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Theresa (Tessa) Fitzgerald Corkill, 1935 to 2024

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When notice of Tessa's death was posted on the Ozarch list, various responses pointed to the calibre of an esteemed researcher, colleague and friend (AACAI 2024; Smith 2024; Vines 2024; Wright 2024). Tessa (Figure 1) touched many people with her wit, candour and integrity. She had a way of asking, in an innocent tone but a direct manner, thorny questions that had complex answers. Readers who wish to gain a sense of her personality (and perhaps to recall their own memories) may like to read Tessa's 'Breccia' column in the AACAI Newsletter (see access details below in the reference list).

Tessa was born in Ealing, England, in 1935. Her family moved to Australia in 1950. She did well at Meriden School in Strathfield and was offered a scholarship to university, but her parents were against her going. So soon after leaving school, Tessa travelled to Europe with her friend Judith, with an adventurous spirit and enquiring mind. Tessa married and moved to Hong Kong in c.1958. In the 'colonial' society of the time, wives of expats were not permitted to work, so Tessa sought voluntary work. She joined the Marco Polo Club where she met Dr Solomon ('Solly') Bard and started her involvement with archaeology, taking part in digs around Hong Kong in the early 1970s.

The Corkill family moved from Hong Kong to Sydney in 1975. Solly Bard had spent 1967 at the Australian Museum with David Moore, the Museum's curator of Anthropology at the time. Through these connections Solly introduced Tessa to David Moore and she became a volunteer at the Museum. This included taking part in the second of David's excavations in the Hunter Valley in 1976–1977 and working with him on the subsequent artefact analysis. Tessa also joined the (now defunct) Anthropological Society of NSW, where she met Val Attenbrow who was also a member.

Tessa and Val became friends, and Tessa remained a devoted collaborator with Val. This included voluntary work for the Upper Mangrove

Creek project and analysis of stone types in several artefact assemblages for Val's Port Jackson project (e.g. Corkill 1995, 2000). Tessa's professional thoroughness, attention to detail and commitment to task, were the perfect recipe for a successful working relationship with Val. Tessa remained associated with the Museum for the rest of her life as a volunteer, temporary staff member (1978–1980, 1986–1990) and research associate.

The next challenge for Tessa was an undergraduate degree in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, a goal which had been denied to her as a younger woman. She completed her Honours thesis in 1986, exploring a geoarchaeological approach to the Holocene Shoalhaven River embayment (Corkill 1986). Of concern was how geomorphological changes to a coastal landscape may have influenced the cultural landscape, and whether available archaeological data were sufficient to test various models relevant to that topic. While her thesis emphasised environmental factors, Tessa acknowledged the '... actors in the landscape ... (as) ... they always remain the central reason for our interest in patterns of the past' (Corkill 1986:113).

The importance of life's actors was highlighted for Tessa when she met John Edgar during her undergraduate studies. Tessa's partnership with John continued for 40 years (Figure 1), and she affectionately and often referred to him in her 'Breccia' column in the AACAI Newsletter. In 1988 Tessa and John moved to a bushland setting in Glenorie, north-west Sydney. This location was ideal for Tessa and John to learn about nature—its flora, fauna and geology, and its expression as a cultural landscape. Tessa developed a strong interest in the local Maroota Sand, contributing to an understanding of its formation and age (Graham et al. 2010).

Tessa continued her interests in geoarchaeology, completing a Master's Thesis at the University of Sydney (Attenbrow et al. 2008; Corkill 1997, 1999, 2005). The research focused on identifying potential



Figure 1. Tessa and John Edgar 2018 (Photograph Richard Corkill).

sources of artefact stone, especially silcrete which was the primary rock type used for the production of stone artefacts on the Cumberland Plain of western Sydney. This is a sound body of research, including an understanding of previously published geological literature, ground-truthing of potential sources of artefact stone, and use of thin sections and PIXE-PIGME analysis (Proton Induced X-ray Emission and Induced Gamma-ray Emission). She concluded that silcrete occurred naturally as boulders and cobbles in an ancient fluvial deposit, which outcropped in several locations across the northern Cumberland Plain, and it was not possible to distinguish between silcretes from different outcrops of this deposit.

Tessa's home in Glenorie became an important (secondary) source of silcrete material for experimental research, reference collections and various knapping related activities. Silcrete from Tessa's shed is found widely across the Sydney region—in reference and private collections, cached for future knapping and in a garden or two. Silcrete has travelled, via Tessa's academic exchange network, to at least one interstate university campus, as a resource for teaching.

During her time at the Australian Museum, Tessa used her extensive knowledge of the geology of the

Sydney Basin to identify potential sources for more than 300 ground-edged implements (hatchets) and other artefacts that had been found throughout the Sydney region and held at the Museum (Corkill 2005). Aspects of this work were later incorporated into an ARC Discovery Grant (titled 'Axes, exchange, social change') led by Val Attenbrow and Peter Grave. Analysis techniques used in this project included non-destructive provenancing techniques (pXRF) to better understand the role of ground-edged implements in trade and exchange systems in past Aboriginal societies. The areas of investigation extended from the Sydney region and included the Central Coast, Hunter Valley, Illawarra and Blue Mountains.

Tessa was a valuable member of the pXRF team (Figure 2) and helped identify and collect specimens from potential geological sources within the Sydney Basin. This involved numerous field trips with the team and resulted in a comprehensive geological reference collection for volcanic and metamorphic rocks. Several ground-edged implements including hatchets, wedges and Bulga knives were subsequently matched to sources which identified extensive local and long-distance trading patterns. This project is ongoing, but has already led to numerous publications to which Tessa contributed (Attenbrow



Figure 2. Tessa with some members of the ARC Discovery Grant pXRF team during a trip to Kulnura in 2015. Left to right Angela Rosenstein, Tessa Corkill, Val Attenbrow, Rebecca Bryant, Karen Stokes and Nina Kononenko (Photograph Hugh Watt, who was also a member of the team).



Figure 3. Tessa in 2018 (Photograph Richard Corkill).

et al. 2012, 2017, 2019), as well as conference presentations at the Australian Museum (2013), Department of Archaeology at the University of Sydney, Australian Archaeological Association Annual Conferences in 2012, 2013 and 2014, World

Archaeological Congress WAC-7 at The Dead Sea in Jordan (2013), and the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Conference at Seam Reap in Cambodia (2014).

Tessa's achievements were not limited to research, as she was also active in consulting archaeology, with about 70 reports written between 1989 and 1999, listed in the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) in NSW. Tessa's enquiring mind did not always stop with the completion of a consultancy, but she sought answers to bigger questions, such as the nature of rock shelter taphonomy (Corkill 1993, 2001). Tessa was also active in the Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists Inc (AACAI), volunteering as Membership Secretary from 1994 to 1997, and Vice President in 1999.

Tessa was a remarkable person, with an astute and enquiring mind. She sought to learn but was also keen to give. She touched many people's lives—family, friends and colleagues. She is sadly missed, but we raise a glass to her, applaud her achievements and thank her for letting us know her (Figure 3).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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