

The Maori Heritage Caves at Redcliffs, Christchurch, New Zealand

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Introduction

At the 2017 ACKMA Annual General Meeting at Te Anau, Southland, New Zealand, the welfare of two Maori heritage caves, Moa Bone Point Cave - Te Ana o Hineraki (Moa Cave) and Moncks Cave, post the 2011 Christchurch earthquakes, was raised by Redcliffs resident and ACKMA member, Moira Lipyeat. Her concern was supported by the author who made a trip to the Redcliffs – Sumner area in March 2011, less than a month after the earthquakes, to take photographs of the many damaged caves.

The caves, which are in volcanic rock, are located in the Christchurch seaside suburb of Redcliffs at the toe of the Port Hills. Both caves are of high heritage value because they were occupied by early Maori (14-15th centuries). Archaeological work was undertaken in both caves pre-1900, and again in later years, with many artefacts being removed, mostly to the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch.

After the AGM, and further discussion with the ACKMA Committee, the author sent a letter in June 2017 to the Christchurch City Council (the Council) asking what steps were being taken for the preservation and interpretation of the caves in the wake of the earthquakes. Questions were also posed about public safety and future access to the caves because of the ongoing rockfall hazard. At the time the letter was sent, both caves were off limits behind cyclone fencing and looking neglected. Scrub had grown up in front of Moncks Cave so it could barely be seen and demolition 'rubbish' (having fallen from above) was visible in and around the entrance to Moa Cave.

Moa Cave is of special significance to Moira, as it is less than 200m from her home and was the site of the 2003 launch of her book, 'Delving Deeper', a history of New Zealand caving over the last 50 years which she compiled together with the late Les Wright. After the book launch, there was a dinner in a nearby privately owned cave which the then property owner, Bill Inwood, was operating as a dining and conference venue. In 2008, he sold the distinctive Mexican 'adobe' style house and the cave venture to Ed Langston who hired it out as a wedding venue. Unfortunately both the house and access to the cave were badly damaged by rockfall during the 22 February 2011 earthquake and Ed lost both his home and business. The house has now been demolished and the cave is non-accessible.

Ever since she moved to Redcliffs in 1985, Moira has taken a deep interest in all the caves in the area. In the June 2011 Journal (No 83), Moira published an article entitled "Canterbury Earthquake Causes Damage to Local

Caves". She has collected all the information she could find – papers, reports, photographs, anecdotes, news cuttings and more – and last year these were made into a tidy 'scrapbook' which runs to 300 pages – way more information than can ever be analysed here. Members of the Council's Heritage staff were so impressed with it when she brought it along to a meeting at the Council last September that they asked to borrow it so they could make a digital copy.



Veteran caver Ian Sandford addresses assembled cavers at the launch of 'Delving Deeper', Moa Cave, REdcliffs, 2003. Moira is at far right.

About the caves

The following information is an outline only and those who would like to know about the history of Moa and Moncks Caves, and/or the wider Port Hills area, should check out the reference list at the end of this article. Many of the reports and papers are available online.

The Heathcote – Avon Estuary/Ihuatau area has been occupied by Maori on and off for the last 700 years. Evidence is found both in the various caves and rock shelters as well as the open areas such as Redcliffs Flat (where the school was, and between the two caves). A gap in the archaeological records between early Maori occupancy (14th – 15th centuries) and later Maori occupancy (18th – 19th centuries) is thought to reflect higher water levels in the estuary, i.e. at least once it became an open bay, and thus the amount of food available changed.

Moa Cave and Moncks Cave, plus a number of other smaller caves and rock shelters, between Ferrymead and Sumner, have been formed by sea wave action on the volcanic rock (basalt) of the Port Hills. These hills, which form the backdrop to Christchurch (looking southwards), are part of the eroded remnants of the long extinct Banks Peninsula volcano. Today most of these caves, including the two under discussion, are inland from, and well above, today's mean high water springs (MHWS), at about the height of the last high sea-stand (5 to 6m above current MHWS).



