
Macleay Museum News

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Mummy's Day Out

The Museum's Peruvian mummy recently went to the hospital, following a visit to the morgue!

The mummy has been in the Museum's collection since the nineteenth century and is possibly one of two mummies brought to Australia by George Duniam and publicly displayed in Sydney in 1851. These mummies were reported to have come from the Pacific coast of what was then southern Peru. The reason for the mummy's outings was to get x-rays and CT scans to help establish the sex, age-at-death, and presence of pathological changes as well as information about the method of mummification. Dr **Estelle Lazer**, a forensic archaeologist and physical anthropologist, has been interpreting the evidence:



The fact that the mummy was preserved in a flexed position made this investigation rather challenging for conventional x-ray analysis as all the elements overlapped and the resulting x-rays were ambiguous and difficult to interpret. The CT scans produced a series of about 650 'slices' taken one millimetre apart. The skeleton could then be reconstructed in the computer and key elements could be isolated to enable detailed analysis. The bones were fully developed and appeared to have fused, indicating that this person had reached adulthood. An examination of the pelvic bones revealed that the mummy was that of a female.

Determination of age-at-death from adult bones is notoriously difficult. This is because the only skeletal changes that occur once maturity has been achieved are degenerative and there is considerable variation between individuals. The spine and other bones were observed to be

in very good condition, with no signs of degeneration. This would be consistent with a younger adult. The dental evidence supports the notion that this individual was a younger adult, who probably died between the middle of the third and fourth decade. The lower jaw has not survived and all the teeth from the upper jaw had been lost prior to death. The sockets for the third molars were fully formed. No sign of periodontal disease was observed. There was evidence of two relatively small dental abscesses. These possibly reflect bacterial infection resulting from tooth decay. The only other pathological change that was observed was pitting on the roof of each eye socket. This is usually interpreted as the result of iron deficiency anaemia or a high parasite load.

Height is a good indicator of the health and nutritional status of an individual during the growing years, though it is also governed by genetic potential. The height of the mummy was estimated from long bone measurements by the use of formulae that have been derived for Mesoamerican populations. The height obtained was 148.10 plus or minus 3.5 cm.

The CT scans also provide information about the method of mummification. They reveal the remains of what appear to be the trachea, diaphragm and what might be the poorly preserved remains of the heart and lungs. This indicates that this person was not artificially mummified as the body would have been eviscerated. It is likely that natural mummification in a desiccating environment was assisted by the use of cotton and gravity. Positioning the body in an upright flexed position would have allowed the decomposition fluids to drain out of the lower orifices. The preservation of the body was further enhanced by tight cotton bindings which absorbed decomposition fluids. The impression of the woven cloth can still be observed on the skin of the mummy. The next step in this study is to ascertain the date of the mummy by Carbon 14 analysis. This work is to be undertaken by Associate Professor Mike Barbetti, Professor of the N.W.G. Macintosh Centre for Quaternary Dating at the University of Sydney. The Museum's mummy is certainly having a busy afterlife.

The Macleay Museum would like to thank the NSW Department of Forensic Medicine, especially Professor John Hilton, Mark Patterson and Dr Alain Middleton, and the Radiology Department of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, especially Karen Fisher and Sean Brannigan, for undertaking this work. Thanks are also due to Ian White.

Director's Notes and Jottings

Staff News

We are delighted to announce that our Curator of Entomology, Margaret Humphrey, was recently awarded her PhD for her work on the taxonomy of a genus of Australian and New Guinea spiders. This is a wonderful achievement as Margaret has completed this part time, while working at several jobs (including teaching in the Faculty of Agriculture here), bringing up two sons, and the usual other multitude of pressures on a busy life. She recently returned from Lihir Island, in Papua New Guinea, where she was involved with an insect survey for the Lihir gold mine. Margaret was also recently elected a councillor of the Linnean Society of NSW, the Society of which William John Macleay was both a founder and benefactor. Margaret joins a long line of entomological curators who have been actively involved with the

Linnean Society, most recently of course, Dr Woody Horning, her predecessor. Dr Don Herbison-Evans has been renewed as an honorary Research Associate for a further three years.

Late last year, Susie Davies was awarded a grant through a University-funded project: The Career Development Support Program for General Staff Women. This has allowed Susie to visit the South Australian Museum and spend time researching their Aboriginal collections. She timed her visit so that she could also attend some sessions of the Museums Australia Conference held this year in Adelaide.

