Papua New Guinea Village Studies of the early 1970’s: History and Reflections

This paper provides an overview and reflection on the theoretical underpinnings and methods of the ‘Village Studies Project’ at the University of Technology in Lae, Papua New Guinea from its inception in 1971 to 1975, referred to as the ‘early work’ or ‘early village studies’. It also discusses the early work regarding knowledge and purpose of the researchers. Village studies is contextualised as an important aspect in founding the then new professional program in architecture in PNG. The project was motivated by a commitment of the founding head of architecture, Professor Neville Quarry, to ground education and research in the nation’s building and settlement traditions and its diverse cultures. Quarry was well aware that European anthropologists had extensively studied people and culture in PNG over the previous fifty or so years but he knew that such work had only tangentially engaged with buildings. His intention was to document an architectural vocabulary which he believed important to strengthen understanding of traditions in support of creative ingenuity for future architecture. Twenty four villages have been identified that were studied between 1971 and 1975 after which the early researchers left PNG for post graduate studies and teaching and practice careers. Most of this early work remains in private collections, while some has been lost. Little of the early work has previously been discussed in scholarly forums and much of it is little known about outside of the researchers. The Village Studies Project case studies documented after 1975 are housed in the Architectural Heritage Centre of Papua New Guinea, established by Professor Wallace M Ruff (known as Mack Ruff) who significantly expanded upon the earlier work. This later period has been discussed by several commentators over the past twenty years in various conferences and publications, but with little or no reference to the early work. This paper establishes a record about this earlier phase of the Village Studies Project.
**Introduction**

The initiator of the Village Studies Project was the founding head of architecture at the Institute and later University of Technology in Lae, Papua New Guinea, Professor Neville Quarry. He sought to ground architectural education and research in the nation’s building and settlement traditions and diverse cultures. Quarry's ambitious vision extended to documenting for posterity the architecture in all of the provinces of PNG. This started by involving academic staff members and students in recording village lifestyle, layout and buildings, initially close to Lae, but later more widely dispersed across the country.

After leading the first study to a village near Lae, Quarry became less involved in field work and documentation than in encouraging and supporting colleagues and in presenting the ‘bigger-picture’ of the project at conferences and in University reports.¹ In 1974 Quarry wrote in a Research and Development Report to the University of Technology.

> Although many areas of Papua New Guinea have been investigated intensely by anthropologists, there remains a dearth of qualitative and technical information upon traditional construction methods, materials and distribution of building types within settlement patterns. Such data is important as an archival record of the built forms of a society in transition. It is also valuable as a stimulus and resource bank of information for future building development which should take into account the existing environment and preferred architectural values of Papua New Guinea culture.²

With the exception of Quarry the academic staff members involved in early village studies were recent graduates in Architecture. They had enthusiasm and personal talents but were not well experienced in practice and teaching let alone in research of an ethnographic nature.

From Melbourne came Adrian Boddy, Ken Costigan and Tony Styant-Browne, all past students of Quarry. From Sydney came Janet Grey and from Brisbane, Gordon Holden. Encouraged by Quarry, all developed an innocent, at first, interest in understanding the architectural culture of transitional PNG and they believed in the need to document it before the processes of cultural change displaced current forms. As they became more involved they found useful readings, mainly from anthropological sources, in their search for cultural understanding and methodological guidance. They also learnt from each other through experience.
Influences

Two personal encounters injected considerable influence on the work of the author during the early period. In 1972 the anthropologist Margaret Mead visited the University of Technology, Lae. At the time she was returning from Manus Island where she had conducted extensive field work several decades earlier. Mead had been briefed that architecture staff members were involved in studying villages and she arranged a meeting, which resulted in about an hour of discussion with the author as well as meeting other colleagues. That hour was like a super-tutorial of encouragement and resulted in a rich list of suggested anthropological readings as well as critical reflections on the methods that were currently in use. She emphasised the importance of the need for being disciplined when in the field documenting the work, using field notes, drawings and photographs. This would allow accurate reflections and interpretations later. Mead introduced some of her own research, and she suggested following up on publications by Gregory Bateson and Reo Fortune as well as earlier work from Bronislaw Malinowski.