Moa Cave and Moncks Cave are about 1 km apart with Redcliffs Flat in between. Map: LINZ TopoMap BX24 online

The archaeological record points to both caves being used fairly extensively in the early Maori period (14th - 15th centuries) but after this their stories are quite dissimilar with Moa Cave continuing to be used on and off right through until Europeans began to arrive, and afterward by them as well, while Moncks Cave was not. This is because Moncks Cave was buried by a landslide sometime between the 16th and 18th centuries and remained concealed until it was revealed in 1889 by quarrying at the toe of a rocky spur on the property of local landowner, Mr Monck.

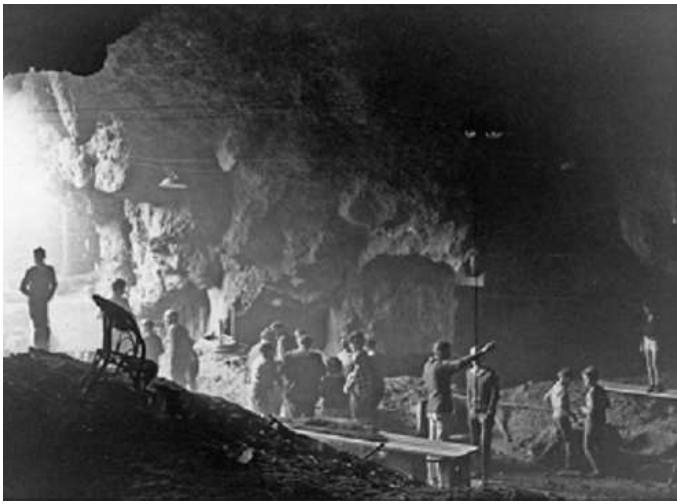
As a consequence, most of the artefacts found in Moncks Cave were in good condition – much like a time capsule – and both the finders and scientists of the day soon realised they had made a ‘special find.’ The site was excavated soon after being opened by H. Forbes and J. Meeson and both wrote up papers detailing their finds. Most of the artefacts, including those initially picked up by the landowner and his workers, are now lodged at Canterbury Museum where they form a very valuable insight into the earliest period of Maori occupation in New Zealand.

Unlike Moa Cave, Moncks Cave didn't have a Maori name when it was re-found in 1889 because there was no memory of it in the whakapapa (oral record) of the then local Maori. However it was duly listed on the New Zealand Archaeological Association's site register as Site No. M36/47 ('M' for Maori) at some stage. In 1998, archaeologists Chris Jacomb and Helen Brown began a new round of excavation work at the cave and their 2009

report to Heritage New Zealand (HNZ), became the basis of the cave's present day listing as a 'Category 1 Historic Place, No. 9067, Able to Visit' site (The 2009 listing needs updating to reflect the post-earthquakes stance of the cave being closed, i.e. 'not able to visit'). In addition, Moncks Cave has long been listed on the Council's heritage register of sites and buildings important to the early history of the greater Christchurch area.

By contrast, Moa Cave has always been open and, in consequence has been used on and off right up to the present day by early Maori, later Maori and then the first Europeans. Excavations within the cave show that the longest period of occupation was the earliest one, modern researchers ascribing this to geographical changes to the nearby estuary, i.e. when water levels were high and it became an embayment, Maori occupation was low and vice versa.

The Europeans who found moa bones in both the sand dunes outside the cave and inside the cave (which led to the first round of excavations in 1872) called the cave Moa Bone Point Cave, the point being the first corner of cliff encountered after crossing the estuary from Ferrymead heading for Sumner. In the 1870s, a cutting was made through the point (about 100m west of Moa Cave) for the road with more artefacts and some human remains being found. To this day, it is not unusual to make further finds when roadworks and excavations are being carried out – as late as 1969 work was stopped on the digging of a sewer line through the cutting in order for archaeologists to excavate a variety of artefacts.



