites, in particular, at Devon Downs and Promms Landing. These presented a reasonably consistent picture of hunter-gatherer activity going back to approximately 6000 years B.P. Seen in its perspective, this internal consistency in a number of investigated sites, although justified by the known high density of historical aboriginal population still left this region well catered for archaeologically so that in the past few years, interest has shifted elsewhere.

Our original reason for excavating yet another site in the Murray was solely to rescue what we could from what was obviously an important cemetery. A mass of graves had been exposed for sometime and were breaking up in the weather. It is only as our investigation has advanced that this site's fundamental importance to both the aboriginal and early colonial history of the region has come to be realised.

The reasons for this lie in the site's geography within the wider physiographical context of the Murray. This river, as it traces its course through South Australia, flows in a deep trench cut into a flat, arid limestone plain. Within this trench and bordered for long stretches by 30 metre high cliffs, the main channel meanders across a narrow alluvial plain adjoined by lagoons, reed swamps and subsidiary channels, creating an attractive environment for hunter-gatherer peoples. Its links with the greater Murray-Darling system and the rivers flowing into the Gulf of Carpentaria have for long suggested its likelihood as a corridor for the inland continental movement of prehistoric man. However, in that part of it under our consideration, regular flooding and consequent scouring of the trench bottom has removed much of the archaeological evidence, as previous excavations have confirmed.
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS (Cont'd.):

Just North of the present township of Blanchetown, the main channel swings in a broad arc from one cliffside to the other. The broad bend inscribed within this arc is sufficiently above high flood levels for it to have preserved evidence of ancient human occupation. Its general height is above or at the 8 m. (25 ft.) contour level which is probably a result of pediment formation as the cliff-line here has been planed off by erosion leaving a shallow slope intersected with gullies. But, as shown in the older maps, it was originally flanked on its eastern margin by a lower terrace with the channel of Cumbunga Creek (fēd from a lagoon to the South) flowing at the intersection between them. As a result of the general rise in river level since its bridging by locks (the Blanchetown lock was opened in 1922), the lower terrace has been flooded so that it now forms a broad lagoon, studded with the dead trunks of drowned gums, bordered on one side by the high terrace of the Roonka Flat and on the other by a thin bank of earth and reeds separating it from the main channel.

The Roonka Flats height above river level also explains its retention of a low bordering belt of sand, preferred as a campsite by Aborigines from being better drained and softer than alluvium. Our trenches penetrate this sand ridge. The name "Roonka", originally roonka roonka refers to the large grub, larval stage of the cossid moth Trictena argentata, highly esteemed as a food by the Aborigines. As it prefers its burrow close to the roots of red gums in well-drained soil, one can appreciate how the Roonka Flat got its name and of the forest of gums which must have sheltered it from the harsh southwesterly winds which now eat into its timber denuded plain. The bush, the sand, the outlook, the close proximity to water, the game and waterlife must have assured Roonka a high density of population. This is gaining support from the wealth of older reports of human remains elsewhere on the flat now being inked in on our field plans. The density of reported finds marks Roonka out in contrast to adjoining flats closer to present river level.

With the coming of the European, the popularity of this locality as a human focus persisted, but for different reasons. Immediately to the North is another bend which has retained its cliff-face western boundary but having a sole
access route from the limestone plain to the river flat below. As such it formed an ideal natural pound for stock and thus became a major stopping off point for the overlanders moving stock from Sydney to Adelaide in the 1830's and 40's. Furthermore, a few miles to the South lay the Government station at Moorunde, established in 1841 to bring about peaceful relations between settlers and aborigines. The Moorunde site, despite its verdant appearance, was shunned by aborigines because of its openness to floods. This resulted in its gradual abandonment by the Government leaving its ruins to this day. But it had one fruitful result in one of our most vivid nineteenth century descriptions of everyday aboriginal life from the pen of its first magistrate, Eyre, and although he and his contemporaries refer to the local people as Moorunde blacks, we suspect that their true home was more likely a little further North on the Rooka Flat.

From the information that survives we know that these people called themselves Ngaiawang and that their territory extended from a point not far east of the northwest bend of the Murray downstream past Rooka for a distance of some 90 km. (55 miles). In common with the other Murray tribes, they confined themselves largely to the trench only occasionally ranging on the plains whose inhabitants they either avoided or fought against.

The site of our excavations was accidentally exposed as an archaeological locality about 12 years ago when the landowner sought to level off low sandy rise surmounted by native pines. Several feet were planed off with a bulldozer exposing graves and other archaeological material. The area was subsequently found unsuitable for irrigation and abandoned. Thereafter it deflated leaving behind a thick carpet of debris.

We commenced our excavations by laying out a grid of trenches parallel to the line of the sand ridge. Six trenches were pegged out and those graves exposed but still more or less in situ were recorded and taken up.

The trench selected for intensive excavation, Trench A, straddles the remainder of the original land surface and the base of the deflation surface exposing the stratigraphy in
profile. This has been removed in horizontal cuts and the resulting surfaces planned for features and finds, thus serving as a cross reference to the planning and analysis of the profile.