While those in the architecture department were not aware of it in the early village studies period, in 1973 Mead published a paper which scoped across anthropological methods and outlined the limitations and challenges of field study. Access to this paper would have been welcomed at the time even though the paper does not explicitly engage with methods of documenting buildings and village layouts.

Margaret Mead’s suggested readings were of authors with profiles almost like an extended family who’s who in anthropology in the early 20th century. We know that Malinowski had mentored Bateson in the British ‘functionalist’ tradition of anthropology pioneered by Radcliffe-Brown, which searched for explanations of social structure. Fortune was also trained under Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. Mead herself was a prodigy of the famous American anthropologist, Boas who favoured a psychoanalytical approach which sought to understand the development of individuals within their cultural setting. It is relevant in terms of anthropological cross-fertilisation of approaches that Mead’s second husband was Fortune and her third, Bateson, who she met on the Sepik River in 1932 whilst travelling with Fortune.

In 1973 Clare Cooper Marcus, a sociologist, joined the teaching staff as a visitor in the architecture department for a period. Cooper Marcus, who later became a distinguished faculty member at the Berkeley Architecture School, was deeply immersed in observational
research into human spatial behaviour and she advised on suitable research methodologies related to this. She also recommended readings to provide underpinning theory to support field work. Of note were publications by her sociologist mentor Herbert Gans (*The Urban Villagers, 1962*). Cooper Marcus had already published several behavioural science papers of relevance to architecture. Shortly after her visit she published the influential paper *The House as Symbol of the Self*, 1974 and the book *Easter Hill Village*, 1975, based on research from the late 1960’s. Both of these works are instructional in terms of field work methods.\(^{11}\)

Other sources of influence on the early village studies were through collegial advice from academics at the University, including Mack Ruff who arrived in 1973 and accompanied the author to Kanganaman and later led other studies. Mack demonstrated considerable negotiation skills with village people that other researchers learned from. Of special note was Ian Willis from the General Studies Department, and Lae citizens who had an interest in the *Journal of the Morobe District Historical Society*, especially its Editor Philip Holzknecht. Willis had made strong connections to local village people in the process of researching for his book *Lae Village and People*, 1974 and he provided advice and reviewed field work material produced out of the architecture department. Willis introduced the research work of anthropologist Hogbin, who had also studied under Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. Hogbin had undertaken several studies in the Morobe area, of which Lae is the Provincial Capital.\(^{12}\) More so than other mentioned anthropologists, Hogbin was very interested in social change, and thereby introduced something of an historical perspective in his research which was not strictly diachronic (happening over time) in nature, rather than the synchronic (study at one point in time) approach favoured by the more strict functionalists.

Further readings at the time include: Belshaw, *The Great Village*, 1957; Rowley, *The New Guinea Villager*, 1965; Harding, *Voyagers of the Vitias Strait*, 1967; Clarke, *Place and People*, 1971; Kaufmann *Papua Niugini*, 1975. Anthropological journals were also accessed for relevant papers, especially *Oceania*.\(^{13}\)

Also of relevance were the readings for students in the ‘Man and Environment’ course that linked with the early village studies, including: Forde’s *Habitat, Economy and Society*, 1948; Rudofsky’s, *Architecture Without Architects*, 1965, Oliver’s *Shelter and Society*, 1969 and Rapoport’s, *House Form and Culture*, 1969. In teaching this course it was common to link village studies examples to the theories and ideas expressed in the readings.
Method

Discussions with the head of the Surveying Department at Unitec, Mike Kellock, led to the development of a relatively simple measurement technique for both buildings and village layouts. This called for first establishing a datum straight line (or lines) through the village on a compass bearing, using string pegged tight along the ground. With the use of an optical square, a small hand-held instrument with a slot and hair wires in a cylinder and a prism to look at 90 degrees to the alignment of the hair wires. At the bottom of the instrument a hook supports a plumb-bob. By moving along the datum string-line and keeping the hair wires aligned with the string-line the corner of an identified building can be viewed through the prism at exactly 90 degrees to where the plumb-bob hangs over the datum string-line. By measuring from a starting point along the datum string-line to the plumb-bob and then measuring to the corner of the building at 90 degrees the reference for the building can be quite accurately located and documented. Another corner of the building can similarly be located and the building footprint measured and documented on a clip-board.

