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# Macleay Museum News

Number 16, October 2000

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## *Web Re-Spun*

These days an effective web site is an essential means for any institution to communicate with a wider audience. Like the spider's web, one's place in the Internet requires regular rebuilding. The Museum's web site has been undergoing extensive revisions and additions this year. In March the web site underwent the first in a series of facelifts. This change has seen the site expand in size and in speed of download times.

In 1995 Angus Patterson, then curator of the Historic Photograph Collection, set out with the aid of Tim Robinson from University Archives to create a web site for the Macleay Museum. Angus wrote all his code using the now forgotten 'L View', but even within these limitations he created a simple and uncomplicated web site which remains the backbone of the present Macleay site.

The site has kept its links to its humble origins. An advantage of maintaining the simplicity of the site is that it enables maximum access to all interested parties without creating different browser versions, which ask you to download and update 'plug-ins'. It has the added benefit of enabling page templates to be kept simple and easy to update. An inexpensive web-authoring tool such as 'Front Page' allows other members of curatorial and administrative staff to control their input to the site. The checking of these additions is done just prior to uploading by a delegated member of the staff.



The web site has provided a space in which exhibitions can be given an afterlife in which the research and essence of the exhibition is still available. At present the Macleay site contains information on 24 different exhibitions, as well as providing background material on the Macleay family and the history of the Museum.

As with many smaller museums the Macleay has a number of areas it wanted to promote and the web provides a gateway to the outside world. Products such as cards, publications, bookmarks and copies of historic photographs needed space as did information about educational programs, worksheets and of course exhibitions. We have designed simple order forms for publications which can be downloaded, filled in and faxed, as well as a list of all the publications still in stock. The education sheets were already used at the Macleay so we simply copied and pasted them into HTML and put them on line to enable them to be printed up by teachers and students alike.

Two areas of the site have also had major expansions. The Historic Photograph Collection pages have now expanded to include over 220 images together with biographical and background information on a number of major collections, including Charles Kerry, Burns Philp and Co, Charles Bayliss, William Hetzer and Negretti & Zambra. The Historic Photograph Collection also has commercial demands put on it from researchers and publishers who use material for articles and publications. The web has provided a means to promote and streamline these requests, and now includes a price list and order forms for prints and reproduction requests. The Scientific Instrument Collection pages have been expanded to provide a wide range of information on scientific instrument resources and Australian scientific history, as well as the texts of the current displays, *Working with Microscopes* and *Slipsticks*.

The Museum's honorary associate in the Invertebrate Unit, Don Herbison Evans, has put on-line links to images and descriptions of the biology, behaviour, and life histories of 1066 Australian Lepidoptera species including 419 with caterpillar pictures.

Getting the content of the revamped Macleay site up on-line was the first major hurdle. The second was assessing the success of these changes. Once on-line a web site does not immediately attract thousands of visitors. In fact only some 26 people a week visited the site last year and of those very few looked at more than one page before moving on. We found that the size of the image on our home page was taking too long to download and needed to be replaced.

So how well have the changes worked? By October we were receiving around 150 virtual visitors a week, and more importantly we have an average of 1.8 page views per visitor which means people are finding enough information on the site to warrant further browsing. We are now linked to over 400 other sites and in an international survey of museum web sites the Macleay's site gets a rating of 4 out of a possible 5. We have been selected by UNESCO to appear in their CD-ROM "Millennium Guide to Cultural Resources on the Web". The Web and its standards change at a phenomenal rate and the real secret to improving a web site is eternal vigilance and dedication to upgrading.

**Geoff Barker**  
**Webmaster**

## *Director's Notes and Jottings*

### **Staff Notes**

Three members of staff have been on-duty overseas since the last newsletter, and I report on this below. Geoff Barker is a proud new father, of baby Dexter, and coincidentally will be working four days a week until the end of the year. Margaret Humphrey, our one-day per week entomology collection manager will shortly change her status from a casual to a regular part-time employee. We continue to rely heavily on our excellent volunteers (Val Havyatt, Don Herbison Evans, who are now both Honorary Associates of the Museum, Ken Fairey, Marina Garlick, and Matthew Alderdice) all of whom contribute one day a week.

