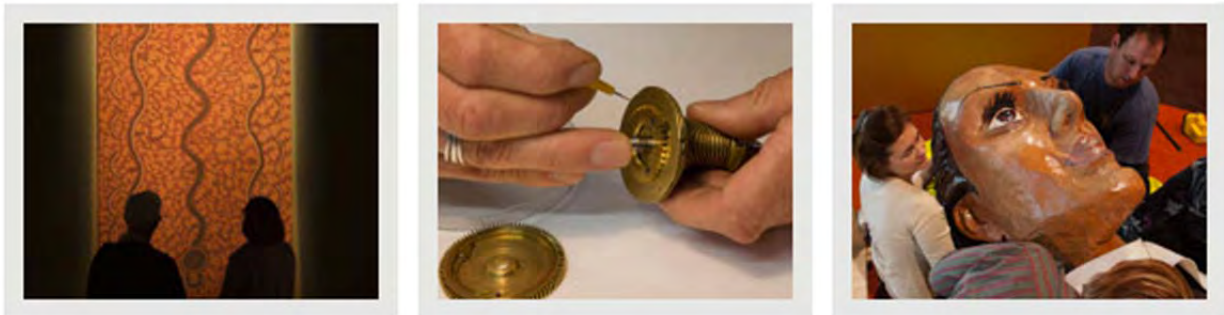


**Understanding Museums:
Australian museums and museology**

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



This PDF version of the web publication, *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, is a history of museums in Australia since the 1970s. It focuses on the changes that have taken place in Australian museums of all kinds and takes as a source of inspiration the Pigott Report on museums and national collection, which was published in 1975.

The contributing authors – all of whom are outstanding and most also longstanding museum practitioners – delve into the depth and breadth of Australian museum collections. They both reflect and reflect on an increasingly vital museum community, one that responds to Australia's rapidly changing society, engages in important debates and contributes to lifelong learning. And in so doing, these authors not only examine the realised legacies of the Pigott Report but also describe developments that the Pigott Committee could not possibly have foreseen.

Combined, these essays promote the very real contribution that museums are making to contemporary Australian culture and society. They articulate the shared goals of the diverse sectors of the museum industry and reveal the essential confidence that museum people have in their collections, programs and audiences.

This book is for museum professionals, students of museology and anyone interested in cultural collections and heritage.

Online version: <http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/index.html>

Image credits (left to right): Visitors in front of Kaapa Tjampitjinpa's 1975 work *The Storm Water Dreaming in the Papunya Painting* exhibition (2008); horological conservator working on a clock made in the 1700s for the *Australian Journeys* gallery (2009); installation of the giant Griffin puppets in the *Landmarks* gallery (2011). Photos: National Museum of Australia

Cite as: Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), 2011, *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/ ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Contents

Issues in museology

- Introduction, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- Museums in Australia: from a new era to a new century, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- 'The orphans of government': The Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (The Pigott Report), 1974–75, Anne-Marie Condé
- Conservation in Australian museums, Ian Cook et al.
- Digitisation to social media, Des Griffin
- Australian museums and the technology revolution, Tim Hart and Martin Hallett

Indigenous people and museums

- Introduction, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- Ethnographic museums and collections: from the past into the future, John E Stanton
- Transforming culture: Indigenous art and Australian art museums, Bernice Murphy
- Repatriation: the end of the beginning, Michael Pickering and Phil Gordon

Museums and history

- Museums and history: Introduction, Leon Paroissien and Des Griffin
- War and Australia's museums, Peter Stanley
- History in the new millennium or problems with history?, Tim Sullivan
- Museums, history and the creation of memory, 1970–2008, Margaret Anderson
- Redeveloping ports, rejuvenating heritage: Australian maritime museums, Kevin Jones
- Museums and multiculturalism: too vague to understand, too important to ignore, Viv Szekeres

Art museums

- Introduction, Leon Paroissien
- Art museums in Australia: a personal account, Daniel Thomas
- International exhibitions, Caroline Turner
- Collecting works on paper: specialisation at risk?, Anne Kirker

Museums and science

- Introduction, Des Griffin
- Museums and the environment, Douglass F Hoese
- Interactive science centres in Australia, Michael M Gore and Susan M Stocklmayer

Regional museums

- Introduction, Leon Paroissien and Des Griffin
- The development of regional galleries, Margaret Rich
- Let a thousand flowers bloom: museums in regional Australia, Kylie Winkworth
- Drawing people together: the local and regional museum movement in Australia, Kimberley Webber et al.