The details of each building, including measurements, were recorded photographically, using a ‘Polaroid’ camera. Surveyor’s levelling staffs held or lent against the building at each corner and a measuring tape laid on the ground at the base of the building provided sufficiently accurate measurements on film (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Measuring village house at Tali, 1972 (unpublished photograph by the author)

The instant ‘Polaroid’ photo would be marked up on the back with the building number as well as measurements from the tape and staff and any additional relevant information such
as the occupant's name, or information about the materials or structure. Conventional film cameras were also used to document the building for archival recording and publication purposes, often one camera with colour slides and one with monochrome film.\textsuperscript{14}

The majority of buildings were documented externally but a small number of houses were able to be entered with permission of the owner. What were considered to be the most typical houses were selected to provide a representative sample. This allowed additional photographs to be taken to accompany field notes about construction details and materials as well as furnishings and how the occupants used the space. However that every building in a village was not fully documented internally is an obvious limitation of the early village study project that restricts discussion about relationships between architecture and lifestyle.

A major advantage of the methods of documentation adopted is that they required relatively in-expensive equipment that could be easily transported and used in the field.\textsuperscript{15} The main limitation of the village plan method is that it is only truly accurate when the ground plane is horizontal. For villages on gently sloping ground small distortions in measurement result in buildings being located slightly inaccurately and for steeper sites such as are sometimes found in the highlands the inaccuracy can be significant, requiring on-site trigonometrically calculated adjustments to account for slope.

Unlike anthropological work of the time and that which preceded it, wherein the researcher would spend many months even years in the field, the methods adopted by the architect researchers were very constrained by breaks between teaching semesters and by restricted funding for travel and to support the work.

Typically an academic staff member would plan to go to a village of one of the architecture students and with the student's help and probably other friends in the village all the buildings could be measured, photographed and a village plan drawn in about a week or so. In preparation for a field trip, discussions with the accompanying student would lead to writing a joint letter from the researcher and student to village elders, explaining the purpose of visiting the village and respectfully asking permission to be there for the expected period of time to photograph and draw buildings and to talk to villagers. On arrival in the village there would often be a welcoming party followed by informal meetings with elders. Sometimes a monetary gift would be provided to the village elders.
While documenting in the village, at the end of a day, the researchers would often sit with village people and show and talk about the documents that were being prepared. During the stay, local food would be purchased, if surplus was available, as well as artefacts. This gesture helped the cash economy. On departure, any spare food, clothing or medical items would be given to village people. An indicator of the good relations between researchers and villagers is that during the study at Kanganaman, on about the third day, a group of men who had been away hunting returned with a large crocodile strung on a long pole carried by three men at each end. That evening a portion of the crocodile meat was given as a gift to the researchers.16

The author also used a super-8 movie camera on several village studies, including at Kanganaman, where he filmed the Haus Tambaran as well as village houses and village people going about their daily activities. This film has been digitised and compiled with other PNG segments under the title *Papua New Guinea Adventures.*17 which is held in the National Library and the Oxley Library.

Field notes that gathered information about building materials, food sources, family structures, and to some degree aspects of cultural traditions would complete the work. On return to the architecture school, for those studies that had been drawn and written up, a copy of the outcome would be sent to the village elders (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Village Plan of Kanganaman 1974 (drawn by the author and published in Gigibori, Vol 2 No 2, 1975, 49)](image-url)
The research undertaken would possibly not be considered serious in classical anthropology tradition. The fact that the likes of Margaret Mead gave encouragement suggests that she, while undoubtedly recognising the limitations from an anthropological perspective, could see the value of gathering and recording material building traditions from the perspective of another discipline. She possibly recognised that an architecturally focused methodology of field work could add further dimensions to ethnographic scholarship.

