THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS IN ILLAWARRA?

More than a decade ago, the IHS received a letter dated September 30 1980 stating the following:

_in 1975, Sydney writer Anne O’Grady published a novel, postulating the settlement in Australia by ancient Egyptians. The support the premise of her story, a list of reports allegedly culled from Australian newspapers, concerning finds of ancient Egyptian artifacts in coastal areas of Australia was appended. These reports included: a) the finding of gold figures, pottery fragments, scarab beetles and small Egyptian figurines at Austinmer. b) a handmade silver necklace and bronze armband “reported to be of ancient Egyptian origin” at Austinmer in or around 1930. c) a 2,000 year old coin found in sand dunes at Towradgi. d) the image of “an Egyptian Diety” cut into a cliff face near Campbelltown. e) An “Ancient wooden wreck measuring about 40 feet long and 9 feet wide, built without nails . . . partially hidden under a sand dune at Wollongong . . . near the ruins of twenty stone dwellings with two paved pathways leading to a water catchment and the remains of a 50 foot stone wharf.” I would be interested to know if you, or any members of the Illawarra Historical Society have heard of any of these ‘discoveries’, and whether they in fact occurred. If so, I would appreciate any further information you could give me on these, or similar finds in the area, and possible explanations for them._

Yours sincerely,

Robert Karl
P.O. Box 137,
Warrandyte
Victoria 3113

In her usual highly efficient and courteous manner, Margaret MacDonald replied to Mr. Karl’s enquiries:

“I’m afraid I haven’t been able to locate any of the reports listed by Anne O’Grady (it would have been a help if she’d given her sources!), nor have I found reports of any similar discoveries in this area. I do remembers, however, that some years ago a Rex Gilroy claimed to have discovered, near Wollongong, the ruins of stone dwellings etc which he considered to be evidence of ancient Egyptian occupation. In spite of the interest shown by local anthropologists and historians he would not disclose their whereabouts, and as far as I know nothing more has been heard from him on the subject. I understand he now has a natural history museum at Echo Point, Katoomba, so you could probably contact him there for further details.

Since writing the above I have talked to Mrs. D. Sefton, who is involved in research in this district for the pre-history group of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies. She knows of no discoveries which give any real ground for supposing that ancient Egyptians were here, and thinks that Rex Gilroy and others have been misled by the ceremonial headdresses on some of the pictures in Aboriginal carvings (for example, those in a cave on the water catchment area behind Wollongong), which do bear
some resemblance to those of ancient Egyptians, and by natural rock formations which to vivid imaginations suggest ruins of buildings etc.

P.S. It seems odd that no-one I have spoken to has heard of the wreck story. Do you think that Anne O’Grady could have been confusing Wollongong with Warrnambool?"

If anyone has discovered anything in the ten years since Margaret MacDonald replied to Mr. Karl, they have a great chance to make a name for themselves as a historian of international repute.

ABORIGINAL WORKSHOPS ON THE COAST OF NEW SOUTH WALES, AND THEIR CONTENTS.

By R. ETHERIDGE, Junr., Curator, and THOMAS WHITELEGGE, Senior Zoologist.

(Australian Museum Records January 1907. ML Ref 507/A)

Mr. Walter Howchin appears to have discovered a large number of small weapons and implements of various kinds on the South Australian sea-board, but there is no indication as to whether these stone implements were found scattered over the surface generally or derived from "workshops." The instruments are enumerated as follows:— (1) Stone points; (2) Flakes (knives), in seven varieties of single-edged, ridged, flat and polygonal, lanceolate, broad, serrated and trimmed; (3) Spearheads of a type which seems to be restricted to a narrow coastal belt; (4) Chisels; (5) Gouges; (6) Awls; (7) Scrapers, divided into eleven distinct varieties; (8) Hammers; (9) Anvils; (10) Fabricators; (11) Cores.

Mr. Brough Smyth gave the following account as to the use of stone implements;— "The Western Australians use small splinters of quartz for making the long deep cuts which may be seen on almost every native—both men and women—across the breast and arms, with a similar fragment stuck to the end of a stick they dress and cut their kangaroo skins in preparing them for use as cloaks. They also stick thin splinters of quartz, broken by their teeth, to the side of a short stick to serve as a saw .......

11. — DESCRIPTION OF LOCALITIES.

During our researches traces of minor "workshops" which yielded various weapons, chips, flakes, and other objects of interest were found at Gerringong, Redhead, Ulladulla and Milton on the South Coast. There is also evidence of a large "workshop" on the southern end of Wollongong Beach, a little distance from the racecourse stand. The most extensive "workshop" met with, however, is situated at Bellambi Beach (Pl. xlv.). This area is many acres in extent, and is more or less densely strewn with stones of all descriptions, at least such as are usually found on shell heaps, camping grounds or workshops. Of the larger stones observed, many consisted of irregular pieces of sandstone (fire stones?), fragments of siliceous fossil tree stems, oval or rounded flattish boulders, probably used as grindstones for pounding seeds, others of the same shape but smaller, or such as were suitable for the manufacture of tomahawks. The latter were very numerous, and also other thicker stones frequently with central pits as if they had been used as anvils for cracking large seeds or fruit-stones on.