Museums, education and visitor experience

- Introduction: learning, the visiting experience and the art museum as educator, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- 'Protecting the past, safeguarding the future': museum studies, the profession and museum practice in Australia, Jennifer Barrett
- What's driving children's cultural participation?, Barbara Piscitelli
- The museum education mix: students, teachers and museum educators, Janette Griffin
- Family visitors to museums in Australia, Lynda Kelly

Copyright and use

© Copyright National Museum of Australia

Copyright

Material on this website is copyright and is intended for your general use and information. Your use of the material is subject to this copyright and use notice.

The Museum does not own copyright in any of the authored content in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*. The authors own copyright and have licensed the Museum to publish the material.

The Museum also does not own copyright in third-party images included in some of the chapters. Copyright owners are credited in the captions of the images.

Use

The material on this website is intended for personal, professional and educational use.

Unless otherwise indicated, you may copy, distribute, display, download or print the material on this website for your own personal use, for non-commercial educational purposes or for non-commercial use within your organisation, provided that you attribute using the citation provided at the foot of each page.

If you wish to alter or republish any of the material on the site, please contact Copyright and Production Services, National Museum of Australia image@nma.gov.au or phone +61 2 6208 5150.

Creative Commons

One of the papers in this collection, Margaret Anderson's '[Museums, history and the creation of memory](#)', is published under [Creative Commons Licence Attribution-Noncommercial](#).



Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed, the authors of the material on this website reflect their views and opinions. The authors have sole responsibility for errors or omissions. The Museum recommends that you exercise your own skill, judgement and care with respect to its use.

Links from Understanding Museums to external websites are provided for convenience only and do not constitute endorsement, the Museum of any material found at those sites.

Contacts

National Museum of Australia
Canberra ACT 2601 Australia
T +61 (0)2 6208 5099
E feedback@nma.gov.au
www.nma.gov.au

**Understanding Museums:
Australian museums and museology**

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



Issues in museology

Museums were established across many parts of the Australian continent during the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. However it was in the latter part of the twentieth century that the greatest burgeoning of museums occurred. These decades also witnessed the consolidation of a sophisticated museum profession, the creation of a single national professional association – Museums Australia – and an active participation of Australian museum professionals in the international museum context.

The essays in this section jointly seek to present a scholarly study of museums and museum practice, including the very recent challenges of new technologies.

Contents

- Introduction, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- Museums in Australia: from a new era to a new century, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- 'The orphans of government': The Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (The Pigott Report), 1974–75, Anne-Marie Condé
- Conservation in Australian museums, Ian Cook et al.
- Digitisation to social media, Des Griffin
- Australian museums and the technology revolution, Tim Hart and Martin Hallett

Online version: http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Issues_museology.html

Image credit: Panel from the *Harvest of Endurance Scroll*, a 50-metre scroll representing the history of the Chinese in Australia http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/collection_interactives/endurance_scroll/harvest_of_endurance_html_version/home

Understanding Museums - Issues in museology

Introduction

by Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien

Museums were established across many parts of the Australian continent during the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. However it was in the latter part of the twentieth century that the greatest burgeoning of museums occurred. During these decades new institutions were established and new buildings constructed; there were numerous extensions to established museums, especially to art museums where steadily rising interest in the work of living artists had been stimulated by the Australia Council; collections were greatly expanded; and exhibitions played a major role in shaping the public profile of museums and the increasingly diverse character of their expanded audiences.

These decades also witnessed the consolidation of a sophisticated museum profession, the creation of a single national professional association – Museums Australia – and an active participation of Australian museum professionals in the international museum context. In October 1998 the General Conference and General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) was held in Melbourne, reflecting the international museum profession's growing knowledge of and interest in Australia's museums and the work they accomplished. 'Museums and Cultural Diversity', the theme of the ICOM '98 Conference, reflected a distinctive preoccupation of Australian museums in world terms, and fostered international focus on the crucial presence of Indigenous voices and emphases in Australia's museums. This left an enduring impression on conference delegates.

