
Macleay Museum News

Number 11, April 1998

Macleay goes MoS

‘The extraordinary seduction of the Macleay Museum is the sense of discovery, surprise, curiosity, sometimes disgust, always awe and wonder as one peers into aisles of showcases; even more so behind the public gaze into hidden cupboards and drawers.’ This is the reaction of Peter Emmett, Senior Curator of the Museum of Sydney in Bridge Street. In recent months Peter has been exploring the remoter corners of the Macleay Museum’s holdings to conjure an exhibition of our diverse and rarely seen treasures to be held at the Museum of Sydney later this year.

Provisionally titled *Oceans of Story*, the exhibition will present journeys of exploration through clusters of specimens and artifacts. ‘I have resisted the temptation to create a microcosm of the Macleay in the contemporary design spaces at MOS, because the Macleay Museum exists as a public living entity in itself’, says Peter./ ‘How then to create a parallel exhibition of the Macleay collections without the cabinetry? What containers for the uncontainable as these diverse collections spill from ordered arrangement in cabinets and drawers?’

The aim is to create a series of ‘islands’ from Macleay objects collected on journeys and expeditions over the past 120 years. ‘What do these strange and diverse selections tell us about the place, or rather how the place was perceived and represented by those journeyers?’ At this stage the exhibition has more questions than answers. The exhibition will represent real journeys but go beyond this to explore the metaphor of journeying. A sense of place will be evoked by representations of the Red Centre in Baldwin Spencer’s black and white photographs of the Horn Expedition. Other places can only be reached through instruments - exploring the minuscule through microscopes. Many of the objects in the Museum have taken different journeys to arrive here. They represent the trawling of nature and of indigenous cultures by people - scientists, missionaries, sea captains - driven by traditions of acquisitiveness.

Pearl shells from the west coast of Australia, Asmat shields from Irian Jaya, seafaring birds, surveying instruments and samples of coral reef will jostle together to explore the idea of journeying. Lantern slides used by the geologist Edgeworth David in his teaching at Sydney University will reflect the afterlife of a journey.

Trained as a historian, Peter Emmett has curated numerous exhibitions and has coordinated the Museum of Sydney since its inception in 1989. 'I have always been attracted to the Macleay', he says, 'because of the diversity of its media.' He is struck by the thematic sympathy between Macleay and MoS. From its beginning, Sydney has been the recipient of the flotsam and jetsam of history from the Pacific and the world at large. The Museum of Sydney reflects this as do the collections of the Macleay Museum.

Peter's exploration and our journey with him is just beginning. Other people will be able to join the journey at the Museum of Sydney between 8 August to 8 November 1998.

Director's Notes and Jottings

Lecture Series

In November 1997 we held a small but successful function at which Shane Ahyong, Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Fellow in 1995, and Graham Fulton, Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Fellow for 1997, spoke on their work with the natural history collections. These were mini lectures, with plenty of opportunity for audience interaction. Both emphasised very strongly the uniqueness and importance of the collections, and both projects have led to worthwhile updating of our records. Both Fellows also emphasised how much important work remains to be done on these collections. We hope to be able to offer further mini lectures on the collections during this year. Please let us know if you would be interested in being notified of these events.

Special Events

A morning tea and special briefing was held for the University Guides, to enhance their knowledge of the Macleay, so that they can bring tour groups to look at the Museum. A special information pack on the Museum was prepared for the guides, which we will re-use with school and teacher groups.

A pre-dinner function was held in the gallery as part of a small international conference to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the death of the great Cambridge mathematician G.H. Hardy. Hardy played a significant role in linking mathematical developments in Britain with the developments in continental Europe. Several important international and interstate visitors were present.

AUMOL

At the end of November, Australian University Museums on Line was launched by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Gavin Brown. This project has so far brought together in a single catalogue the holdings of 14 collections at four universities, the University of Sydney, University of New South Wales, University of Queensland and Macquarie University, with a total of 70,000 records and 12,000 images. These may be searched across all collections or you may limit your search to the holdings of a single museum. If you have access to the Internet, you can now scroll through the Macleay Museum collection holdings, many of which also have pictures. We were not successful in obtaining a second grant to assist in expanding the project to incorporate the holdings of other universities this year. However, we will be

going on refining the entries that relate to this museum and would welcome any feedback those web browsers among you may have. Url: <http://aumol.usyd.edu.au>. We are also actively pursuing other exciting lines of research built on the work so far.

Marketing and Merchandise

Regular visitors will appreciate our difficulties in offering an outlet for merchandise. However, as reported in the last issue, we are looking at ways to develop product relating to the Museum and marketing it through other outlets. We are working closely with the Nicholson Museum in this venture, and with Portfolio, a part of GeoGraphics. At present we have one note card for sale, at \$2.00 per card, featuring a view of the gallery. It is a very attractive card at an attractive price, and may be used for many purposes! We used it as our Christmas card last year. We will have a second card, and a bookmark available shortly we hope, and we are trialing wrapping paper featuring birds from the collection. These items will all be available for order through the Newsletter, and we are working on other outlets. We also have T-shirts, at \$20.00 each, in medium and large sizes, bone colour with the Macleay Museum logo on the front. If interested, please ring Andrea on 9351 2274 to place your order.