Stratigraphy

Almost the whole range of the stratigraphy has been exposed at one point or another. This shows the site to consist of a basically aeolian deposit resting on a well-developed terra rossa, which is superimposed on a thick sheet of nodular calc, locally called "kankan", which covers grey-green fluviatile clays of undetermined depth. The average depth of the column thus investigated would not be much in excess of 5 metres.

Within this column, human remains are concentrated in the uppermost aeolian unit and scattered in a fragmentary state in the underlying terra rossa.

The aeolian unit can be subdivided into several well-defined layers. They are:

1. An archaeologically sterile mixed sand composed of material re-deposited since the bulldozing of the site and its subsequent deflation.

2. A layer of intense human occupation, subdivided internally by a sterile band indicative of abandonment. This hiatus is characterised by water sorting with some evidence of aeolian resorting.

Above and below this break there is ample evidence of human dwelling activity - including graves, refuse pits, fire-places, pit ovens and possible settlement layouts - i.e. arrangements of sleeping pits, adjoined by hearths and bordered by postholes.

Viewed laterally, the profile can be subdivided into two foci. These are identified by a marked thickening and deepening of the occupation zone which is elsewhere attenuated and linked by a band of faintly present material. These have the appearance of campsites.
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS (Cont'd.):

established in hollows on either side of a sandy rise and have therefore been denominated on settlements 1. and 2. respectively.

The age of this layer has not been finally determined, but a rough indication comes from a radio carbon date of 3950 ± 150 from a grave just below its basal surface. An undetermined thickness of its upper surface was planed off, but graves near the present upper surface contain clay pipes, buttons and other European trade goods which confirm that occupation extended into the middle of the last century. This range of dates, the nature of the deposit and the finds are all consistent with material from other Lower Murray sites.

3. Beneath this is a succession of 3 sand layers which while comparatively bare of evidences of human camps or even humicity, but which nevertheless contain a diversity of graves and some occupation features. The general level of excavation now stands at something more than halfway through this unit so it is too early to assess the extent to which it was a dwelling site as well as a cemetery. An idea of its age however can be had from a hearth at its base which has yielded a C14 date of 18900 ± 400 B.P. The hearth is situated close to the original erosion profile but sealed.

4. Beneath and clearly demarcated from it is the terra rossa with clear evidence of soil profile development. It contains scrappy but persistent evidence of human activity but so far almost invariably in fragments and in secondary position. We have examined this so far only within the confines of a sondage trench and no. C14. samples have been submitted for dating.

The Graves

The most persisting signs of the human presence at Roonka are the graves. They separate out into several broad groups:

N.B. * fragments of mineralized bone including possible split bone points are found at the unconformity between 2 & 3 in Quad. 7.
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS (Cont'd.):

1. Supine:

In these, the body is fully extended on its back with the head pointing west. There is considerable variation in the arrangement of limbs, some evidence of lashing at the wrists, knees and ankles, also of fingers and toes. There can be single, or multiple interments, with one or two showing great care and elaboration of disposal with a wealth of funerary goods, e.g. 50/50a.

The finds include implements of bone, stone, parts of animals and shellfish. The graves are frequently lined with vegetative matter.

2. Crouched:

In these, the body is sharply bent at hips and knees so that the knees are brought sharply up to the chin with the arms, sharply bent at the elbows, folded in behind.

There is no fixed orientation, these interments can be orientated to all points of the compass with several of them positioned vertically in the ground, heads uppermost. Variation is found chiefly in the degree of flexion which in some cases leads to the knees projecting straight forward from the body.

Several of these are at the bottom of shafts, a type of pit paralleled in the excavations at Devon Downs and Fromms Landing. Finds are fewer than is the case with the supine graves, but seem to have a similar range.

3. Intermediate:

There are some intermediate forms - e.g. Skeleton 21B, supine on its back, but with legs sharply brought up at the knees and fallen back across chest and abdomen.

4. 'Lounging':

I have chosen this term to describe what is a completely new grave type for Aboriginal Australia and deserves to be illustrated in detail. Only four of this type have so far been excavated, but from a depth which suggests
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS (Cont'd.):

that they are late Pleistocene in age after which the type seems to have gone out of fashion. As we are now working through these levels, we expect to encounter more.

They are arranged so that head and trunk are positioned vertically in the ground, arms at sides and thighs, which with the legs are fully extended, at an angle into the earth.

Single and double burials are found. They exhibit wide variation - one of them being collapsed in a squatting position with the body slumped forward in a deep shaft, a situation closely paralleling Professor Macintosh's find at Lake Mitchie. Another shows evidence of placement in the ground in a disarticulated state and from its close positioning of articulated limbs is faintly suggestive of mummification recorded historically for the lower reaches of the Murray.