However, much of the vision outlined in the 1975 Pigott Report on Australian museums commissioned by the Whitlam Labor Government still remains to be realised. This series of essays addresses many problems faced by museums in the twenty-first century, such as governance and funding issues, public debate about displays and temporary exhibitions, and learning in the museum context. These essays jointly seek to present a scholarly study of museums and museum practice that is also accessible to people outside the museum profession, who daily demonstrate their active interest in museums and their programs.

Anne-Marie Condé provides a detailed overview of the Pigott Report (The Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, 1974–75) that has been fundamental to the development of museums and museum practice in Australia.

Access to conservation expertise and facilities is of concern to all museums, regardless of their specialisations. The field of conservation in Australian museums has undergone a most significant transformation since the 1970s, when it was then identified as being in crisis and needing urgent attention. Indeed our training and specialised skills in conservation have undergone revolutionary transformation since that time. The essay by Ian Cook, Jan Lyall, Colin Pearson and Robyn Sloggett, describe these developments in such a fundamentally important museum discipline.

From the first use of computers by museum people in the 1960s – astonishingly slow machines accessible by punched tape – computers and electronic devices of all kinds have come to dominate life in museums, as everywhere else, and not simply in size and computing power.

Des Griffin explores the challenge to museum in extending knowledge and understanding. Museums now don't just have websites, they use a variety of social media including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, You Tube and various microblogging platforms designed to engage audiences, ultimately directing them back to the web page where they can respond to news about programs and events. Visitors real and virtual are urged to join with the museum in creating programs. The notion of the museum as authority is truly turned on its head.

Tim Hart from Museum Victoria and Martin Hallett from Arts Victoria review the participation by museums in Australia, significantly through the Heritage Collections Council established and funded by Museums Australia and the Cultural Ministers Council, in this revolution. Importantly, it is museums that have driven the changes: policies such as those launched by the Keating government as part of the broader arts agenda have mostly been marginal to Australian museums' progress.

Understanding Museums - Issues in museology

Museums in Australia: from a new era to a new century

by Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien

The border between the themes of an art museum and a general museum is often blurred. Moreover the spirit and atmosphere of an art museum is no longer so inimical to the spirit and atmosphere of a museum of natural history or technology ... Today, in influential quarters, art is the new religion and so an art museum is more likely to be housed in a new Parthenon. Nonetheless, the art museums have nearly all the troubles and the unanswered challenges facing other kinds of museums. [1]

The election of EG (Gough) Whitlam in December 1972 as the first Labor prime minister for 23 years generated significant changes across a spectrum of areas in Australian life, including education, the arts, the environment and urban planning [2], foreign affairs and Indigenous affairs. The three years of the Whitlam government also triggered initiatives that were to have a profound effect on Australia's museums for the rest of the century and beyond.

Australia in the early 1970s had gone through a period of great change. A 1967 referendum had recognised Indigenous Australians as citizens in their own country. The Vietnam War and subsequent immigration of refugees focused attention on Asia and began to change the country's ethnic mix. The Australian National University had become a significant centre for Asia and the Pacific, and was a leader in educating Australians to become fluent in Asian languages. The Whitlam government's early recognition of China generated one of the most generous cultural exchanges that China was to negotiate with any western country, ultimately contributing to a trade partnership that is vital to Australia's economy today.

Museums of art, science, technology and natural history had existed in state capital cities since the nineteenth century, and a number of smaller museums and galleries contributed to the life of some larger regional cities and towns. While state galleries had hosted major international art exhibitions episodically in the past, most museums had seen their own exhibitions as almost permanent public displays. Staff concentrated on collections and their documentation. Most of the state museums had research programs of various kinds, mainly in the areas of natural history and anthropology, but seldom of social history.

The Australian War Memorial in Canberra commemorated the nation's loss of life in foreign wars and portrayed the heroism of Australian soldiers. Australian history and nation building had meanwhile begun to emerge as a special subject in schools and universities. Previously social history – the comings and goings of ordinary Australians – was seldom addressed in Australian schools, universities or museums, although many small collections of machinery, equipment, fashion items and domestic paraphernalia were assembled in towns throughout Australia, and daily life in the country and the city was being photographed and painted. Australian inventions and creations were not considered as significant as those produced elsewhere. Children learned of generals, politicians and explorers, but not of the achievements of immigrants, of Aboriginal peoples, or of conflicts on Australian soil.

