
Macleay Museum News

Number 9, April 1997

Island Encounters

How were ethnographic collections acquired in the 19th century? This theme is explored in *Island Encounters*, an exhibition focusing on Torres Strait and Pacific Island artefacts from William John Macleay's collection.

On display are artefacts from the Torres Strait Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Caroline Islands, Kiribati and Samoa. Through extracts from collectors' journals, photographs, and other sources, *Island Encounters* explores the circumstances in which artefacts in Macleay's collection were collected and by whom. Although the indigenous perspective in such encounters is largely absent, some clues are revealed through the accounts of collectors.

William John Macleay (1820-1891) amassed a collection of more than 1,000 artefacts from the Torres Strait and the Pacific region between 1874 and 1891. Particularly significant are those artefacts collected during Macleay's *Chevert* expedition to New Guinea (Papua New Guinea) in 1875. Macleay also obtained indigenous artefacts from naturalists, explorers, naval officers, ships' captains, missionaries and planters. These individuals, like Macleay during the *Chevert* expedition, acquired artefacts during encounters with indigenous peoples. Such encounters were often brief and European trade goods were either given as presents or exchanged for indigenous artefacts. Viewed in this context, Macleay's collection represents interaction between indigenous peoples and Europeans.

On display in *Island Encounters* are Torres Strait and Papua New Guinea artefacts collected during the *Chevert* Expedition. These artefacts can be compared with some of the trade goods (metal machete blades and adze heads, glass beads, mirrors) that Macleay took with him on the Expedition. Artefacts acquired during the Expedition were collected by either Macleay or his cousin, Captain Arthur Onslow (1833-1882), a retired naval officer and politician. Onslow had previously visited Hammond Island, western Torres Strait, on the British surveying vessel HMS *Herald* in 1860. Some Torres Strait artefacts on display may have been collected during Onslow's earlier trip. The Torres Strait collection in the Macleay Museum is the oldest held by any museum in Australia.

A major part of Macleay's collection comprises masks, clothing, personal ornaments, clubs and spears from the Papuan Gulf region of Papua New Guinea. These items are directly associated with European scientific investigations and exploration of the south-eastern part of the island in the 1870s and 1880s. Some artefacts were acquired during the *Chevert* expedition, while others were collected by the British explorer Theodore Francis Bevan (1860-1907) in 1887. Bevan made five trips to New Guinea between 1884 and 1887, the last of which was partly funded by Macleay.



Three Solomon Islanders, c. 1890,
probably Roviana, New Georgia group
Historic Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum

Masks, chalk figures, and ornaments from New Ireland on display were collected by the natural history collector James Cockerell, who spent 12 months in the region from late 1875 with the Methodist missionary Rev. George Brown (1835-1917). Brown, who established a mission in the islands of New Ireland and New Britain, was also accompanied by a group of Fijian and Samoan converts. Cockerell made many visits to the islands of New Ireland and New Britain with Brown, who was an avid collector of artefacts.

Artefacts from the Solomon Islands on display include some collected by the shell-collector John William Brazier (1842-1930) during the voyages of HMS *Curacoa* in 1865 and HMS *Blanche* in 1872. Both vessels were among those which cruised the Pacific monitoring British interests in the islands. Brazier also collected artefacts from the Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati) and the Caroline Islands during the voyage of the *Blanche*, some of which are on display in the exhibition. Particularly striking are a helmet made from the skin of a porcupine fish and a woven suit of body armour from Kiribati, thought to have been collected by Brazier.

Island Encounters was opened by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Gavin Brown, on 24 March. The exhibition, curated by Susie Davies, Curator of Ethnography, will remain on display until 1998.

Director's Notes and Jottings

Staff Notes

After a long period of staffing stability and relatively few well spaced changes the last few months have seen several major staff moves. At

the end of December, the museum farewelled our longest serving member of staff, Lindy Davidson. Lindy had worked as the Administrative Assistant at the Museum for about 12 years, and was a mine of information on previous practice and the history of the museum. Her knowledge of the workings of the University accounts system is especially missed, but we are getting there now. Lindy had been part of the University for even longer, having been appointed originally in 1975. She was of course known to many of our friends and I am sure that you all join with us in wishing her well in her retirement.

After several weeks with no Administrative Assistant, we were thrilled to welcome Andrea Brew to the position, part time. Andrea has a strong background in administration and has been for some time a professional temp. She therefore has much experience in working out how different offices function, and already we are benefiting from a new look at our various procedures. Andrea works every morning, and in the afternoon is a part time Arts student.