Basically for most of the architectural studies, buildings were photographed and measured and aspects of them were asked about. The results were simply documented in notes, photographs and drawings (see Figure 3). Only with a few of the studies was deeper cultural meaning, ecological context or theoretical constructs contemplated and these tended to be reflective as the material was written up and they tended to refer to earlier published anthropological work.

On reflection these methods were not completely out of order, as anthropological training itself at the time was somewhat ambivalent about strict methods. Margaret Mead wrote (before the digital revolution)

\[\text{.... the tendency to avoid teaching concrete methods of field research has been exacerbated by the extremely rapid changes in technology of taping, filming, photographing, preserving, developing, viewing, retrieving and preparing materials for suitable forms of publication and exposition.}^{18}\]

The above sources of information, influences and technicalities are mentioned in order to explain the underpinnings and methods of the early village studies. While the researchers were curious about anthropological work, especially the methods used, it is fair to say that the work undertaken was mainly pragmatic documentation. The researchers were doing what seemed appropriate to them and they scanned across the various methods potentially available looking to adopt or adapt those that seemed to fit the purpose.

There was also an educational dimension to the research. Through involving indigenous architecture students, by explaining the work in courses and by leaving publications and data, knowledge and understanding of traditional settlements and buildings could be conveyed to the generation who would inherit responsibility for subsequent building work in the country.
A further aspect of the early work undertaken by the author was the collection of historical and contemporary photographs of indigenous buildings. The purpose of the historical photographs was to create temporal benchmark images of buildings and villages with which to refer when undertaking studies of a place. It was anticipated that this could inform understanding about change. The contemporary images collected were intended as samples of the early village studies, but the full collection resided with the study researcher.

The collection involved making new photographs of photographs found in books as well as from collections in libraries and museums. This collection documented the location of the photograph and photographer (where known) the year it was made, any available notes as well as publication or collection reference, all for further study or acknowledgement purposes (see Figure 4).

John Gollings, the architectural photographer and past student of Neville Quarry’s, visited the architecture group several times in the early days of village studies. During one visit he produced a video about the Village Studies Project which included an interview with the author. This video was subsequently presented at an architectural conference in Australia. Gollings also accompanied Neville Quarry and Tony Styant-Brown on village studies, during when he made numerous photographs, which remain in archives. The photographic techniques and equipment used by Gollings informed the other researchers.
Outcomes
The above mentioned photographic collection consists of over three hundred items and a copy of them was presented to the Lae Unitec Library in 1975. Unfortunately that collection is now missing from the library. An additional collection resides with the author but has not been published.

Figure 4. Photograph from the Holden collection. Taken in 1917 of a Haus Tambaran at Malu, Sepik River, by Behrmann - note the citation reference attached.
(Source: Latrobe Library Ref: SLTF 919.5 – B39S)

Studies resulting in publications include Ken Costigan’s Master’s Thesis *The Pattern of Structure in the Trobriand Islands*, 1995, a work of scholarship. The author’s journal papers *Kanganaman Haus Tambaran*, 1974 (also see Figure 5) and *Building and Settlements of the Huon Gulf, Papua New Guinea*, 1974 were selectively limited in scope. All these studies were informed by early anthropological research. In his Trobriand Island thesis Costigan drew from Malinowski’s *Sexual Lives of Savages* as well as his own extensive field studies from 1974. Costigan studied for his Masters degree under Christopher Alexander at Berkeley and was influenced by Alexander’s ideas especially *A Pattern Language*, 1977 for theoretical underpinning. In the Kanganaman study Bateson’s *Naven* was influential and in the Huon Gulf study there was reliance on several of Hogbin’s publications.
Costigan’s Masters Thesis encapsulated a ‘pattern-language’ approach to the buildings that he designed in Papua New Guinea for over thirty years. He published on the subject in 1983 and his body of built work was recognised by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects with an International Award in 1999, with the citation

… produced over the last twenty years a body of work which draws from traditional building methods and materials and explores design solutions that reflect an understanding of local cultural priorities.