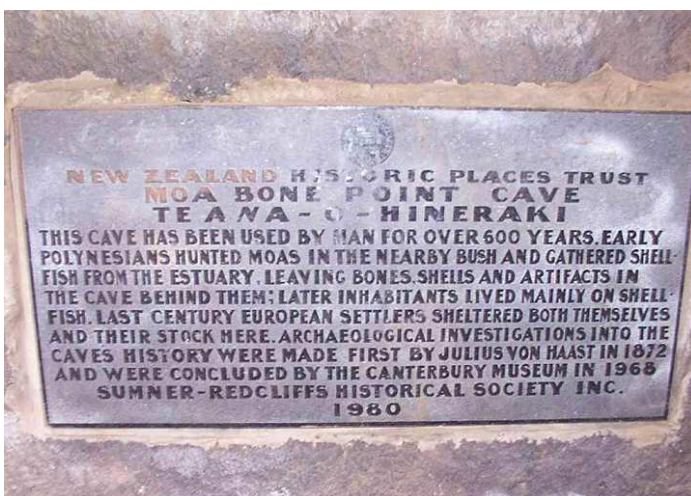
Moa Bone Point Cave, Redcliffs Cave. People at a public lecture by Roger Duff, Canterbury Museum, on 22 March 1969. Photos: Anthony Thorpe, Christchurch City Architects Division, Canterbury Museum, Canterbury Museum Archives.

Pre-earthquake interpretation for Moa and Moncks Caves

Prior to the earthquakes, there were interpretation panels at both caves which gave visitors some idea of the background behind their importance to local heritage and some key words if they wanted to search out more information. Both caves were also open to the public and many people took the opportunity to enter, the caves being judged as safe for this. For most people – those without lights - it was just an experience but for the keen person with a torch, the inner chambers of Moa Cave could be reached with a bit of grovelling.

People in the Redcliffs – Sumner area are quite proud of their local heritage and, in 1980, in conjunction with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (now Heritage New Zealand) the Sumner – Redcliffs Historical Society Inc came up with the wording for a plaque which was placed just inside the entrance to Moa Cave on the right.

The wording can be seen in the photograph below.



The plaque at Moa Cave Photo: Sumner – Redcliffs Historical Society

The 2009 HNZ report has a note that at the time the Moncks Cave site had “considerable potential for public education and is regularly used for school visits and 'heritage week' field trips.” To that end, an onsite

interpretation panel was mounted in December 2000 at Moncks Cave Reserve as part of Christchurch City Council’s ‘1850 Heritage Trail’ project. The idea was to promote the area via through a coastal trail (of which Moncks Cave Reserve is part) with interpretative panels along the way. This literally ‘fell over’ with the 2011 earthquakes; the Moncks Cave Reserve panel being too badly damaged for restoration, even temporarily. As of February 2019, the coastal trail is gradually being restored but at present there is no visitor interpretation other than the big sign which says ‘Moncks Cave Reserve’ at Moncks Cave.



At the centre of the photo is one of the caves on the day loop walk from Barnett Park. Owing to rockfall damage, this cave and the loop walk have both been closed. Photo: M Traves, May 2017



Christchurch City Council archive copy of information destroyed by the earthquakes at Moncks Cave. It refers both to artefacts found in Moncks Cave and in one of the caves on the loop walking track which began at Barnett Park (see map page 11) accessed from the walking track (see photo previous page). Design work by L Burns, Christchurch City Council

Effects of the 2011 earthquakes

The rupture of the Port Hills fault on 22 February 2011 caused a magnitude 6.3 earthquake which was disastrous for Christchurch. The fault rupture was about 14 kilometres long, and extended east-northeast from Cashmere through to the Avon-Heathcote estuary area and out to sea (although not much fault movement is thought to have occurred beneath the ocean).

Shaking from this earthquake was very strong and, together with sudden uplift on the Port Hills side of the fault, caused causing major rockfall in the Port Hills. The shaking also caused subsidence and major liquefaction of the estuarine side and north side of the fault including much of the land on which central Christchurch was built. As a consequence, numerous buildings collapsed or partly collapsed and many people were killed. These problems were compounded by 6,000 aftershocks over the rest of 2011. One, the magnitude 6.0 aftershock of June 13, caused another round of rock falls on the Port Hills.



This Google map image shows the fault plane (rectangular area) across the southern part of Christchurch and northern Port Hills. Colours on the fault plane indicate the amount of slip between the two sides of the fault). The contour lines indicate the amount (in mm) the land has risen (blue contours) or subsided (red contours) due to the slip on the fault. The white line is the contour where there was no change in height. The red, green and yellow coloured symbols show some of the GPS stations whose displacements were used to derive the fault slip model.