A national collection, consisting primarily of portraits and landscapes by Australian artists, had been assembled incrementally for a long-discussed National Gallery, and a site had been chosen in 1970. However, the nation's capital still had no national museum of any discipline other than the Australian Institute of Anatomy.

The relationship of museums in Australia with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders for more than 150 years failed to recognise the validity of different peoples with distinctive cultures. This unfortunately positioned museums as an instrumental agent of the dominant white population derived from Europe that had settled the land without any regard for prior ownership and occupation. Museum collectors obtained artefacts and cultural material, including secret and sacred items such as stone tjuringas. Worse still, human remains were obtained, often from graves, and skulls and other skeletal material and soft body tissue were sent to museums in Europe and America. Such practices regarded Indigenous peoples as 'primitive'; a number of museums publicly

displayed human remains, and disparate artefacts were densely arrayed in glass cases as late as the 1960s.

Computers and information technology had not yet begun to impact every facet of the life of museums. Documentation of collections often depended upon bound registers collating handwritten information, utilising small cards on which information might be typewritten. Curators were expected to mount exhibitions, care for the collections and conduct research; when resources permitted, they published catalogues for exhibitions. Boards governing museums had substantial control over collections and programs. Funding was almost entirely from government sources, and bureaucratic control was exercised through the department of the relevant minister. Politically, state governments exercised much of the power concerning domestic matters; the Commonwealth had only recently undertaken developmental initiatives on behalf of the arts, as it had previously done in tertiary education.

The Pigott Report (1975)

A Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, chaired by businessman Peter Pigott, was commissioned in 1974 to review museums of all kinds. The Committee's far-sighted and significant vision for museums in its 1975 report was an overarching one, addressing the need for new museums, new emphases, new initiatives and new training courses.

The Pigott Report was delivered in 1975, only days before Governor-General Sir John Kerr dismissed the Whitlam government. The Report nevertheless survives as one of the most important documents on the state of any country's museums. *Museums in Australia 1975* took a broad view, confronting the entire range of issues facing museums, from collections in cramped and appalling conditions to opportunities to excite visitors and encourage inquiry and understanding. 'As places of education, museums have unusual but rarely defined advantages', it argued, as they are able to instruct and entertain a great diversity of people and provide an immediacy to the real thing through dispensing with the 'layers of interpretation which, in most media, separate an object or evidence from the audience'. [3]

Amongst the aims of museums highlighted in the Report, several advocated for the museum experience as a dynamic engagement with the public:

- Museums should classify and arrange their exhibits with boldness and caution, conscious that a way of arranging knowledge can be illuminating in one era and stultifying in another era.
- Museums should satisfy curiosity and arouse curiosity.
- Museums should educate formally and informally.
- Museums should extend the frontlines of knowledge ... and enable curious spectators to visit those frontlines and understand how some of the battles to extend knowledge are fought. [4]

This approach to the educational aims of museums recognised the learning experience in ways that – even today – are sometimes challenged or ignored by critics who are unaware of the advances made in understanding the nature of learning, the nature of the museum visit, or the role of informal learning institutions such as museums, zoos and libraries in social development.

'In Australia', the Report observed, 'governments too often accept museums as institutions where the second-best will succeed'. [5] Museums needed to work together; they would not survive and reach their potential without a shared approach to basic ground rules and policies endorsed at a national level. Thus the most important recommendation of the Committee was that an Australian Museums Commission – comparable bodies existed in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom – be established to foster the development of museums in Australia.

The Pigott Committee recommended a number of new national museums, especially a 'Museum of Australia' to be constructed in Canberra, focusing on three themes or galleries: 'Aboriginal man in Australia'; 'European man in Australia'; and 'the Australian environment and its interaction with the two named themes'. An early Planning Committee for a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia had recommended that a separate institute be established. The Pigott Committee, while strongly supporting the concept, questioned the practicability of separate administrative arrangements. [6]

The Committee also recommended establishment of a National Maritime Museum in Sydney, an aviation museum in a growth centre such as Albury-Wodonga, and a Gallery or Museum of

Australian Biography within Canberra's Parliamentary Triangle.