Both Julian Holland and I have given papers at overseas conferences this year. Julian gave a paper in Oxford in September (see next page). I gave a paper on 'The Dual Roles of University Museums' at a conference in Paris on Management of University Museums organised by the OECD International Committee on Management in Higher Education, also in September. This is an important topic but rarely addressed, and the conference, attended by delegates from 17 countries was well worth while. I also attended a smaller meeting in Glasgow immediately before the Paris conference, and thus had the opportunity to visit the Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow, and in Edinburgh, the wonderful new Museum of Scotland. In Paris too, I was able to fit in visits to several wonderful museums, like the newly opened Musée des arts et métiers, the re-hang of the Pompidou Centre and the Louvre. Although such visits are fun, one learns a great deal by looking at the way other museums operate and exhibit their collections. I was also fortunate to have a European holiday this year in May, and as always it was a 'busman's holiday' with visits to museums and museum colleagues in London, Malta and Italy.

Locally, Geoff Barker and Susie Davies attended the Pacific History Association meeting in Canberra, at which Geoff gave a paper on Burns Philp and the Solomon Islands; Rose Stack, Susie Davies and Stuart Norrington attended a seminar at the Powerhouse on Exhibiting Human Remains at which Rose gave a paper; and Julian gave two papers in Sydney in October.

In June Margaret Humphrey represented the museum at the Council of Heads of Australian Entomology Collections in Darwin. Margaret continues to make great progress in re organising the collection into families, and improving the accessibility of the cabinets. Overseas loans of specimens have increased, there are increasing numbers of professional visitors to the collection, and we are very pleased that two PhD students are using the collection for their research, one working on wasps, and the other on spiders.

### **Interns and Visitors**

Between March and June, we were fortunate to have working with us Heather Bachman, an international student from Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY, who was attending the Australian Catholic University as part of their Study Abroad Scheme. Heather, who has a strong interest in anthropology, worked with Rose Stack and Susie Davies and made an extremely valuable contribution to exhibition and collection management work in that area.

The Museum continues to host work experience students from various schools around the state, and in general terms, the students enjoy their experience, and are useful to us. We always try to develop a program that suits their interests and offers a variety of museum

## *Fellows*

In May the Museum was very pleased to welcome the Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Fellow for 2000, Michael Letnic. Mike is a PhD student in Biological Sciences at this University working on the landscape ecology of the Simpson Desert. Mike has wide interests especially in 19th century natural history, and is developing an exhibition for the Museum on Aboriginal trade routes across Australia. The working title is 'Shaping Australia: Trades that Stretched the Nation'. The aim is to highlight the complexity and extent of trade in Australia prior to European settlement, and demonstrate the importance of these established trade routes in the European colonisation and settlement of Australia. Mike became interested in this through his work in the Simpson Desert on the plant Pitjuri, which was used (and traded) by Aboriginal peoples as a narcotic in pre and post settlement times.

The exhibition *Carnivorous Solutions* developed by our 1999 Fellow, Dr Steve Wroe, has now been installed and will be launched in conjunction with a Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Fellowship seminar. This will be held in the Gallery on 21 November. Both Mike and Steve will give brief accounts of their work with the Museum and beyond, and at the end of the lecture, light refreshments will be served.

## *The Institute*

Earlier this year the University commissioned a feasibility study into the possible conversion of the former Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute Building on City Road into a University Museum to house the Art Collection, the Macleay Collections and sections of the Nicholson Museum. We were heavily involved in the study, which has reported positively on the possibilities. Any move to the building is several years off, and there are obviously many more studies to be undertaken, business plans to develop and much work to be done before such a museum eventuates. We regard it very warmly, as it will be the best opportunity for the Museum to regain something approaching the original size of our display spaces, even if it means moving from our original building. Whether we would retain the existing gallery for visible storage of (say) the vertebrate collection is certainly not decided, although we would like to do so.

The University plans to raise funds from private donors for this venture, and to this end, we have contributed to a small exhibition in one room of the Institute which has been fully restored. The exhibition displays gifts to each of the three University collections, the Art Collection, the Nicholson and the Macleay. It looks wonderful, and is opened for special viewings by prospective donors.

## *Your Peripatetic Editor*

*Curator of Scientific Instruments (and editor of this Newsletter) Julian Holland has recently returned from an extended study tour abroad,*

*to Britain, Ireland and the United States:*

The fulcrum of the trip was attendance at the XIX International Scientific Instrument Symposium held at Wadham College, Oxford, in September where I presented a paper on 'Samuel Charles Tisley and the Making of Instruments for Science'. The Symposium was very well attended with some 150 participants, indicating the growing strength of the academic and curatorial community concerned with historic scientific instruments.

