

# THE LAPSTONE CREEK ROCKSHELTER: The Story Continued

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## Abstract

This paper revisits the archaeology undertaken at the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter in 1935–1936, which was to become a landmark for Aboriginal Australian archaeology. In so doing it highlights and seeks to clarify errors and anomalies disseminated in the published literature relating to this shelter's excavation. It brings to light previously unknown material in the form of artefacts, field notes and documented photographs obtained during the excavation of the shelter, including archaeological evidence of shelter use after European settlement. The paper provides evidence of the keen interest in Aboriginal art, culture and artefacts pursued by some professional and non-professional archaeologists in the Sydney region in the 1920s and 1930s, revealing the networks connecting them and describing their involvement in the rockshelter's two excavation endeavours. Those involved were Bernard Hornshaw, George Bunyan, Clifton Towle, L.H. Preston and Frederick McCarthy.

## Introduction

In 1935 and early 1936, a flurry of archaeological activity occurred in the Emu Plains area west of Sydney at an Aboriginal rockshelter on Lapstone Creek. The outcomes from this activity (McCarthy 1948) were to become landmarks in the discipline of Australian archaeology. Mulvaney (1964:40) commented that it 'was the classic site where the New South Wales cultural sequence was first defined' and is now known to represent the two most recent phases. At the time, this shelter was called either Emu Plains Cave or Emu Cave for short by some, or the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter by others. This knowledge is important if the whole story of the shelter's exploration is to be fully understood and evaluated. The former names were used by locals, non-professional archaeologists and collectors. The latter was preferred by museum professionals and is the name by which the rockshelter is known today. Therefore, all artefact labelling, recording and documentation undertaken by non-professional archaeologists and collectors used the term Emu Plains Cave or Emu Cave exclusively when referring to the site. Consequently, the relevance of some existing material relating to the site has not been recognised, because the connection between the two names has not been appreciated. This is particularly true of material still in private collections.

There were in fact two excavation endeavours at the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter. The main participants in these excavations were Messrs Bunyan, Hornshaw, Preston, Towle and McCarthy. The first four were non-professionals earning income from employment totally disassociated from archaeology and anthropology. McCarthy was a museum professional.

This paper examines the following aspects of the shelter's two excavation endeavours:

- it demonstrates the keen interest in Aboriginal art, culture and artefacts pursued by some professional and non-professional archaeologists in the Sydney region at that time, and the networks connecting them;
- it brings to light new material collected and recorded during the first excavation, namely the artefacts, photographs and field notes assembled by B.L. Hornshaw;
- it explains the role each person played in the shelter's two excavation endeavours;
- it highlights and/or clarifies errors and anomalies disseminated in the literature relating to the shelter's excavation; and
- it provides evidence of the shelter's use after European settlement based on artefacts found in the shelter.

## The Non-Professionals

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### *Bernard Leslie Hornshaw (b. 1878–d. 1937)*

Bernard Hornshaw has been described as a finder, recorder and collector of Aboriginal art and artefacts (Nelson 2001). His collections fell into four categories: wood artefacts, stone artefacts, a photographic collection of Aboriginal culture and rock art and a collection of manuscripts (diaries, field notes etc). Much of the wood artefact collection has been dispersed (Sotheby's 1997:111–113, 1998:11–23) while the photograph and manuscript collections now reside with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (Hornshaw 1892–1937, 1930–1937). The remainder of the wood artefacts and the whole of the stone artefact collection are still held in the original private collection.

Hornshaw had no formal qualifications in the fields of ethnography, anthropology or archaeology. He worked for the New South Wales Tramways. His knowledge came from private reading and his own field observations. He was particularly noted for his knowledge of Aboriginal rock carvings (petroglyphs). He devoted the leisure of a lifetime to the study and recording of Aboriginal rock art. He made many notable discoveries, including some of the most interesting groups within 80km of Sydney. His work attracted the attention of many experts and scholars of his day including Elkin (1943: x) and Barrett (1937a, 1943:80–85). The value of his work was acknowledged by the Anthropological Society of New South Wales (1932a:142, 1935:21) and was often reported in the daily press (e.g. 'Ingegoodye' 1932; Barrett 1932, 1937b). Hornshaw published little of his work formally, Hornshaw (1930, 1931, 1932, 1933) being rare examples. He preferred to communicate personally with experts and scholars of his day. Nevertheless, he did assiduously record his investigations in photography, sketches and notebooks and he corresponded with others regarding his work. Hornshaw was an active foundation member of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales.