Angus Patterson, who has been with us for nearly three years, sometimes part time and sometimes when we could afford it, full time, is about to leave us to return to England. He has been working with the Historic Photograph Collection, but in the short time with the Museum, has been responsible for many achievements. Among these are the design of our extremely good Home Page, and many other smaller computer contributions. He was the curator of the *Upstairs Downstairs* Foyer exhibition, and for both the Froggatt and the *Chevert* displays in the main gallery. As a parting contribution, he has developed the exhibition for the first floor foyer, *An Architect's Antidote: the Buildings of Science Road*, which traces the development of Science Road especially under the influence of Professor Leslie Wilkinson, the first Professor of Architecture, 1919 to 1947. We hope that this exhibition will be ready before he leaves the country at the end of April. With his substantial contribution to other exhibitions we are going to miss Angus. His position will be advertised as a part time position in April.

Indigenous Heritage Project

In the 9 months since her appointment as Indigenous Heritage Officer, Rosemary Stack has made a considerable difference to the Project, developing procedures for the Advisory Committee, and creating and maintaining contact with many communities. She was responsible for organising a recent and very successful Research Forum for Indigenous Communities (some of which was held at the Macleay). While the Forum was small, the participants were appreciative of the opportunity to visit the University and meet the people involved in the project. A program of Community visits is planned for the near future.

Schools Program

The Museum has had some response from the flier sent to secondary schools last year, but not as great as we hoped. We are also working with others on campus to develop activities for primary schools, which we hope will be successful. We will again be participating in the After School Science Activities organised by the Faculty of Science.

Gallery Changes

Although I can report no changes yet to our lighting problems, we are very pleased to report that the ceiling in the gallery has been repainted, thanks to the University's Facilities Planning Department. The end result is a much brighter and cleaner feel to the gallery, using a colour (chosen on advice from Trevor Howells, a leading conservation architect based in the Faculty of Architecture) similar to the

original. Next, the walls! We have refurbished the six flat top cases now housing the Kater display, and one other of the cedar cases, which will shortly display some of the fine bark paintings in the collection.

Special Visitors and Events

Early in the year the Museum hosted an interesting and fruitful visit from Dr Graham Durant, Deputy Director of the Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow, who was visiting Sydney briefly. Professor Tony Bennett, Director and Professor of Cultural Studies, Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy at Griffith University, visited the Museum as part of his research on the cultural and social aspects of 19th century museums. We also hosted a visit of the NSW Vice Chancellor's Committee, Standing Committee on Museums and Collections. Among many other diverse visitors, Mr Les Murray, Australia's foremost poet visited the museum, and we were the site for a short feature film, *Seal of Fate*, which unfortunately is not shortly to open in a cinema near you.

We have participated in regular University events like the Antique Fest, Information Day, and at short notice arranged a small display on the war time work of Professor Frank Cotton on the development of the Anti G Pressure Suit, a forerunner of the space suit. This was held in the Seymour Centre as part of the lecture by the visiting US NASA Scientist, Dr David Mackay last November. And of course staff continue to participate as lecturers in various special programs, sometimes held in the gallery, and sometimes elsewhere.

Donations

We have decided that our regular appeal for donations this year will be focused on a particular need. We have a truly important collection of ethnographic artefacts mostly collected in the late 19th century. Many of these are wonderfully displayed in our special exhibition for the year, *Island Encounters: Torres Strait and Pacific Island artefacts, 1860 to 1891*. But we have no funds to pay for their conservation, and are therefore making a special appeal for a Conservation Fund, to raise sufficient funds to pay for conservation work on several, perhaps many, of these important objects. Any assistance is greatly appreciated, and donations are of course tax deductible.

ARC Project

In June 1996, I applied successfully for an Australian Research Council Grant (received in January 1997). The grant is to enable the establishment of a database, "a catalogue with pictures" of the holdings of university museums and collections, initially at four participating universities, and to make this catalogue available on the Internet. The University of Sydney is the coordinating institution with partners at Macquarie University, the University of New South Wales, and the University of Queensland. The project, known as **AUMOL**, or **Australian University Museums on Line**, is being run as a parallel project to AMOL, Australian Museums on Line, which is coordinated by the National Museum of Australia for the Heritage Collections Council of the Department of Communications and the Arts. Although the project is in its early days, we already have some 60,000 records and have had several approaches from other universities to join.