The Committee meanwhile found that the deterioration of existing collections in Australian museums had reached crisis point, and recommended that a Cultural Materials Conservation Institute be created to study and communicate ways of preventing the deterioration of fragile and perishable objects in the Australian climate. [7]

Addressing the international context, the Pigott Report further expressed concern about the unregulated export of particular items of Australia's cultural heritage.

The Pigott Committee covered a number of other important issues, including the growth of small local and regional museums and regional galleries of art, the nature of research in museums, and the role of curators in research as opposed to exhibition activities. The Report also referred to the lack of attention given to Australian history, and the future of biological collections held by various Commonwealth government departments.

In subsequent decades Australia's cultural life was transformed through a variety of different events and initiatives, and the Report must today be viewed in its historical context. The Committee could not have envisaged many of the factors that have subsequently shaped Australia's museums. However, fulfilling the vision of the Report, the Australian National Maritime Museum was eventually built in Sydney, opening in 1988; the National Museum of Australia finally opened in Canberra in 2001 to coincide with the Centenary of Federation; and a provisional National Portrait Gallery [8] was established in Old Parliament House after the completion of the new Parliament building in 1988. A handsome new purpose-designed building for the National Portrait Gallery opened alongside the National Gallery on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin late in 2009.

The introduction in 1978 of the Commonwealth Government's Tax Incentives for the Arts scheme provided tax deductions for the full value of gifts to museums and libraries, bringing valuable additions to collections throughout Australia. The export of significant cultural heritage was addressed by the Australian government's ratification of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting the Illegal Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. [9]

Art museums and the Australia Council

The Whitlam government's substantial expansion of the role and funding of the Australian Council for the Arts – focused on the performing arts under previous governments – had an immediate and enduring effect on art museums that was unparalleled elsewhere in the museums sector. Boards for Aboriginal Arts, Visual Arts and Crafts all initiated policies and programs that impacted on museums. For decades the state art museums had been represented on one of the few Australian government bodies concerned with aspects of museums – the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board. This body's transformation into a board of the Australian Council for the Arts (later the Australia Council) in 1972 prepared the way for unprecedented Commonwealth support for Australia's art museums.

The Council's Visual Arts Board (VAB) [10] inherited some of the functions of the former Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, aside from the building of a national collection for the ultimate establishment of a National Gallery.

The Visual Arts Board's priority in the 1970s was designing diverse programs of support for the work of Australian artists. The VAB also took over the role of 'the mounting of Australian exhibitions to tour internationally and co-operation with State galleries in bringing outstanding overseas exhibitions to Australia'. [11] The development of art museums across Australia – especially of regional art museums – expanded the collection of work by living Australian artists, while publication grants generated catalogues that museums could previously ill afford. Meanwhile initiatives of the new Australia Council's Aboriginal Arts Board located arts and crafts advisers in Indigenous communities across the country, initiating a process that ultimately took Indigenous artists on national and international trajectories.

The Visual Arts Board's recommendations to the Australian government led to regional art museums eventually being established in Burnie, Devonport, Townsville, Wollongong, and to an expanded Newcastle Region Gallery, although by the time a number of these projects came to fruition the incoming Fraser government had passed the responsibility for capital funding to the states.

Grants through VAB support programs to assist purchase of works for public collections, together with grants for exhibitions, provided additional encouragement to art museums and non-collecting art galleries across the country.

In at least one field, a Visual Arts Board funding initiative went far beyond benefiting art museums. The Board recognised 'the dearth of people qualified to do conservation work', and in 'the absence of any other national body with a similar concern', and acknowledging a position considered 'to be in the nature of a national emergency', [12] the Board funded the attendance of 20 interstate delegates to attend the First National Seminar on the Conservation of Cultural Material, held in Perth in August 1973. Other grants funded overseas travel by conservators. However, support for conservation was still minimal in the face of the critical national situation regarding collections subsequently described in the Pigott Report two years later.

With funding from the VAB, the Australian Gallery Director's Council (AGDC) transformed its exhibition co-ordinating role and became a not-for-profit entity. The AGDC drew in regional art museums across the country, expanding the long-standing cooperative domain of state gallery directors. By 1979 the AGDC was touring more than 60 national and international exhibitions to both metropolitan and regional venues, visited by approximately 1.5 million people. [13] This was the first of a succession of exhibition touring agencies established with Australian government funding.