Rosemary Stack has been reappointed for a further five years, as curator/manager of the Indigenous Heritage Project which has moved into a second five year phase. Rose's duties have been enhanced, and she will take over the management of the Project from me, in addition to her other responsibilities in liaison with communities, and curatorial responsibilities at the Macleay.

I am planning to retire as Director of the Macleay later this year. I have been here for seven years now not long enough to achieve half what I would like to do, but I do feel there has been some progress in my time here. Needless to say I will miss the Museum more than I can say.

I have no particular plans so far, except for an eight week overseas trip in September/October, mainly to see my two children, now resident in London and New York. After that I intend to become a volunteer guide for the University Tours (specialising in the groups from other universities), learn to teach English as a Foreign Language so that I can work with released refugee groups, and register with the Museums and Galleries Association as a Museums Advisor for country areas. And maybe a few other museum sort of activities. We hope that the position will be readvertised as soon as possible after I leave, perhaps in a slightly different form, as the University is considering ways of restructuring the three university museums.

Collected: The Book!

We hope to publish the book of the exhibition in July this year. Susie Davies is the main author, with Rosemary Stack contributing a chapter on the bark paintings in the collection. The text is nearly complete, and the final photographs (by David Liddle) were taken in March and are now being scanned and prepared for publication. The book will be A4 size, 112 pages, full colour and will have over 100 photographs of the collection, interspersed with contextualising photographs from the Historic Photograph Collection. The designer is Maryann Hawke who has been the graphic designer for many of our recent exhibitions. We think it will be an even better book than *Adorned*, which has nearly sold out. (About 100 copies left).

This is obviously an expensive exercise. So far we have been very fortunate to receive a donation/sponsorship of \$20,000 from the Chancellor's Committee (who also supported the publication of *Adorned*) and from the University Sesqui-Centenary Fund we received a grant of \$8,000. The remaining costs will be met from our very small reserves, and we hope that we will recoup this from sales over the next year or two.

Lighting

While on the subject of sponsorship, we have been fortunate again in receiving additional sponsorship-in-kind from PHM Technologies, of Beaconsfield, NSW through the General Manager Mr David Peaston and the Sales Coordinator, Mr James Chin. The company donated a dimmer system called *iControl Automation System*, which dims the lights in the display cases whenever there is no movement in the gallery,

and increases the light levels when visitors are moving around. This was organised for us by Professor Warren Julian of the Architecture Faculty, who over the years has been of very great assistance to the Museum in obtaining a really good lighting system. Mr Phil Granger installed the system, at a very reduced rate. We are enormously grateful to all of the parties involved, and delighted with the results.

Visitors

Some of our recent international and research visitors have been: Dr Daniela Serini, Curator from the Vatican Ethnology Museum to look at the ethnography collection; M. Herve Joubaux, curator from Chartres Musee des Beaux Arts, to see the ethnographic collection; Betty Churcher, former director National Gallery, re future loan of the Port Essington and other Bark paintings; Dr C. Catchpole, University of London re thylacine skeletal material; Link Olsen, Field Museum of Chicago, re Asian vertebrate specimens; Stephen Cairns, Smithsonian, re corals; Glen Hoyer, re bats; Eryn Hogue, PhD student re mammal jaws; Quiao Wang, from New Zealand re beetles; Roger de Keyser re beetles; J. Gillings re beetles; Dr Jem Poster, University of Oxford, re 19th century natural history collectors; and Dr H. (Dora) Yoshida, of the Nagoya University Museum, interested in further developing a Sister Museum relationship between the University of Sydney Museums and Nagoya. The number of visitors to the Historic Photograph Collection to look at photos for reproduction averages around 15 to 20 per month, with an average of 5 research visits each month. And last but not least, former Macleay Museum colleague and curator, Angus Patterson, now the Silver Galleries Project Coordinator, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Among notable groups: the NSW Art Gallery members group, a Powerhouse Museum Members group; The Arts Society of this University to look at the three university museums; Sydney History Group, Australian Science Teachers Club, the Ecological Society which held its Christmas party in the Gallery; Museum Studies students; Master of Heritage Conservation class; Museum and Galleries Foundation of NSW conference tour, among many other more general groups for tours, talks or specific projects.