The early village studies led to six other outputs including three Masters degree scholarly research papers by Janet Grey when she attended the University of Hawaii. Grey also published an occasional paper titled *Chuave Housing: a study of Kabikom village, 1976.* This was a valuable descriptive study based on original field work. Unlike her other published work it was not underpinned by an anthropological study or positioned theoretically.

Figure 6 shows the studies that were undertaken in the early village studies. This list was compiled recently in consultation with the early researchers and represents the best understanding of the situation at present.
That other publications were not forthcoming from the early work is unfortunate because as can be seen from the table the amount of field work undertaken was considerable. Field documentation material for most of the studies remains undeveloped, however some of this has been located and in due course will be collected and catalogued.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCHER</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>STUDY</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
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<tr>
<td>Boddy</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Gwabadek</td>
<td>Morobe</td>
<td>Photos</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>BuBut</td>
<td>New Ireland</td>
<td>Photos, Unpublished Paper</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Wartzian</td>
<td>Markham Valley</td>
<td>Photos</td>
</tr>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>Eware</td>
<td>Morobe</td>
<td>Photos, Field Notes, Drawings, Village Plan</td>
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<td>Costigan</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Yalumgwa</td>
<td>Trobriand Isl</td>
<td>Photos, Field Notes, Drawings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kabalula</td>
<td>Trobriand Isl</td>
<td>Photos, Field Notes, Drawings</td>
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<td>Kwadibwaga</td>
<td>Trobriand Isl</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>Kabikom</td>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
<td>Photos, Field Notes, Drawings</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>Lenkau, Rambutso Isl</td>
<td>Manus Isl</td>
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<td>1976</td>
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<td>Photos, Field Notes, Drawings, Village Plan</td>
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<td>Huon Gulf</td>
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<td>Middle Sepik R</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Huon Gulf</td>
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<td>LabuButu</td>
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<td>Lae</td>
<td>Photos, Drawings</td>
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<td>Taraka</td>
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<td>Sepik R</td>
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<td>Various Locations over PNG</td>
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<td>Photographs from books, libraries, private collections</td>
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<td>Published Article</td>
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<td>Pulgimb</td>
<td>Western Highlands</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Squatter Settlements</td>
<td>Lae</td>
<td>Photos</td>
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Figure 6  
Outputs from the early Village Studies Project 1971-1975
Building on his work around the Huon Gulf that was informed by Hogbin’s interest in change, in two conference presentations (2004 and 2007) the author demonstrated that for certain PNG coastal cultures there is photographic evidence of change as well as a predisposition for change in the pre-colonial era. This was demonstrated by the relatively quick adoption of hip roofs typical of colonial houses to replace traditional gable roofs at Hanuabada. There are other examples. What is evident from studying old photographs is that there are indications of what Memmott and Davidson describe as “cross-cultural architectural exchange, borrowings and appropriations which result in blended patterns and transformations of architectural forms, structures, meanings and other properties.” The author’s presentations challenge the notion conveyed for example by Alexander in Notes on the Synthesis of Form (1964), when discussing the unselfconscious tradition in architecture (so-called primitive architecture), Alexander asserts that it is largely unchanging. The presentation Tradition and Transition: A Study of Selected Papua New Guinea Buildings and Settlements was developed further as Reflections on Change in Traditional PNG Architecture. In addition to archival research and theoretical discussion the materials relied on the author’s field work as well as on Hogbin’s publications in the 1940’s and 50’s and on Belshaw’s book The Great Village: The Economic and Social Welfare of Hanuabada, an Urban Community in Papua.

Reflection

The author’s decision during the early work to undertake studies that drew from published anthropological studies was made in order to give greater depth of understanding about change, by having an earlier point of reference. On reflection, a likely consequence of this is that the original anthropologist’s interpretation tended to sway understanding during the work which was not critically assessed.

