

## Missing figures in the history of archaeology Why and how should we tell the story of the first women archaeologists in the Pacific?

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### Biography

I am a Pacific archaeologist focusing on 2 relatively new fields of research in the region: archaeobotany and the history of archaeology. After 5 years at the ANU working on the history of oceanist francophone archaeology as part of an ARC Laureate Project developing the historiography of Pacific archaeology, I am back at UWA to focus on the hidden contribution of women in this history and keep supporting the development of archaeobotany in Australia and the Pacific islands.



John and Margaret Stokes  
on Rapa Iti, 1920 (from  
Kirch 2017)



Laura Maud Thompson, around 1932

### Abstract

25 years ago, historian of science Margaret Rossiter described the 'Matilda effect': the historical process through which female scientists were written out of history. Although research in the history of science has been working to identify and rectify this bias for the past 40 years, such endeavours have been less numerous with respect to the social sciences. The history of archaeology has in turn produced narratives that are fundamentally gender biased. In the Pacific, the history of archaeology is a new field of research, which provides a unique chance to write a more inclusive and multifaceted history of the discipline from the start.

In this talk I will present the background and rationale for a new research project that aims to respond to Rossiter's plea to future scholars: "to write a more equitable and comprehensive history and sociology of science that not only does not leave all the 'Matildas' out, but calls attention to still more of them". I will also talk about some of these Pacific Matildas, and what the first clues we can gather about their stories tell us both about the historical place of women in the field and the place of women in the history written about the field. Indeed, there are two sides to the hidden aspect of women in the history of archaeology (or science generally), and both will be explored by the project: (i) what factors constrained women to long remain a minority in the discipline and (ii) why are the women who did manage to contribute difficult to discern in historical records? As archaeologists, we are trained to be aware that in archaeological deposits 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'. In the history of our discipline we now need to be conscious of the voices hidden in the silences of the archives.

**Thursday, 21 May, 4-5 pm**

**Please contact the speaker, Martin or  
Emily for the Zoom session information.**

#### Inquiries

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