Entomology

Since Margaret joined the Museum, the loan program of specimens requested by researchers has had renewed impetus, and much of the resulting research is quite exciting. Several new type specimens have been identified: most recently four wolf spider specimens, from the old Bradley collection; three beetles identified by a researcher in the USA as being the original material described by Macleay. A further 12 or so types have been identified during more 'routine' work on the collection in the last two years. We are fairly certain that this figure will continue to rise.

Margaret, with the assistance of Don Herbison-Evans and Ken Fairey, another regular volunteer, has rearranged the cabinets to house most major insect groups together, and this has been continued within drawers of species. Nearly 200 drawers of specimens are now arranged in alphabetic order, which makes the task of identifying what is held very much easier.

Don has also commenced cataloguing the orders and families of insects represented in the Macleay collection. This catalogue is available on the web. The Museum's web site already holds much of Don's work on Australian moths, with special emphasis on the larval stages.

The site continues to grow in popularity and usefulness. Do check some of these pages on <www.usyd.edu.au/su/macleay/entomology>.

Vanessa Mack

Thirty Years of Special Exhibitions

The Museum has been holding special exhibitions for the last thirty years. An extensive display of museum posters from around the world was mounted in 1971. *The World of Museums* was accompanied by a booklet listing many of the posters. The following year a more substantial exhibition was mounted *Historical and Interesting Scientific Instruments*. This was a milestone in the history of the Museum. Not only was it the first fully fledged 'special temporary exhibition' but it led to the establishment of the Museum's scientific instrument collection. 'Scientific instruments' was interpreted fairly widely and the exhibition included Prof. Edgworth David's Antarctic sled and Lawrence Hargrave's ornithopter as well as more conventional instruments such as microscopes, a telescope, a Wimshurst machine and a Helmholtz sound analyser, most of them borrowed from departments of the University. The exhibition ran for two months and attracted some 2600 visitors more than the whole visitation for the previous year. An informative but modestly produced catalogue accompanied the exhibition and sold for a mere five cents (a reminder of how much the value of money has been eroded by inflation in the last three decades). It was part of the intention of the exhibition to flag the value and interest of such instruments and to discourage people from throwing out such pieces. At the conclusion of the exhibition many of the items were returned to their departments, but other departments were happy that the items should be preserved in the Museum.

In the last three decades the Museum has mounted well over fifty temporary exhibitions and displays as well as numerous long-term displays. Some exhibitions marked significant anniversaries. For example, *100 Years of Australian Scientific Exploration* was mounted in 1975 to mark the centenary of the *Chevert* expedition.

The bicentenary of the death of Banks's scientific companion on the *Endeavour* was marked by *My Dear Friend Daniel Solander* opened by Princess Christina of Sweden in April 1982. The following year saw the *Medical School Centenary* exhibition. An exhibition on *Miklouho-Maclay*, mounted in 1988 on the centenary of the Russian scientist's death, was launched by the former Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, Michael Somare. Later that year *Mr Macleay's Celebrated Cabinet* was mounted to mark the Museum's own centenary. The 150th anniversary of the first photograph known to have been taken in Australia was commemorated by *The Silver Image* in 1991.



The Chancellor, Sir Herman Black, welcoming Princess Christina of Sweden to the Museum for the opening of *My Dear Friend Daniel Solander* in 1982.

Photo: Raymond de Berquelle

Other exhibitions have been held in conjunction with congresses and special events: *Hear Here* (1980) in association with the tenth International Congress on Acoustics, *Genesis of Botany* (1981) for the thirteenth International Botanical Congress and *Aspects of*

Geological History (1994) for the nineteenth International History of Geology (INHIGEO) Symposium held at the University.

A number of exhibitions have been devoted to archaeological themes from *Domestic Pottery in Greece and Turkey* (1975) and *Sydney Unearthed* (1979) to *Lukluk Bek Long Taim Bipo - Community Archaeology in Papua New Guinea* (1993). These and other exhibitions have been mounted in conjunction with staff from various teaching departments.

Photographs shed much light on many aspects of life and experience. Apart from photographs used in conjunction with other exhibitions, there have been several shows specifically devoted to photography. *The Mechanical Eye* (1977) was the first of these. The book of the same title was the forerunner of *The Mechanical Eye in Australia* (OUP, 1985). *The Same But Different Indian and Australian Photographs, 1850-1925* (1986) was organised in conjunction with Dr Jim Masselos from the Department of History. The most poignant was *Vietnam in Retrospect* (1987), a selection from the vast series of photographs taken by Denis Gibbons (then in the Department of Botany) during his five years' service in Vietnam. *No Roads, No Fences* (1993) exhibited photographs taken by Lucy Cragie on extended outback journeys in the 1930s.