Hornshaw's stone artefact collection comprises about 8000 items from all over Australia but with a heavy emphasis on New South Wales. Most of the items were collected from

the field by himself, either during his search for rock art, or during his excursions with the Anthropological Society of New South Wales. Those not in this category were donated by others including W.W. Thorpe, W.R. Harper, C. Barrett, G.A. Hatley, A.S. Kenyon and G. Bunyan. The location from which each item was obtained was marked on the artefact. This applied even to the smallest of points. Many of the items can be cross-referenced with the photograph and manuscript collection.

Of particular interest to this paper is a subset of 96 stone artefacts from the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter. There are also photographs of the excavation activity at the shelter and field notes classifying the items found, the layers within which they were found and the names of the persons who participated in the excavation. All these items and material are labelled 'Emu Plains Cave' or 'Emu Cave', now known to be the same cave as the 'Lapstone Creek Rockshelter'.

### **George Bunyan (b.1879–d.1967)**

George Bunyan lived at Emu Plains where he was the local butcher. He could not help but notice the evidence of Aboriginal culture that existed in the region where he lived. He became intensely interested in what he saw and, as a hobby, set about collecting artefacts and discovering caves once inhabited by Aboriginal people. At some stage this activity brought him into contact with Bernard Hornshaw and the two families became close friends. Together, Hornshaw and Bunyan collected many artefacts from around the Emu Plains region and they jointly investigated many caves. Bunyan enjoyed close relations with local farmers who gave him permission to search for artefacts on their land. One very successful technique was to search along the fencelines where farmers threw rocks that might interfere with ploughing, sowing and harvesting operations (Norma Ritchie, pers. comm., 2003; Lyndell Shaw and Colin Hornshaw, pers. comm., 1995, 2005).

Bunyan was invited into local schools to talk to children about the field evidence of Aboriginal culture, and school groups were often taken to his home to see his artefact collection (Norma Ritchie, pers. comm., 2003). He was in fact so free with access to his collection, with little or no supervision, that much of the collection was pilfered and lost over the years (Norma Ritchie, pers. comm., 2003). On the death of Bunyan in 1967, Ritchie (Bunyan's grand-daughter and shown as a young girl in Figure 1) became custodian of the collection. Unfortunately, most of it 'disappeared' when she put it into storage for several years. What remained was donated to the Nepean District Historical Society and some items have found their way into the Australian Museum collection.

Hornshaw's field notes and photographs record that Bunyan accompanied him on at least 13 of his field trips. Bunyan also donated photographs and artefacts to the Hornshaw collections.

### **Clifton Cappie Towle (b.1888–d.1946)**

Clifton Towle held a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Sydney and worked with the New South Wales Railways. He was an active member of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales and, together with W.W. Thorpe, was responsible for the Society's formation in 1928 (Anthropological Society of

New South Wales 1931a). Like Hornshaw, Towle's knowledge of Aboriginal culture, art and artefacts was acquired through private reading and his own field observations. He acquired a significant collection of both wood and stone Aboriginal artefacts many of which he donated to Hornshaw's collection. Towle also donated numerous photographs to Hornshaw's photograph collection. These photographs show that Towle travelled widely in his search for Aboriginal artefacts, including far western New South Wales and southwestern Queensland. On his death Towle's artefact collection was bequeathed to the Australian Museum.

Unlike Hornshaw, Towle published widely, particularly in *Oceania*, *Victorian Naturalist*, *Mankind* and *Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*. Hornshaw's field notes record that Towle accompanied him on at least three of his field trips.