The Kanganaman study had special significance in that the Haus Tambaran ‘Wolimbit’ was declared a national cultural property in 1967, but this building had not previously been fully documented until the author’s work. That the documentation method of this building, like for all of the villages studies, was in a western architectural code is not surprising given the training of the researchers and the absence of traditional codes of an archival nature (see Figure 7). Inevitably the code used in the early village studies captured physical visual reality in particular ways that may not be inclusive of culturally imbedded knowledge and values. However the potentially subjugated indigenous knowledge and belief systems may in due course be uncovered and be used to critically reflect on the early documentation, thereby adding to cultural heritage understanding.
Throughout the period 1971-1975 it remained clear to the researchers that the main purposes of village studies was to document the physicality of a changing architectural heritage and to engage students of architecture in the process. This called for sensitivity to the culture and for students to gain understanding and respect for tradition. But this objective fell short of deep cultural understanding due to limited time in the field and language communication and comprehension limitations. Except for a small number of graduates, the aim of establishing respect among architecture students for traditional buildings at the time appears to not have been as successful as hoped. As communicated by one of the early students to Ruff

... when I first saw the work you were doing in Papua New Guinea Architecture, I thought those many hours were a waste of time. Now I am beginning to realize the value – and the need for these records.33

A few of the early students subsequently came to appreciate the value of the work. One of the exceptions is a student from Kanganaman Village who accompanied the author in the study of that place in 1973. Cletus Gonduan later joined the academic staff in the Architecture School at Unitech, Lae and he completed a PhD titled *Spatial Layout, Meaning and Use in Native Melanesian Housing*.34 This scholarly study focused on house design to accommodate changed needs of the Iatmul people of the middle Sepik River, including Kanganaman village, who now live in urban settlements. It adopted a layered approach across: The Designed Space; Functional Space; Adaptation of Space; Public and Private
Space; Social Space and Symbolic Space. Gonduan's work shows an ideal future of the village studies. He exemplifies a new generation contributing to an understanding of change informing design decisions based on deep cultural understanding.

The author’s Kanganaman study took place about 40 years after Bateson’s study of 1932/33 (see figure 8). It was a similar period before that when the area was first explored by Europeans (Germans) from the late 1800’s, who left some photographs (see Figure 4). Upon us is another similar time cycle, approximately a generation, and with it an opportunity to re-document the village, from which potentially more comprehensive understanding about change may be gleaned. Similarly some of the other studies from the early 1970’s could be repeated to inform the nature of changing culture, lifestyles and consequential building needs. This type of study would need to be contextualised, because each study is influenced by understandings of the time that may not be the correct or only interpretation. We are here reminded of Margaret Mead's caution given in 1973 “The Data can never be re-collected in the light of later paradigms.”

The contemporary architectural ethnographer, Vellinga, makes the point that in studying vernacular architecture it should be accepted that the work is always in the process of change. He advocates that historical architectural studies should not be motivated for the purposes of freezing a moment in time for heritage curiosity or for trying to stop change, but
… they should be in order to critically understand the forces and mechanisms of adaptation and change. That which acknowledges the existence of change, but which, rather than lamenting and trying to stop it, tries to understand how and why it takes place and attempts to ensure, through critical assessment and engagement, that the changes that are affected are sensible, appropriate, and, most of all sustainable.\textsuperscript{36}

The early village studies did not venture in any significant way into critical reflection on change, as the imperative at the time was to mainly document the physical presence of existing buildings. However the material that was generated can subsequently be critically revisited, as has happened with Costigan’s Master’s Thesis in 1995 and the author’s more recent conference papers.

The expectation that data gathered in field work somehow correctly interprets the snapshot in time was challenged by Bateson in the 1930’s in \textit{Naven}. Bateson was somewhat pre-occupied in this seminal work with “the problem of misplaced concreteness in conceptual thought about human activity.”\textsuperscript{37} Marcus points out with respect to Bateson that there are two aspects to misplaced concreteness: being firstly in the collection process of the data; and then in its analysis and interpretation. Both are influenced by the epistemology of the observer. This may be considered to be a hermeneutic bind. Because of his critical self-reflections on the material and his own interpretation in \textit{Naven}, Bateson’s work has become seen as a pioneering experiment in seeking a richer holistic ethnography.

