

# 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

### *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