



Thimbles, buttons and sewing pins found at the site of the Te Puna mission station, Bay of Islands. Photographs by Angela Middleton

Dating these excavated contexts generally relies upon analysis of the artefacts that they contain, as methods such as radiocarbon dating that are commonly applied to earlier periods are seldom useful for the recent past. Some artefacts, such as coins, show the year in which they were manufactured, which provides an earliest possible date that the context in which they were found could have formed. Similar deductions can be drawn from artefacts such as clay tobacco pipes and ceramic vessels that sometimes show the name of their maker, whose period of operation can usually be found through historical research. Innovations in methods of production, as for example with glass bottles, can also provide an earliest possible date of manufacture.<sup>9</sup> Of course, there will usually have been a time-lag between the making of an item and its disposal; studies at sites of known age provide indications of typical durations of use, which help to establish when an artefact might have been deposited.<sup>10</sup>

One advantage of the archaeological approach is its time depth, as this provides evidence from both before and after the emergence of written history. This is especially important in the study of cross-cultural encounters where, at the outset, only one party practised writing. Knowledge of the Māori world prior to contact with Pākehā comes in part from oral traditions, handed down through generations, along with evidence derived from archaeological investigations. The latter is especially important for understanding the earliest periods of Māori culture and for documenting long-term trends and patterns of change. This allows for a broader perspective on changes in the Māori world after the arrival of Pākehā than if evidence was confined to the documentary record.

### The material past

Archaeology materialises the past, furnishing it with real objects that were made and used by communities of people who lived in specific places at defined points of time. These tangible links to the past provide an immediacy that seldom fails to grip those who encounter the objects and the stories they embody. Beyond this, however, is a



deeper importance, because objects reflect the material practices of everyday life: they are a product of what people actually did, which does not always correspond with what they said or wrote about their activities.<sup>11</sup> Archaeological evidence provides the starting point for constructing detailed descriptions of the everyday lives of past communities. The materials recovered during an excavation are usually dominated by ‘rubbish’: items discarded because they were waste from food preparation or tool-making, or once-useful objects that were broken, worn out or abandoned. These discards are direct evidence of the home life, work and leisure activities of past communities and provide the basis for identifying patterns of behaviour relating to such everyday processes as the acquisition, preparation and consumption of food; the spatial organisation of domestic, industrial and public activities within settlements; and broader economic interactions between localities, regions and nations.

Material objects are also relational.<sup>12</sup> People use tools to interact with their surroundings, from acquiring food and constructing shelter to broader modifications of the environment. The archaeological record shows that these kinds of ecological relationships can be altered when new materials and technologies become available. Objects play a crucial role, too, in the relationships between people. The items that a person possesses provide a signal to others of that individual’s position in society and perhaps also their ethnic and other social affiliations. Relationships between social groups are often mediated through the goods they trade or exchange. In these ways, the material objects recovered through archaeological investigations allow us to gain a deeper understanding of past lives.

### Māori and Pākehā

The primary focus of this book is early Pākehā settlements and material culture but, as will be seen, they cannot be understood without reference to the Māori world into which they were brought. Māori are descended from Polynesians who were the first human settlers of New Zealand.<sup>13</sup> Before non-Māori people came in the late eighteenth century, Māori identified primarily as members of whānau, hapū and, sometimes, iwi.<sup>14</sup> Collectively, they were ‘tangata māori’; ordinary human beings, distinct from the supernatural.<sup>15</sup> They also used this term to distinguish themselves from the first

Both sides of a clay pipe made by Joseph Elliott of Market Wharf, Sydney, between 1831 and 1837. In the early nineteenth century tobacco was usually smoked through a pipe. Clay pipes were cheap, but broke relatively quickly, so broken pieces are common in archaeological sites. When these pieces show the maker’s name, it is usually possible to find out where and when the pipe had been made. Joseph Elliott pipes were common in New Zealand sites of the 1830s. *National Museum of Australian Pottery, Holbrook NSW, ELL 1506, photograph by Geoff Ford*