Beyond matters of recording physical cultural heritage, a practical outcome of the early village studies was in providing restoration guidance. In 1980 an earthquake partly destroyed the Kanganaman Haus Tambaran and the author’s measured drawings and photographs were used to help in decisions about rebuilding.\textsuperscript{38}

A further practical outcome is that Ruff’s documentation of the Isago village communal longhouse of the Gogodala people in 1978 (demolished in 1979) assisted in subsequent revival of the longhouse tradition.\textsuperscript{39} It is worth noting that at no time in the early village studies phase was there mention of documentation for the purpose of encouraging or supporting revival architecture. Revival of past traditions clearly raises questions of authenticity and the early researchers were seeking to capture the present for the purpose of understanding the situation to inform the future, not to recreate a past. However the question
of authenticity has other dimensions as made by Austin “Authenticity is established by
representation and in the case of architecture the representation is what constitutes a
building as architecture.” 40

Arguably the outcome to date of greatest relevance is the capacity of village studies
documentation to inform the design of new buildings and settlements in the rapidly
expanding urban areas of PNG. Gonduan’s PhD focused on this matter but unfortunately his
culturally underpinned design advocacy is at odds with the provision of contemporary
housing in PNG cities. Typically government sponsored housing is designed to a low-cost
formula which produces a mini-version of expatriate housing in terms of planning layout that
favours rooms for different functions, long lasting manufactured materials and Western
pragmatic/minimalist architectural expression, laid out in orthogonal street patterns. The
house types are code numbered according to size and cost and they can be quickly built by
indigenous tradesmen. 41 Such housing takes no account of traditional housing and
settlement patterns, and probably nor can it when in any neighbourhood the occupants vary
in their place of origin. The building of enclaves of urban housing for occupants from the
same tradition would provide opportunities for more culturally responsive housing but such
an approach would be somewhat impractical and in tension with national assimilation
objectives. However housing design/provision especially in terms of planning layout could be
more flexible in recognising the cultural background of city dwellers by giving greater choice
of internal layout and detailing.

The reciprocal of traditional building culture informing future urban architecture is made by
Coiffier who points out that Sepik people who go to live in urban areas for a period often
dismantle their urban house and bring it back to their home village for re-erection. In such
cases the longer-lasting city model is seen as desirable and consequently it influences
village traditional methods “in a slow but irreversible process.” 42

The early village studies did not make a great inroad into Quarry’s vision of recording
examples from all eighteen Papua New Guinea provinces, but examples from seven were
undertaken in five years: East Sepik; Western Highlands, Chimbu, Morobe; Milne Bay Manus
and New Ireland. The strongest representation was in Morobe with ten studies, where
access by road and boat was readily available. On reflection, all of this may be seen as a
reasonable achievement and a sound base for subsequent research to build upon.
Conclusion

What eventual value may be placed on the village studies is summed up by Ruff and Ruff,

... will it be anthropologists or Papua New Guineans who determine what is culturally authentic, and further, the eventual use of materials is uncertain. It may be that another generation of Papua New Guineans will have to mature before the proper value will be put upon the national heritage.  

While writing explicitly about Sepik architecture in 1990 Coiffier adds a point that has wider significance for Papua New Guinea and which echoes Quarry’s vision from 1974 that inspired the early village studies work. Will future architecture.....

... be one that bears in mind cultural variants and is carried out by the inhabitants themselves, or will it be one of rapid change imposed from the outside?... the improvement of dwellings should begin with recognition of their architectural values ... of the needs of their inhabitants with a view to adapting them to new life-styles.

Mack Ruff’s Village Studies Project is a substantial collection of thousands of items including photographs, negatives, drawings, notes and text. Most of the pre Ruff early work is yet to be deposited with the collection. However until the missing work is developed, presented, published and critically reviewed, its contribution to Papua New Guinea architecture heritage remains largely untested.

Endnotes

1 In addition to reports internal to the University, Quarry presented the paper Patterns and Precedents in New Guinea housing at the International Conference on Housing for Emerging Nations, Tel Aviv, November (1974). He also presented the paper Changing Attitudes to the Built Environment in Papua New Guinea in The Melanesian Environment: Papers from the 29th Waigani Seminar, Port Moresby May 1975.