Prior to the Symposium, I was fortunate to be based in the London Science Museum as a temporary research fellow to undertake research on Tisley and other matters. In addition to being able to inspect items in the collections of the Science Museum, I had ready access to the resources of the Science Museum Library as well as the libraries and archives of the Royal Society, the Guildhall, the Royal Institution, the British Library and the Society of Friends. Subsequently, useful research visits were made to the Shropshire Records & Research Centre, Shrewsbury; the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, Dublin; the Collection of Historic Scientific Instruments, Harvard; the Ernst Mayr Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard; the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia; the National Museum of American History, Washington; and the Harry Ransom Cultural Center of the University of Texas at Austin.

More museums were visited than can be listed individually but some highlights stand out. The recently restored [Great Telescope](#) erected by the Third Earl of Rosse at Birr Castle in Ireland in the 1840s was truly impressive, the Biodiversity display at the American Museum of Natural History in New York was breath-taking, the sundials, astrolabes and other early instruments at the [Adler Planetarium](#), Chicago, were remarkable, the preserved bird skeletons from the La Brea Tar Pits in the [George C. Page Museum](#), Los Angeles, were outstanding, and as for the Madagascar hissing cockroaches at the [University of Nebraska State Museum](#) at Lincoln, well, they didn't disappoint!

On-duty leave for attending the Symposium and undertaking some professional visits was supplemented by long-service leave and recreation leave. The University of Sydney provided financial assistance. Altogether the trip was a wonderful opportunity to extend professional contacts and visit a great variety of museums in addition to attending the Symposium and meeting specific research objectives. The trip was all the more pleasant and fruitful for the generous assistance of numerous professional colleagues (and others) along the way.

**Julian Holland**

## *Federation Photos*

On 1 January 1901 the six British colonies of Australia united to form a new, independent nation, the Commonwealth of Australia. The Federation celebrations were concentrated in Sydney where all the allocated £20,000 were spent attempting to create a spectacle which would rival any held in the British Empire. Professional photographers in Sydney, including John Paine, saw the potential for capitalising on the unique event and selling their photographs to those who had missed the festivities as well as those who had been there.

Taking photographs of the event posed problems for John Paine. Firstly he needed to capture the size and scope of the spectacle and to accomplish this he took photographs of the procession from a building looking down on the corner of the Sydney's General Post Office and George Street. These photographs attempted to show the size of the event by capturing the procession as it moved down Martin Place, and as it faded into the distance along George Street.



© Macleay Museum Historic Photograph Collection

Paine was not the only one to think this was one of the better vistas of the procession. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted the next day, "Nowhere along the route was the procession seen to better advantage than when passing along Martin Place. ... the many windows with outlooks from the gaily decorated General Post Office were filled with the faces of employees and their friends".

Paine was well aware he would need to take photographs which would capture the events in more detail. Although the procession would take two hours to cover its five miles around the city and up Oxford Street to the Domain, Paine needed to move his equipment to a number of different locations along the route. Knowing that it would be impossible to be at all the vantage points along the route, he like many other photographers used the temporary Commonwealth Arches as the focus of his photographs.

The nine Commonwealth Arches which were spread along the route had been constructed rather hastily after funding for each arch had been cut from £1500 to £500. The Sydney Decoration Committee had hoped that more money would be contributed for arches from other towns

and cities in Australia, but in the end Melbourne and Newcastle were the only ones outside Sydney to contribute an arch to the procession. Even the German, French, and American arches were provided by local (Sydney) citizen groups.

Time constraints meant that although Paine managed to photograph all these structures for his stock book many of them are taken after the procession has passed through. Some arches which are photographed from both sides, such as the Wheat Arch, show in one shot the procession heading towards Pitt Street and in the other a nearly empty street later in the day.

Paine was lucky to get the photographs he did of the events for bad weather could easily have hampered his attempts to photographing the celebration. On New Year's Eve a storm had swept through Sydney which had torn festoons and banners out of place, and added to this the early morning showers had left the flags hanging limply from the arches which stretched along the route. Luckily for Paine (and us) the Decorations Committee repaired the arches and the weather improved as the morning continued, the celebration's success being confirmed when the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared, "Yesterday's decorations from a spectacular point of view, was a great and glorious victory of the senses".

At the end of the week the decorations were taken down, leaving no permanent memorial of Sydney's Federation Celebrations, and it is lucky for posterity that commercial photographers who capitalised on the events of the day have left us an invaluable record. For John Paine however the value of his day's work was set, according to his stock book at the Macleay Museum, at eleven shillings per dozen and one and six for each individual photograph.

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