‘The hidden fault that caused the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake’: map from online post by GNS Science, April 2011. See more at <https://www.gns.cri.nz/Home/Our-Science/Natural-Hazards/Recent-Events/Canterbury-quake/Hidden-fault>

The jolt of nearly half a metre of uplift combined with the prolonged earthquake shaking had dire effects on all the caves and rock shelters along the northern side of the Port Hills. At both Moa and Moncks Caves, there was rockfall from the cave roofs and around the entrances. At Moa Cave, further rock fell from the cliffs above. The overall rockfall hazard was such that the Port Hills walking tracks and many roads were closed. Where the cliff line was immediately adjacent to the road, as at Moa Cave, the roadside was barricaded off and traffic shunted away into just passable narrow lanes. Suddenly after years of being easily accessible, Moa and Moncks Caves became ‘no go areas’.

Initially, the ‘no go’ areas were designated by orange cones. However, by the end of 2011, with rocks still coming down at times, a line of containers, two high, were placed at the foot of the cliffs to protect those passing. For over 4 years, the only way to see Moa Cave was a glimpse between containers or pushing your luck by dodging round behind on foot. At Moncks Cave, which is a little bit further back from the road and much less subject to rockfall, cyclone fencing was used until quite recently.



Road cones at Gollans Point Cave (between Moncks Cave and Sumner) in March 2011. Fallen rock can be seen in the cave entrance.



By December 2011 there was a double stack of containers lining the roadside all along the cliff areas on the way to Sumner. Moa Cave is just visible between the containers – it remained blocked off like this for about four years!



As for the previous cave interpretation, a check on this, in May 2017, showed that the plaque at Moa Cave survived the earthquakes. However, instead of being inside the cave, it is now outside – an indication of the extent of rockfall which had occurred.

Looking through the new wrought iron fence at Moa Cave, the somewhat battered 1980 plaque can be seen at lower right. Note the demolition debris which Christchurch City Council have been asked to clear.

Photo: M Traves, May 2017

A kilometre away, at Moncks Cave, the scene post-earthquake was even more depressing – with visible rockfall in the cave entrance; a freshwater pump station to one side of the site outside had collapsed (the concrete rubble); and a power pole had taken on a distinct lean. A Council warning sign outside the cave remained but the interpretation board lay broken on the ground behind it.



**The state of things at Moncks Cave in March 2011, less than a month after the Christchurch big earthquake.
Photo: M Trayes, March 2011**

Action since the earthquakes

The extent of the damage caused by the earthquake sequence posed enormous problems for the city’s utility providers. For most of the rest of the eastern parts of Christchurch, water and sewer pipes were broken and power and ‘phone lines were down. For months, people had some or no power; got their water from a tanker or standpipe; and used camping toilets or the portaloos set up along the roadsides. Some homes were uninhabitable. Some people just moved out, fed up with camping in their own homes and with the regular after-shocks.

In this scale of things, it is unsurprising that little attention was given to the caves, initially, other than to make them off-limits until they could be properly inspected. Only a few people like Moira and the author wanted to visit them anyway – the rest of the locals were too busy getting their lives back together while the tourists just stopped coming. For a while people just lived day to day, still in a state of emergency, until gradually combined planning under the umbrella agency, the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, began to get to grips with what was needed and in what order.

Over time, power and phone services returned, but for months water and drainage were issues, as were the roads which were patched to keep them going. Major issues at Sumner – Redcliffs were houses teetering at the top of unstable cliffs and the amount of loose rock still threatening to come down. Teams of abseilers dealt with much of the latter and, bit by bit, the houses were demolished. This all took time and sometimes the right and left hands of the many local bodies concerned were not in sync, despite strong planning statements being made.

By 2015, a formal strategy had been drawn up for the recovery of the city, the Christchurch Recovery Strategy, to which many local bodies had input including Christchurch City Council, HNZ and Ngāi Tahu. The latter were made ‘responsible’ for Project 5, ‘Identifying and restoring sites of significance to Ngāi Tahu.’ In reporting back on this in July 2015, Ngāi Tahu said:

.....“Significant sites that have been damaged include Moncks Cave, Te Ana o Hineraki (Moa Bone Point Cave), Rapanui (Shag Rock) and the Kaiapoi Pā Monument. Moncks Cave, Te Ana o Hineraki and Rapanui present opportunities for creative restoration, whether through art or historical interpretation. Earthquake damage to the Kaiapoi Pā Monument presents opportunities for the conservation and seismic upgrade of this highly significant Ngāi Tahu heritage place.”.....