Vanessa Mack

An Architect's Antidote

The Macleay Museum has produced a new exhibition, *An Architect's Antidote - The Buildings of Science Road*, using historic photographs from the Macleay Museum's collection and the University of Sydney Archives.

The exhibition examines the work of Leslie Wilkinson, Professor of Architecture from 1919 to 1947, who as University Architect in the early 1920s left a lasting impression on the appearance of the University. Wilkinson believed a modern interpretation of classical Roman and Greek architecture was more appropriate to Sydney's climate, and the University's image, than traditional English Gothic. He asserted that an overall plan of buildings with clean lines, horizontal planes, limewashed exteriors and open unified spaces were preferable to loosely arranged, poorly maintained constructions which were "poisonous to any educational effort".

Budgetary constraints meant that Wilkinson could only modify and add to, rather than rebuild, much of the University. Science Road therefore offers an interesting mix of the University's scientific and architectural heritage. Historically the Pharmacy (formerly Chemistry) and Badham (formerly Physics) Buildings are two of the most significant buildings on campus, purpose built in the late nineteenth century when the University curriculum expanded and science teaching became more specialised. Wilkinson extended and altered these and other buildings in Science Road substantially and linked them all by straightening the road.

Interesting features in Science Road include the Bank Building, the neo-classical facades of which once stood as part of the Commercial Banking Company Building in George Street, and the War Memorial Arch, the construction of which was deferred until 1959 to an altered Wilkinson design.



Sketch of proposal for Science Road by Leslie Wilkinson

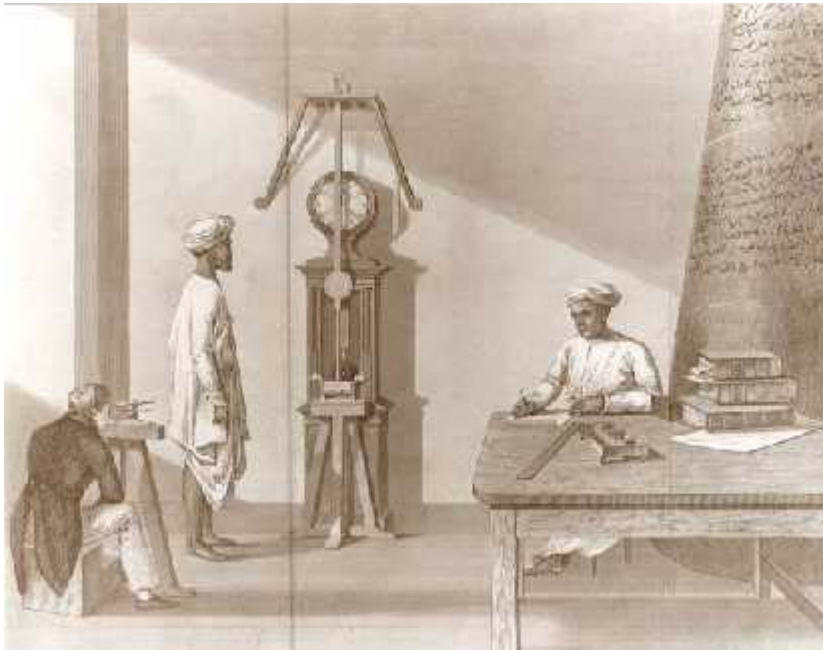
Individually the early buildings of Science Road represent the growth of science at the University of Sydney between 1880 and 1920. However it is the streetscape which is listed in the Australian Heritage Commission's Register of the National Estate and with the National Trust of Australia. Wilkinson's work is recognised but individual buildings are not.

An Architect's Antidote is situated in the first floor foyer at the western end of the Macleay Museum. The exhibition bridges the gap between the Upstairs Downstairs exhibition and the main museum gallery.

Pioneer of Precision

A number of original relics reflecting the work of the metrologist, Captain Henry Kater (1777-1835), are included in a temporary display in

the Gallery. *Pioneer of Precision, Captain Henry Kater, FRS* looks at Kater's work on weights and measures in the 1810s and 1820s in London, his associated work with pendulums for measuring gravity, and his relations with instrument makers.



Pendulum experiment in Madras

Kater's eldest son migrated to Australia in 1840 and subsequently received his father's possessions. Some of these were given to the University of Sydney in 1873 and others to Sydney Observatory. The display draws on items held in the Physics School historical collection and the Rare Book collection within the University, and other items from the Powerhouse Museum. The National Measurement Laboratory has lent the primary standard yard supplied to the New South Wales Government in 1855. Photographs reproduce items in the Henry Kater papers in Sydney and the Science Museum in London.