These graves also contain finds, but the range is confined to ornaments only: a further contrast to the other grave types. Finally,

5. Cremation:

The presence of cremation as a specific measure for disposal of the dead has yet to be conclusively demonstrated at Roonka by the discovery of a pit fully given over to this purpose. Each of the two mass grave features and one or two of the pits, contain burnt human bone fragments. Other pits contain large quantities of charcoal and signs of scorching of the bone. There is a distinct separation here between pits which are generally filled with ash and other pits where charcoal is localised around head and shoulders.

Grave Chronology

Arranging the graves into a chronology will be difficult, as is invariably the case when one excavates cemeteries, and Roonka is no exception.

One promising avenue lies in the hope that treatment of the grave pit contents will yield some organic residue which can be dated by radio-carbon. The contents of several pits
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS (Cont'd.):

have been collected and a project will be discussed and framed at sometime in the near future.

Another avenue lies in ranking skeletons on the basis of an inferred alteration in the surface of bone with depth and, presumably, age. This covers a range progressing from a deterioration in fat content to an increase in surface manganese staining and calc encrustation. Four categories have been distinguished and have been found consistent with depth and cultural features, even to the extent of enabling decisions to be made on certain stratigraphic anomalies. This has a strong chance of validity, taking into account the physical integrity of the site and the presumed uniformity of active soil and weathering agents.

On this basis, in conjunction with stratigraphy where it applies, both supine and crouched graves appear continuously present at all levels. Lounging graves however, are found only in the lower levels. Interestingly enough there is no trace of cremation in this latter group, or in any of those at the deeper levels - all the burnt bone comes from higher up in the section, mostly in Layer 2. or in graves dug from it into the underlying layers.

Osteology

This aspect has so far lacked close attention due to the difficulties of obtaining a worker suitably equipped and interested in undertaking study of the material. We now have someone interested and, as well, the services of a dental anthropologist whose preliminary survey of the better material allows some surmises.

Dentally, the remains fall into three groups:

1. Modern: Tooth size shows the same range as with present-day aborigines, but with absence of cusp wear, presence of dental decay and localised attrition from chewing on clay tobacco pipes. An almost complete clay pipe was found in one of the graves.

2. The bulk of the material has a tooth size within the range of present day aborigines but inclined towards the upper half of the range. Whether this derives from population genetics or diet is not known. The usual evidence of cusp wear and attrition is present.
3. The third group and significantly confined to two of the lounging burials, has a tooth size greater than the upper present day limit and accompanied by a certain lowering of the plane of the forehead. This might suggest a vestigially more primitive type.

General survey of the osteology promises plenty of interest to the student. Both sexes are represented at all ages and while varying in condition, all skeletons have been accurately recorded and largely recovered with the aid of soluble plastics. There is plenty of pathological material and some of them trauma including clear evidence of death by violence and stealth. To date, little more than routine ageing and sexing have been attempted and the majority of material awaits cleaning and restoration.

Remaining Problems

Considerable problems still face us. The chief of these is the validity of the Late Pleistocene date. Coming as it does from a hearth, it requires further confirmation by parallel dating of material deriving from graves. This confirmation is likely however as there is evidence of continued human use from the top to bottom of the aeolian unit, the layering is horizontal and there is a group of graves in close proximity and within the same stratigraphic zone.

Whether Roonka's continued use by man was continuous as well is another problem. The notion that it was in continued use from 18,000 years ago up till the 1840's is not hard to take when it is recalled that its inhabitants were hunter-gatherers, but whether this was so and can be applied to the chronology of its graves is still far from certain. The possibility of a waxing and waning of the settlement and the recovery of associated cultural material is important when it is recalled that this span of time is held to have signalled marked changes in technology. Excavation of the remaining soil may throw further light on this.

Significance

The Roonka excavations already promise much of significance. For a start, they promise to take human history on the Lower Murray into the Late Pleistocene. Secondly, they show promise of an absolute wealth of source material in archaeological terms, from prehistoric to colonial, but combined with directly
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS (Cont'd.):

relevant historic and ethnographic sources. Already the historical sources have yielded one or two historic aboriginal characters complete with names and we currently envisage excavation of the ruins of the Moorunde Government Station. This promises a history rich in circumstantial human detail.

The main significance of Roonka arises from the need for a site or group of sites that will yield well preserved human graves from a sufficient stratigraphic range as will give us a chronology of human graves for one part of the continent. This is despite the recovery of human remains from sites all over the country. Roonka may yield us such a chronology.

Even so, it further commands our attention for the likely antiquity of its material which is considerably older than Keilor of Talgai and of the same order of age as the Kow Swamp and Lake Mungo material. Unlike these, it offers a quantity of material in well defined graves and a wealth of associated cultural material.

Its greatest significance however, is to deny the import of all that is stated above and underline the conformity of morphology exhibited in its skeletal material to the range of modern day aborigines. With similar Sapiens material going back to 40,000 B.P. in adjacent Indonesia, it is obvious that if we subscribe to the view that Australia could have shared in the same transition from Pithecanthropus to Homo Sapiens as its near South-West Pacific neighbours, then we will have to explore far older contexts than Roonka before we detect the signs of the parentage of Soloensis in Australian Fossil Man.