Bequest

The Museum recently received a small bequest with a strong provenance to the history of the Museum. Two framed tapestries, worked by the wife of George Masters, William John Macleay's curator and the first curator of the collection at the University, and his Second Empire French clock in beautiful original condition. The donor was Mrs Florence Howard whose husband, the late George Frederick Howard was the stepson of George Masters. We are not yet certain how or where to display these items, but we are very pleased to have them.

Strategic Plan

This year we have begun the process of developing a more formal strategic plan than we have been working to in the past. We have had several successful preliminary meetings, and in March will be working with a facilitator to develop a vision, and mission and a plan for the next three years. As part of this process, we have been examining our collection policies in the main collecting areas, and have identified certain items in the collection which would be better transferred to other institutions, or otherwise disposed of, in accordance with standard museum practice and our own Deaccessioning Policy. We have disposed of several broken runs of publications relating to photography (mostly to libraries) and are examining the photographic equipment to decide what should be retained. We recently disposed of some printing equipment originally from the Government Printing Office by auction. I would like to assure donors and friends that this is not a wholesale disposal of items, but a very selective approach to refine our collection boundaries, and retain material relevant to our role in the University.

Publicity

Good publicity is very hard to come by, especially when there is no budget to buy it. The Museum has been really fortunate this year in being the subject of a very favourable and interesting review by John McPhee in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (13 January 1998). John titled his piece 'Case This Joint, It's A Treasure Trove', and described most of the current exhibitions and displays in favourable terms. If you have not visited us recently, do come and check it out for yourself. This was followed on Friday February 6 by a one minute article on the ABC's *Snapshot* program before the 7 o'clock news. Susie Davies also had articles on *Island Encounters* in *Australiana*, August 1997 and the current issue of *Antiques in New South Wales: a guide to antique dealers and art galleries*, December 1997 - April 1998.

Donations

As usual, we appeal to our friends to assist the Museum in a tangible way. We enclose with this newsletter, a special form supplied to us by the Development Office on which you may wish to record your donation to the work of the Macleay. Any funds raised in this way are used for special projects, notably conservation of the collection, and are not used to supplement regular operating expenses.

Vanessa Mack

In the Gallery

Artifacts from two areas of the Museum's rich collection of Aboriginal culture feature in two new displays. They show bark paintings from the remote Aboriginal community Yirrkala and a fine selection of boomerangs.

The barks are the work of senior men with the authority to paint the stories from their country. For *Yirrkala* six barks have been selected from more than 90 collected by Professor Ronald Berndt in the 1940s and subsequently donated to the Museum. Others will be seen as barks are replaced in this rotating display.

Boomerang includes rare examples such as that from King George's Sound, Western Australia, collected in 1866; intriguingly incised and decorated specimens from Queensland and the Northern Territory; and boomerangs from Coraki and Kempsey in New South Wales. Also on display are several of the objects used to make and decorate them, as well as photographs.

A selection of notable Australian photographers from last century until the present will feature in *Treasures of Light*. The display draws on the Museum's extensive Historic Photograph Collection. Images of the building of the University of Sydney in the 1850s taken by John Smith, one of the foundation professors, and later scenes taken by John Shewan (second curator of the Macleay Museum) contrast with the striking images from See Raymond Priestley and Edgeworth David's ground-breaking expedition to the Antarctic.

In addition, rarely seen teaching collections from zoology, geology chemistry and medicine demonstrate how scientific photography can be a true art form. The anthropology of the Pacific was captured by Herbert Ian Hogbin from the University of Sydney and by the employees of Burns Philp. These images taken by pioneers of documentary photography evoke an era of exploration and discovery when, to take a photograph was a considerably more difficult task than in this day of disposable cameras. This display is designed to demonstrate the range of materials held in the Historic Photographic Collection and illustrate their value for research.

Island Encounters, revealing the richness of holdings from parts of the Pacific in the Museum's Ethnography Collection, will continue as the main exhibition in the Gallery throughout this year.

Pioneer of Precision, the display on the scientific work of Captain Henry Kater, has been extended until the end of June. Julian Holland, who curated the display, was invited to present a paper on Kater's work on weights and measures at the Metrology Society of Australia

conference in Melbourne last November. The display was the focus for a visit to the Museum by delegates to the Asia Pacific Metrology Programme in December. The visitors from several countries were welcomed by Professor Judith Kinnear, Deputy Vice Chancellor (International & Development).

Miklouho-Maclay Medal

A surprise addition to the proceedings of the Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Fellowship seminar in November was the presentation to the Museum of a commemorative medal. Produced to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay, the medal was designed by Dr David Wansbrough and cast at the Soviet Military Foundry on behalf of the Miklouho-Maclay Anniversary Committee.