### **L.H. Preston**

Little is on record about Preston except that he lived at Kingswood, which is not far from Emu Plains. Hornshaw's field notes and photographs record that Preston accompanied him on at least two of his field trips. Provenance cards show that Preston donated a number of stone artefacts to Hornshaw's collection, artefacts he had excavated from caves in the Emu Plains area with the assistance of George Bunyan.

## **The Professional**

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### **Frederick David McCarthy (b.1905–d.1997)**

A detailed biography of Frederick McCarthy can be found in McBryde (1998) but a few landmarks of his career are given here. Fred McCarthy left school at the age of 14 and soon found himself working at the Australian Museum as a library assistant. However, over the ensuing years he gained a broad spectrum of experience in a variety of scientific departments at the Museum. Despite his lack of formal qualifications he took over as head of the Ethnology Department on the sudden death of William Walford Thorpe in September 1932 and proceeded to successfully complete the work necessary to qualify for a Diploma in Anthropology from the University of Sydney in 1935. He held the museum position until 1964 when he became the first principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), a position he held until his retirement in 1971.

McCarthy was an active member of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales. At the time of the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter excavation he was Honorary Secretary.

McCarthy knew Bunyan, Hornshaw, Towle and Preston. Hornshaw's field notes record that McCarthy accompanied him on at least two of his field trips. McCarthy also donated photographs to Hornshaw's collection. Furthermore, McCarthy was also aware of the existence of significant private collections of Aboriginal artefacts. For example, McCarthy (1948) records that he had examined implements in the private collections of both Towle and Bunyan that had been retrieved from along fencelines in the Emu Plains area after having been exposed by agricultural activities such as ploughing. With respect to Preston, McCarthy (1934:240) records that he was taken by Preston to be shown a rockshelter at Emu Plains.



**Figure 1** A scene from the first excavation, September 1935. L to R: J. Hornshaw, A. Hornshaw, N. Ritchie (née Williams), G. Bunyan, R. Hornshaw, L. Preston and Brown (with respect to the last two it cannot be determined who is who) (Photograph: AIATSIS B.L. Hornshaw Collection, N6793.19).

## The Connections

The above information indicates that Hornshaw, Bunyan, Towle, Preston and McCarthy were all known to each other. They interacted and shared information on Aboriginal archaeology and anthropology, and were all active in the exploration, discovery, and recording of Aboriginal art, artefacts and culture. They assisted each other in their fieldwork and in its interpretation. They showed each other their discovered sites, and exchanged photographs and artefacts. Based on Hornshaw's notes and photographs alone it can be shown that he was accompanied on field trips by McCarthy at least twice, Bunyan at least 13 times, Towle at least three times and Preston at least twice. One excursion with Hornshaw, McCarthy and Towle (Hornshaw 1930-1937, field journal 2:32-36) was to Maroota to inspect petroglyphs, axe grooves and wells and took place just four weeks before the first excavation at the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter described in the next section.

In addition, Towle, Hornshaw and McCarthy were active members of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales. They would have interacted and shared in the Society's activities and they are on record as actively participating in the Society's meetings, excursions and exhibitions (e.g. Anthropological Society of New South Wales 1931b:50, 1931c:51, 1932b:139, 1934:185).

In this environment it would be difficult for any given individual in this group to undertake projects in isolation and without the knowledge of others in the group. This is an important observation. It has a direct bearing on aspects raised later in this paper.