3 It is recalled that Mead spent about two hours with the architecture staff during which she commented on a poster showing the upraised black-fist symbol of the ‘Black Power’ movement and asked if this represented the faculty’s values. The answer was an embarrassing mumbo-jumbo.

4 Mead mentioned New Lives for Old, (Mentor Books,1961) and Growing up in New Guinea, (Pelican Books, 1930). It is recalled that Mead also talked about other references but the notes of the occasion are not readily available to confirm. The named references were subsequently acquired by the author.


7 Malinowski, B. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, (Routledge, 1922); and, Malinowski, B. *Sexual Lives of Savages*, (Routledge, 1968).
9 Expansion of Margaret Mead’s story can be found in her autobiography *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years*, (Simon and Schuster, 1972)
10 While Clare Cooper Marcus never accompanied a village study field trip, she and her husband Stephen Marcus conducted lectures and workshops with students and staff members that expanded understanding of environment-behaviour research and practice.
11 Clare Cooper Marcus remained in occasional communication with the author about behaviour-environment matters and design guidelines, especially during her visits to Australia and into her retirement
13 Other books and journals were also read but a full list would be excessive to mention here.
14 In addition to conventional Polaroid and film-camera records, experiments were made at the Unitec campus with time-lapse photography. The idea for this was initiated by Clare Cooper Marcus as a means to compress the recording of human behaviour in spaces. Unfortunately the instrument that was developed by technologists at Unitech proved to be unreliable and consequently the technique was not used in field work.
15 Of the village studies that were to relatively remote places, typically the researcher and students travelled to the largest nearby town by vehicle, boat or by commercial air flight. In the case of vehicular travel, continuing to the village by vehicle was sometimes available; otherwise there was a need to walk-in from the end of the road. In the case of remote places there was sometimes the need for a charter flight in a light aircraft to the nearest airstrip then a walk into the village to be studied. This was the case with the Kanganaman study where the airstrip at Korogo village about 3K away was used. The alternative was to charter a boat to travel up to the village along the Sepik River, which would have taken considerably longer. By whatever means of travel compact, lightweight and robust equipment was essential.
16 Also carried back to the village were two of the men on stretchers. We were told that one of the men found the crocodile by walking through a swamp and feeling it with his feet, then grappled with it as other men came to his aid. In the ensuing struggle he and another man were injured, although not seriously. It seems that the man who first found or ‘stumbled’ on the crocodile became the owner (a notional term) and it was he who decided the apportioning of crocodile meat, no doubt according to pre-standing obligations, including to visitors.
19 In addition to exploring collections at Unitec and The University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, for historical photographs of villages, the following Libraries were searched: Oxley Library, Brisbane; Mitchell Library, Sydney; Latrobe Library, Melbourne; Australian National Library, Canberra; British Museum, London; Museum fur Volkerkunde, Basel.
25 The titles of these papers are being searched by Janet Grey as this paper goes to review.

For example Adrian Boddy believes that a draft paper relating to his ButBut village study is archived in storage and Tony Stynat Browne has found material from his Pulgimb village study (personal communications February 2011).


The only reference found by the author of substance from an architectural perspective related to traditional building documentation, is in Hogbin’s book Transformation Scene. Of all anthropological studies in Papua New Guinea Hogbin probably devotes more space to discussion how buildings are built, less in the technical sense than in terms of decisions, preparation and collaborative activities of the villagers.


Marcus, G. ‘Timely Reading of Naven: Gregory Bateson as Oracular Essayist’, Representations, No 12; (1985), 66-82.

The author was contacted in 1980 with a request to forward what drawings and photographs were available. This was duly done but what actual work followed is uncertain.


This situation is not unique to Papua New Guinea. For example in a paper delivered to the Pacific Architecture Colloquium in Wellington, 2003, John Hockings spoke of internationally sponsored but culturally inappropriate housing built of concrete block-work being provided to a Gilbert Islands community, to their dissatisfaction.