Ten examples of the medal were produced. At a ceremony at the Australian Embassy in Moscow, on 10 November 1997, the Ambassador, Mr Geoff Bentley, presented medals to Mr Y. Siderov, the former Russian Minister for Culture who led the delegation to Sydney for the Miklouho-Maclay Anniversary in July last year, Mr A. Losyukov, the former Russian Ambassador to Australia, and Mr Y. Nesterov, the former Russian Consul to New South Wales.

Miklouho-Maclay's face is shown in high relief on the obverse of the medal. This could not be struck from a die and several moulds had to be prepared for the casting. His name and dates, in a design by New Zealand artist Tom Coomber, are on the reverse.

Further medals were presented at a ceremony at the Consulate of the Russian Federation in Sydney on 16 February this year by the Consul, Mr Rodionov. Recipients were Anniversary Committee members, Mrs Wendy Paton and David Wansbrough, and Miklouho-Maclay family members, Mrs Alice Maclay, Mr Paul Maclay and Mr Kenneth Maclay. The Museum's medal was also re-presented to the Director, Vanessa Mack.



MACLEAY MUSEUM

This recently produced note card showing the Museum gallery is available with envelope for \$2.00

The Perfect Angle



Why are diamonds a girl's best friend? The sparkle of a diamond depends on its reflections and refractions and their relation to its regular facets. Gemstones embody the notion of perfection and even today ancient traditions of the healing powers of crystals survive on the fringes of alternative medicine.

The scientific study of crystals dates from the second half of the 18th century. Scientists realised that the regular forms in which crystals occur indicate their structure. René-Just Haüy (1743-1822), professor of mineralogy at the Muséum d'Histoire naturelle in Paris, was one of the first to analyse the internal geometrical structure of crystals. To measure the angle between adjacent facets of a crystal he used the contact goniometer invented by Arnould Carangeot about 1780. This consisted of a pair of arms attached to a semicircular protractor. A crystal was placed with adjacent facets in contact with the two arms. The instrument had limited accuracy, giving Haüy the opportunity to read angles that matched his belief in simple ratios. His results awaited the challenge of a more accurate instrument.

That increased accuracy was provided by William Hyde Wollaston (1766-1828). Trained as a doctor, Wollaston took an active interest in chemistry and optics. One of the earliest to research the platinum group of metals, Wollaston also invented a number of instruments including the camera lucida, and in his later years was a close friend of Captain Kater.

Wollaston published a description of his reflective goniometer in 1809. This instrument has a vertical circle graduated into 360 degrees, rotating on a horizontal axis. A crystal was attached by wax to the metal plate connected to the horizontal axle. The angle between facets was then measured by aligning the reflection of an object, say a window bar, with a reference line, such as the top of the skirting board, and then rotating the goniometer until the reflection of the window bar from the adjacent facet came into line with the skirting board. In this way the geometry of very small crystals could be measured with great accuracy. The instrument is fitted with a vernier, and with careful operation could be read to the nearest five minutes of arc.

Haüy had claimed to be able to read to twenty or thirty minutes of arc, but measurements with the reflecting instrument showed some of his readings to be out by as much as a degree. This was critical to the interpretation of the geometric structure of the crystals. John Herschel in 1833 pointed to the reflecting goniometer as an example of the significance of instrumental technique for the development of science:

‘What an important influence may be exercised over the progress of a single branch of science by the invention of a ready and convenient

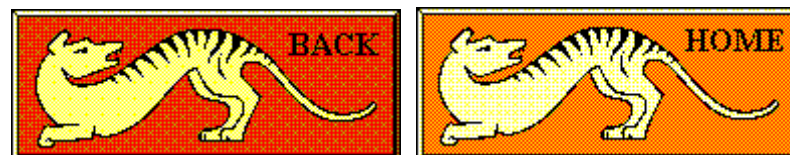
mode of executing a definite measurement, and the construction and common introduction of an instrument adapted for it cannot be better exemplified than by the instance of the reflecting goniometer. This simple, cheap, and portable little instrument, has changed the face of mineralogy, and given it all the characters of one of the exact sciences.'

Early examples of the reflecting goniometer are rare. Of course, there were not so many people engaged in crystallography as there were, say, in microscopy. And yet it seems demand for Wollaston's instrument was less than it might have been. It 'has been less resorted to [said a writer in the 1840s] than might, from its importance to the Science, have been expected, owing, perhaps, to an opinion of its use being attended with some difficulty'.

The reflecting goniometer on display in the Museum dates from the middle of the 19th century and was made by Troughton & Simms, a prominent firm of scientific instrument makers in London. It is part of a collection of scientific equipment that belonged to the Rev W.B. Clarke (1798-1878), a pioneering geologist in New South Wales and friend of W.S. Macleay.

A century after Wollaston's invention, the discovery of x-ray crystallography enabled the structure of crystals to be penetrated. Scientists could effectively see inside crystals. The application of x-ray diffraction techniques to biological molecules has led to some of the most significant scientific discoveries of the 20th century.

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