## The Time Sequence of the Field Investigations

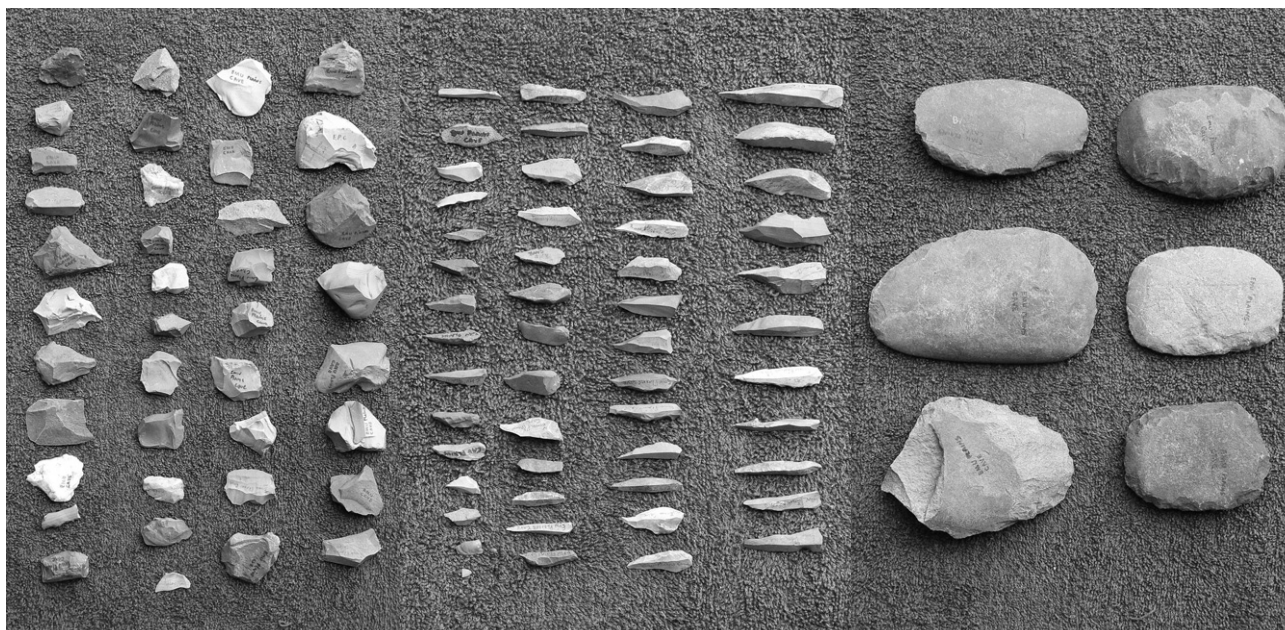
### *The First Dig (the Non-Professionals)*

Some time before 15 September 1935, George Bunyan discovered the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter. Realising its significance as an Aboriginal site, he informed his close friend Bernard Hornshaw of his find and the two families organised a field trip to the shelter on 15 September 1935. Those involved in this field trip are shown in Figure 1 except for Hornshaw who was behind the camera. Hornshaw records in his field notes (Hornshaw 1930-1937, field journal 2:37) that the shelter measured 31ft. (9.5m) long, 4ft. 3in. (1.3m) high and 11ft. (3.4m) to the back of the shelter. He goes on to say that the floor showed evidence of occupational debris. He says Messrs Bunyan, Preston and Brown and his son Ross were involved in digging and sieving while Hornshaw classified and recorded. Hornshaw's field notes record that pebble axes and ground axes were found in the top layers, the middle layers contained eloueras and points and the bottom layers contained only points which he noted indicated two occupational periods.

Ninety-six labelled artefacts from this excavation are still held in Hornshaw's stone artefact collection (Figure 2).

### *The Second Dig (the Professional and the Non-Professionals)*

As previously demonstrated, a strong interconnecting network existed between the five main players who were involved in either of the shelter's excavations. It was inevitable that Towle and McCarthy would learn of the shelter's existence, its significance as an Aboriginal site and of the work that had already been



**Figure 2** Artefacts obtained during the first excavation retained in the B.L. Hornshaw Collection (Photographs: Raymond C. Nelson).

undertaken there. Towle organised a second, more thorough, field investigation in which he initially involved Bunyan only (Bunyan and Towle were related). McCarthy was invited to join them but refused because he would not accept Towle as being in charge (McCarthy 1978:53). McCarthy eventually agreed to join the investigation on the fourth day on the basis that he and Towle would be equal collaborators.

Towle and Bunyan spent three days during December 1935 at the rockshelter and McCarthy joined them during January 1936. The excavation activity by these three is captured in Figure 3. The name of the photographer is not on record but it was possibly Miss Elsie Bramell, a colleague of McCarthy, who is known to have visited the site. The results of this second excavation were not published until 1948 (McCarthy 1948), a delay of 12 years.