Ngāi Tahu decided to go further on this and drew up a ‘Wāhi Tapu’ list of 96 sites, places and waterways, including the two main Redcliffs/Raekura caves and the wider cultural landscape of Raekura ki Matuku Takotako. The ‘Wāhi Tapu’ list was then presented by Kyle Davis (who is both a caver and archaeologist) for Ngāi Tahu to Christchurch City Council through their planning process. The list was accepted and was duly registered under the operative Christchurch City Council District Plan.

By mid-2016, in a further online update about all the Recovery Plan projects, the one for Project 5, then said:

“Project 5: Identifying and restoring sites of significance to Ngāi Tahu (pp. 26-27 of the Programme)

As part of the review of its District Plan, CCC has developed a separate chapter of the Plan called Sites of Ngāi Tahu Cultural Significance in collaboration with Ngāi Tahu. Ngāi Tahu has provided the information on the location of sites and is also advising on the provisions that should apply to these sites. This includes consultation, written approvals and recognition of Ngāi Tahu values in new development. The latter is specifically in relation to publicly owned sites.

The Council's heritage staff had been busy, too, completing an update about the caves post-earthquakes because the two heritage caves were already on their sites list – Moa Cave as Heritage Item No. 351 and Moncks Cave as Heritage Item No. 1367.

The Council was also trying to deal with the fact that the only access into Redcliffs-Sumner was via a road through the cutting at Moa Bone Point, a road highly subject to rockfall. So plans were commissioned for dealing with this as per the overview plan shown below, the design work for this being done by AECOM New Zealand Ltd in October 2015. Work on this major project, with Moa Cave slap back in the middle down at road level, began the following year with traffic diverted through Celia Street, where Moira lives at 29a, for an extended period.

MOA BONE POINT MASS MOVEMENT REMEDIAL WORKS DESIGN



Overview of planned works at Moa Bone Point. Note the line of containers which had to be removed for work to start. A planning note Moa Cave says “Debris at cave entrance to be re-shaped.”

For residents looking on this new round of works – there had been so many like those at Gollans Point (further east) already – this was just another day on the road to things getting better. Except that, one day, Moira spotted the big machinery in the mouth of the cave busy ‘re-shaping’ the rockfall debris and in alarm thinking they were going to really damage the cave, took off into the Council’s offices where she eventually managed to button one of the Heritage Advisers, Gareth Wright.

Did they know how important this cave was in the history of the area? What steps were they taking that the machinery operators didn’t do more damage?

For all Gareth’s attempts to assuage Moira’s fears, she was sure that, planning statements or not, the cave was going to come to more harm. She went away wondering how she could tackle the “powers that be” and make the theory of their plans meet the reality of what was being done.

This was where Moira was coming from when, at the Annual General Meeting of ACKMA at Te Anau in May 2017, she asked for support in tackling the Council and Maori representatives to ensure they did do what their plans said. This author, having already taken umpteen photographs of damage to caves from Sumner back to Redcliffs, agreed that this was a good idea—so the meeting voted that ACKMA support moves to ensure that the importance of the caves was not lost for the future.

To that end, the author talked to Moira; took another round of photos; did some research; and then wrote a letter, in June 2017, to Gareth Wright care of the Council. The letter began by asking “what steps are planned to further mitigate the effects of the 2011 Christchurch Earthquakes for two heritage sites at Redcliffs, namely Moa Bone Point Cave (Te Ana O Hineraki) and Moncks Cave, and is any new interpretation

planned for these two sites”. It ended with questions about when and what might be happening in the future. ACKMA Committee members were kept informed with a synopsis of the research and a copy of the letter.

In August 2017, a somewhat concerning reply came from Gareth Wright in which he admitted that, despite Moa and Moncks Caves having specific mention under Wahi Tapu as important heritage sites in their District Plan, there did not seem to be a ‘comprehensive management plan’ for the caves and, at that stage, Council’s Parks & Garden Department was planning the necessary tidying up work at Moncks Cave. At Moa Cave, after much debate with residents, Council’s Roading Department had decided not to re-instate the footpath to discourage people from walking under a cliff from which rock could still fall. Gareth promised to look into things more and get back to us.