Pioneer of Precision was opened on 5 March by Dr Anita McConnell, a former curator of the London Science Museum, while on a brief visit to Sydney. The display was generously sponsored by the National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia, this year celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. Several of Henry Kater's descendants attended the opening. The display was the focus for a well attended evening meeting of the Metrology Society of Australia on 19 March, at which Julian Holland presented an introductory talk on Kater's life and work. The display, situated in three small cases at the back of the Gallery, runs until 30 January 1998.

The display includes a reproduction of Kater's certificate of election to the Royal Society of London in 1814. Through the Society Kater became associated with many of the leading scientists of his day. The Royal Society also provided the context for much of his scientific work. A volume of papers relating to pendulum researches, mainly reprinted from the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* including presentation copies to Kater, is shown in the display, along with Kater's working copies of standards of length and what appears to be the original 1811 prototype of the Kater azimuth compass. A later Kater compass made by Thomas Jones and purchased by Sir Thomas Brisbane about 1821 for his observatory at Parramatta is also displayed.

Broken Plans

In the Macleay Museum's collection of historic photographs is a large number of glass plate negatives produced by Archibald Liversidge, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Sydney from 1874-1907. Among them is a broken glass plate of an unsuccessful plan submitted by the NSW Department of Public Works in 1904 for the redevelopment of the University grounds. This was one of several attempts in the early years of the twentieth century to create a more uniform, picturesque and above all efficient use of space at the University.

[photo -]

University of Sydney Block Plan, photograph by Professor Archibald Liversidge, c. 1904
Macleay Museum 84/053/092

The University of Sydney Block Plan shewing mode of bringing existing miscellaneous buildings & roads into conformity with a recognisable general design is signed, W^m Mitchell and dated 20.ii.04. The plan was an attempt to expand the neo-Gothic eastern face of the University's main building by constructing a large T-shaped Museum of Anatomy between the Medical School and the quadrangle with a cloistered walkway linking all three. This plan also envisaged the completion of the quadrangle with cloisters running right round the interior, as well as extensions to the Physics and Chemistry Buildings. A roadway was planned to run right round the outside of the main building.

Professor Liversidge was a keen amateur photographer who photographed many of the University buildings in the 1890s. It is likely that Liversidge photographed this plan because of its proposed additions to the Chemistry block (centre) although it is difficult to know what he would have made of it. As Professor of Chemistry, Liversidge had made strong specifications for the design and construction of the original Chemistry Building (c. 1891) with the recommendation that the rear walls should be flat to allow for extensions at a future date. This plan, however, separates the addition from the original building.

It took a long time for the University to settle on a design for its future layout. Accommodating Blacket's original eastern facade with new architecture that would promote the University as a centre for scientific teaching was a problem the university was slow to solve. A design featuring sweeping curves and broad terraces, submitted in 1915 by Walter Burley Griffin, famous for his layout of the city of Canberra, was similarly rejected.

The University's rapid expansion from the 1880s had created a jumble of cheaply produced, purpose-specific buildings with little overall planning. It was not until Leslie Wilkinson's arrival at the University as Professor of Architecture in 1919 that a plan was finally implemented.

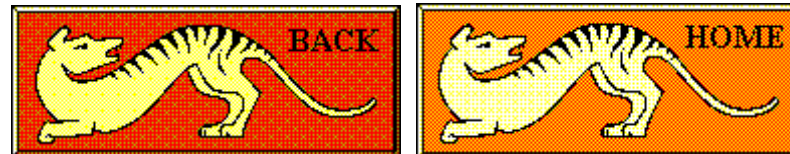
As University Architect throughout the University's major building project of 1919-25, Wilkinson wanted to create harmonious, practical

architecture with buildings more suited to Sydney's Mediterranean-style climate. Wide vistas and light colour schemes would, he hoped, bring "a sense of unity, order, convenience and, if maybe, beauty into the University quarters as a whole". Wilkinson designed the western wing of the quadrangle, the Vice-Chancellor's quadrangle, the new Physics Building and extensions to the Medical School, and altered much of Science Road.

Wilkinson's alterations to Science Road are the subject of a new exhibition, *An Architect's Antidote*, in the first floor foyer at the western end of the Macleay Building, featuring many other historic photographs from the Macleay Museum collection and the University of Sydney Archives. His plan was far more ambitious than the government plan of 1904, and though it ran short on budget, left an indelible stamp on the layout of the University.

Angus Patterson

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