It is important to note that Bunyan was involved in both excavation endeavours.

### Errors and Anomalies

McCarthy (1948:1, 1978:49) displays some confusion with regard to the years in which the two field investigations took place. In his primary and most important paper of 1948, McCarthy states that it was 1936 and 1937. However, in his so called 'semi-popular' article of 1978, McCarthy states that the activity took place in 1935 and early 1936. He does not acknowledge in any way that a discrepancy exists. Hornshaw's field diaries, documented photographs and artefact labelling clearly show that the dates in the primary paper of 1948 are in error and that dates of 1935 and early 1936 are the correct dates.

An anomaly also exists with respect to the delay in the publication of McCarthy (1948). All activity at the rockshelter associated with the second excavation had ceased by early February 1936 (involving a total of eight days), except for one return visit made by McCarthy in May 1936. It is therefore surprising that the evaluation, analysis and publication of the work did not occur until 1948, an elapsed time of 12 years. No explanation is forthcoming in McCarthy (1948). However, in

his 'semi-popular' article, McCarthy (1978:50, 55) does offer an explanation, namely that there was a falling out between McCarthy and Towle. He states that Towle severed their friendship, resigned from the Society and requested that officers and members of the Council not seek to contact him. Towle was the primary motivator behind the second field investigation and it seems he held a significant proportion of the field documentation. Without the cooperation of Towle, McCarthy would have been able to publish only limited results. On Towle's death in 1946, McCarthy (1978:50) says he was able to obtain the material that had been in Towle's possession.

This explanation does not completely account for the delay in publication. Their falling out, and Towle's resignation as secretary and member of the society, did not occur until mid-1940 (Anthropological Society of New South Wales 1941:31). More than four years had elapsed since the completion of the fieldwork. Under normal circumstances this would be enough time to prepare a manuscript for publication. During these four years, Towle and McCarthy are on record as sustaining a good working relationship. In 1936, Towle chaired a committee, of which McCarthy was a member, to draft a new constitution for the Society (Anthropological Society of New South Wales 1937:66). In 1938, Towle gave McCarthy a collection of artefacts to display at a congress in Singapore (McCarthy 1978:57). In 1939, Towle and McCarthy represented the society at a conference held in Canberra (Anthropological Society of New South Wales 1940:276). Why this working relationship did not extend to completing the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter work is simply not known. The possibility exists that during this period, McCarthy put a higher priority on other pursuits such as his nine months in Indonesia and Malaya (June 1937–March 1938) to receive training in archaeological techniques and the completion in 1938 of a course in physical anthropology at the University of Sydney. There were also his normal museum duties to be attended to. However, his falling out with Towle in 1940 closed the window of opportunity to undertake the rockshelter work and the situation could not be retrieved until the death of Towle in 1946.



**Figure 3** A scene from the second excavation, January 1936. L to R: G. Bunyan, C. Towle (Sr), F.D. McCarthy, C.C. Towle (Jr). (Photograph: Australian Museum V7256\_34).

Further anomalies occur with respect to McCarthy's published record of matters relating to the first excavation. McCarthy (1948:1) states that before the second excavation, the rockshelter was dug 'by several private collectors, whose main interest was the acquisition of specimens, and they made no records of their work or of the specimens recovered'. Further, McCarthy (1978:50, 51) states that 'Bunyan and several of his friends whose names are unrecorded ... dug up the western half, and also a shallow strip at the back of the eastern end from which seven axes were taken to a depth of 30 cm, of the deposit ... What happened to the implements Bunyan's party dug up I do not know'.

McCarthy here makes three assertions. The first, that he did not know who was involved in the first dig, the second, that they made no records of their work and the third, that he had no knowledge of what happened to the artefacts retrieved. In addition, it is surprising to note that McCarthy makes no mention of Hornshaw at all in either of his publications (McCarthy 1948, 1978).