We also weren’t the only ones asking what was happening because a *Christchurch Press* article, on 6 April 2017, showed that local residents in Moncks Bay were also concerned about the Barnett Park - Moncks Cave Reserve caves and walking tracks and were asking Council what was planned. According to this news report, the reply was that they were planning to fence off Moncks Cave (for safety reasons), then tidy up and landscape the reserve to make it once again available for public use.

With all the rockfall work near Moa Cave and this plan for Moncks Cave, things seemed to be progressing – especially at the latter where a temporary pump station had been relocated across Cave Terrace at Barnett Park.

But what of our requests for new interpretation boards for both sites? It was obvious that the Council’s heritage team would need to work with local Maori about this to come up with suitable wording and overall design. When there had been no real progress by mid-2018, the author asked for a meeting at Council with Gareth Wright and Lynda Burns, their Interpretation Specialist, who had already said the idea of new interpretation was fine – but as they already a couple of year’s work lined up, it would take time.

Having been sent these updates, the ACKMA Committee decided to show it really was behind getting the interpretation work done by offering a monetary contribution to the overall cost and this was quickly conveyed to Gareth Wright and at the long requested meeting held on 10 September 2018, the ACKMA participants were thanked heartily – yes, the extra \$\$ would a great help.

Moira then showed those present the ‘scrapbook’ she had put together about the caves - she was quickly asked if it could be lent to Council for scanning - and spoke to the meeting about the need for new interpretation as soon as possible, so much time having passed since the earthquakes. The Interpretation Staff then outlined the process of having signage made up making it clear that it would take time because they already had work in hand and there was need to consult with two different iwi, Te Ngāi Tūāhuriri (Tuahiwi) at Kaiapoi for Moa Cave and Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke at Rapaki for Moncks Cave.

Status Report, February 2019

After a request for a further update was made to Gareth Wright by the author in early January, he replied that iwi hadn’t responded to last year’s initial request for a ‘round table’ about the caves and an in-house discussion at Council regarding this was planned with Council’s own Maori Adviser, Kaharoa Manihera, being invited to have input. The outcome of this is that iwi will again be asked again to come to the table in order to try and get the signage work under way.

Overall this is somewhat disappointing given the length of time since the author’s initial letter (June 2017), the level of interest taken by us about the caves and the offer from ACKMA of financial support. The author is very much looking forward to representing ACKMA when a meeting with iwi is convened.

On a brighter note, Moira’s 300 page ‘scrapbook’ of anything and everything about things caves at Redcliffs – Sumner has been digitised by Gareth Wright for the Council’s records and when Moira and the author took a tiki tour out to Sumner from her home at Redcliffs and back on 21 January this year, they found the Council had been busy in many places – including both heritage caves.



At Moncks Cave, landscaping work has been completed. All it needs now is some new interpretation so visitors can understand what they are looking at and why the cave is no longer open for public access. Even more pleasing was to learn that as a result of public pressure – mainly about children getting to school safely – the footpath past Moa Cave has been re-instated. This means that, if new signage is put in at Moa Cave behind the wrought iron fence, it will be able to be read by those passing.

A bonus of this local tour for Moira, who has not been able to get out and about easily of late, was to re-visit Cave Rock (Tuawera) at Sumner which had also been affected by the earthquakes. The walk to the top of the rock to visit the old signal station, and access into the large sea cave, were both closed off for a time in 2012 when large cracks were discovered. It was re-opened after geotechnical engineers had checked it over and some loose rock was removed.

The entrance to Moncks Cave is just discernible behind Moira and the new wrought iron fence. Photo: M Traves, Jan. 2019



Moa Bone Point Cave after the major earthworks of 2016. Note the expansion bolts in the cliff above, trying to hold the rock together. This photo was taken before the footpath was re-instated with the only real way to view the cave being from across the road. Photo: M. Traves, May 2017

Today, most of the many former sea caves and rock shelters in the wider Sumner – Port Hills area have been fenced off or, as at Sumner, are not accessible because sections of street still remain closed. A major casualty of the earthquakes has been the closing off of both caves on the former popular day loop walk from Barnett Park because both have been declared unsafe. Instead, the first part of the former track up the valley has been extended as a cycle/walkway up to the Summit Road and the caves section ‘taken off the Council’s online maps.’ This will also need to be taken into account, too, when new historic interpretation is done for the Barnett Park – Moncks Cave Reserve area.

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