Apart from exhibitions held in the Museum itself, two have memorably been held in venues outside the University: *Sydney the 1850s, The Lost Collections* (1982), photo-graphs from the then recently established His-toric Photograph Collection, exhibited at the Martin Place branch of the Commercial Banking Company (which also sponsored the show); and more recently *Wanderlust* (1998) at the Museum of Sydney.

Publications ranging from modest catalogues to illustrated volumes of essays have been produced in conjunction with many of the exhibitions, some of them subsequently taken up by commercial publishers. For example, the book accompanying *Australia's Animals, Who Discovered Them?* (1978) won the award for best historical book in the inaugural Whitley awards of the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales and was subsequently republished by Pergamon. *The Blue Mountains Grand Adventure for All* (1985) was accompanied by a volume of essays which sold well and went into a second, expanded edition (1988).

While this represents only a sampling of the exhibitions mounted by the Museum over the last thirty years, it indicates something of the energy and imagination which the Museum has brought to the cultural life of Sydney and which it hopes to continue to do for the next thirty years and beyond.

Wandjina

In 1976, Professor A.P. Elkin donated a number of Aboriginal artifacts to the Museum. One of the most striking was the *Wandjina* figure shown here. The first European to see a *Wandjina* was George Grey during his explorations of north-western Australia. On 26 March 1838 Grey was attempting to find a route south in the vicinity of the Glenelg River but the cliffs were impassable. 'Finding that it would be useless to lose more time in searching for a route through this country, I proceeded to rejoin the party once more; but whilst returning to them, my attention was drawn to the numerous remains of native fires and encampments which we met with, till at last, on looking over some bushes, at the sandstone rocks which were above us, I suddenly saw from one of them a most extraordinary large figure peering down upon me. Upon examination this proved to be a drawing at the entrance to a cave, which, on entering, I found to contain, besides, many remarkable paintings.'



Wandjina figure made in the north Kimberley region of Western Australia about 1963. H: 70 cm.
Photo: David Liddle

The figure made a striking impression on Grey: 'in order to produce the greater effect, the rock about it was painted black, and the figure itself coloured with the most vivid red and white. It thus appeared to stand out from the rock; and I was certainly rather surprised at the moment I first saw this gigantic head and upper part of a body bending over and staring grimly down at me.' There were further *Wandjina* figures in the cave as well as numerous representations of men, kangaroos and other animals. Grey paused to sketch the figures before the party retraced its steps. Three days later Grey came upon another cave with a remarkable full-length figure.

The caves discovered by Grey were not seen again by a white man for more than a century when they were relocated by Howard Coate in June 1947. Coate had gone to the Kimberley as an itinerant missionary in the mid 1930s and spent most of his subsequent career there. He soon became aware of the need to learn something of the various local Aboriginal languages and began making word lists and documenting verb forms. It was Coate's linguistic knowledge that led to his contact with A.P. Elkin. Appointed Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney in 1934, Elkin had already spent a year in the Kimberley region in the late 1920s and maintained a continuing interest in fieldwork there. Elkin and Coate became associated over many years.

Elkin was himself an ordained minister and had a particular interest in Aboriginal religions. In particular, he maintained a long-term interest in the place of *Wandjina* in the religion of the northern and central Kimberley Aborigines. In the late 1930s he sent his linguist colleague Dr Arthur Capell to gather information including texts on *Wandjina*. Capell hired Coate as guide and assistant. In 1946-1947 Coate undertook work for Elkin directly, again directed to investigating the *Wandjina* stories and paintings, and it was at Elkin's behest that Coate went in

search of Grey's caves. He also recorded a large body of myths.

Wandjina are ancestor figures associated with rain and fertility. They are mostly known from the spectacular larger-than-life figures painted on Kimberley caves. Representations of *Wandjina* on bark paintings appear only to have been produced since the 1930s. Smaller and more portable versions have also been produced, painted onto stone or carved on the shells of nuts. The three-dimensional figure in the Museum is possibly unique. It was collected by Howard Coate, and possibly made specially for him, at an unknown date. Coate probably gave it to Elkin when they worked together in Sydney on the *Wandjina* myths in 1971-1972. The Wandjina figure greets visitors to the Museum's current exhibition *Collected: 150 Years of Aboriginal Art and Artifacts*. This will run until the end of the year.

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