It is somewhat implausible that McCarthy was not conversant with the details associated with the first dig. This paper has clearly demonstrated the closeness of the network within which Hornshaw, Bunyan, Towle, Preston and McCarthy moved and how difficult it would be to undertake projects in isolation and without the knowledge of others in the group. That is how McCarthy found out about the rockshelter. Bunyan was with Hornshaw on the first dig. Bunyan in turn told Towle who in turn told McCarthy. Add to this the fact that Bunyan participated in both digs and that he possessed a reputation for openness and sharing all he knew about Aboriginal sites, Aboriginal art and Aboriginal artefacts. It is difficult to believe that Bunyan, Towle and McCarthy worked together for five days at the site without discussing and exchanging information

on aspects of the first dig, in particular the names of those involved, what artefacts were found, where those artefacts were, the type of documentation kept (field notes and photographs), and the main conclusion drawn by Hornshaw that the evidence indicated the existence of two cultural periods. This latter is the same conclusion drawn by Towle and McCarthy (McCarthy 1978:55, 56).

It is surprising that, especially in his primary paper of 1948, McCarthy should express total ignorance of personnel and records from the first dig. The records were available for anybody who expressed a desire to see them. His comments reveal a lack of scientific detachment and a reluctance to examine all the data before making a value judgment.

The field records made by Hornshaw of the work undertaken at the first dig are extant (Hornshaw 1892-1937, 1930-1937). They include field notes and photography. Hornshaw took great care of the artefacts from the cave and they remain in his collection all suitably labelled. Bunyan retained some of the artefacts (Norma Ritchie, pers. comm., 2003) but the current whereabouts of these is not known because of the events previously outlined.

### Evidence of More Recent Use

McCarthy (1948, 1978) did not report any evidence from within the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter of more recent use. He possibly assumed this to be of no importance. Hornshaw did collect and record this evidence. At the time, he did not have the means to interpret or date this evidence, but it was retained and recorded for such a time when this might be feasible. Recent archaeological work at other locations in Australia have now made it possible to elicit useful information from this evidence.

Among the artefacts retained in the Hornshaw collection is a clay tobacco pipe found in the surface debris (Figure 4). The



**Figure 4** Clay tobacco pipe found during first excavation (Photograph: Raymond C. Nelson).

pipe has a distinctive basket design. Ayto (1979:12) identifies this design as nineteenth century. An almost identical clay pipe bowl was recovered during an archaeological excavation at the Ross Female Factory site in Ross, Tasmania, from a solitary confinement cell (Bridget Berry, Hyde Park Barracks Museum, pers. comm., 2006) dating between 1847 and 1855. One can conclude that the rockshelter was used after European settlement. This may have been by Europeans as early as about 1850 or may have been by Aboriginal people as late as about 1850.

### Concluding Comments

A number of errors and anomalies in the papers of the professional archaeologist F.D. McCarthy have been discussed. They are raised at this time in an effort to put the record straight and to acknowledge the extensive work carried out by knowledgeable and self-educated, non-professional archaeologists, working in a variety of groups, and reporting their findings through the Anthropological Society of New South Wales during the early-to-mid-1930s.

The material documented in this paper confirms that Bunyan, Hornshaw, Preston, Towle and McCarthy were linked in a Sydney-based network that had at its focus a common interest in all aspects of pre-European Aboriginal culture. The nature of the connections and interactions between these men ensured that all were aware of each other's interests, activities and projects and these would have included the two excavation endeavours at the Lapstone Creek Rockshelter. The evidence presented shows McCarthy's expressed ignorance of all aspects of the first excavation to be implausible. Contrary to McCarthy's assertions, photographs, field notes, names of participating personnel, operational procedures, artefacts, and the fact that the results indicated two culture periods, were all recorded and documented by Hornshaw. All this material is extant.

An examination of Hornshaw's material from the first excavation would have clarified the years in which the excavations took place, assisted in the planning of the second

excavation and provided some foresight as to what the occupational debris might expose (two culture periods). It may also have prompted more interest in the evidence for use of the rockshelter after European settlement.

The outcomes from the second Lapstone Creek Rockshelter excavation (McCarthy 1948) remain a landmark in the field of Australian rockshelter archaeology. However, any future study of this rockshelter should not overlook the material extant from the first excavation.

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