Exhibitions development for Australian audiences was a key platform of the Visual Arts Board. With new skills in exhibition coordination still needing development, the Board became the 'organising museum' for a number of exhibitions in the 1970s. Building on the Australian government's policy of not insuring its property, the Australia Council was instrumental in initiating the government's revolutionary indemnity scheme – in lieu of prohibitive insurance premiums – for a US\$70 million exhibition, *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse*, assembled specifically for Australia by New York's Museum of Modern Art.

This indemnity agreement paved the way for an extensive application of government indemnity that would, by the end of the century, reach the level of indemnifying one billion dollars' worth of touring exhibitions in the country at any one time. In subsequent years the demand for exhibition indemnity stimulated the development of state schemes. In 2010 the Australian government replaced what had become the Art Indemnity Australia program with the Australian Government International Exhibitions Insurance Program, in which a budget of eight million dollars extended over four years was available for purchasing commercial insurance for exhibitions with a minimum value of AUD\$50 million.

This Australian government impetus in the 1970s to support the expanding momentum of exhibitions, together with the highly publicised development of the National Gallery in the 1980s, inspired state governments to fund new museum buildings and major extensions, and support expanded programs and operations, together with new public amenities such as restaurants, cafés and larger museum stores. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, funding of art museums by the states had grown well beyond anything originally envisaged by the Australia Council.

Despite its primary emphasis on art-forms development and support for artists, the Australia Council continues to support the research, mounting and touring of exhibitions, and provides core support for a number of key Australian art institutions that focus on exhibiting and supporting contemporary Australian art.

A national policy for museums

Successive governments have failed to adopt the recommendation of the Pigott Report that a Museums Commission be established, or put any alternative support system in place. [14] The absence of a national policy for museums, as recommended by the Pigott Committee, was illustrated by the 1989 report published by the Commonwealth Department of Finance, *What Price Heritage?* The review focused on the increased expenditure on Commonwealth-run museums – an increase attributed in part to the part played by the Pigott Report in raising expectations [15] – and sought to establish performance indicators through comparisons with major museums in the states. Through an elaborate analysis of the ratio between total floor area, exhibition area, total staff, recurrent expenditure, and cost per visitor, the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery, the nascent National Museum and the National Maritime Museum (under construction at the time) were compared with a number of vastly different museums. It was nearly two years before the Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories (DASET) – a minor voice in

the preparation of the *What Price Heritage?* report – demolished the underlying methodology used by the Department of Finance in a 1990 Report entitled *What Value Heritage?* However, the earlier report had already concluded that museums should be more entrepreneurial; that the National Maritime Museum should be primarily an exhibiting institution; that the National Museum building should be deferred for five years; that a management review of the National Gallery would precede any consideration of the Gallery's resources; and that there would be no new Commonwealth museums, nor assistance for national museums proposed by the states. [16]

Most museums, meanwhile, were well established as primarily the responsibility of state and local governments. Agreement on creating a truly representative body lay with the periodic meetings of the state arts and culture ministers. This body established the Australian Libraries and Information Council in September 1981. However, a succession of approaches to the Commonwealth and to state governments by professional museums associations during the 1980s was unsuccessful in gaining support for an equivalent national body for museums.

In the early 1990s the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC), after meeting with representatives of the Council of Australian Museum Associations (CAMA, representing all major types of museums and professional groups) agreed to establish a Heritage Collections Working Group (HCWG); libraries and archives were included on the Committee. The focus was to be on collections; other functions of museums, such as exhibitions, education, audience development and research, were not included in the brief.

By 1996 the HCWG had evolved into the Heritage Collections Council (HCC), which developed specific programs to build a national database for heritage items and a national collection conservation program. Programs to enhance exhibitions development were subsumed within the Australian government's establishment of the Visions of Australia program in 1998, to tour heritage collection material in mostly small exhibitions around the regions and metropolitan areas. Major museums contributed financially to the HCC's work and meetings through Museums Australia, the professional association that had evolved from the amalgamation of a number of museums associations nationally. All governments also contributed funds in support of HCC objectives.

By the time of the 1998 International Council of Museums (ICOM) Triennial Assembly and Conference in Melbourne, the HCC's work on the Australian Museums on Line (AMOL) project included information on more than 350,000 objects of all kinds, encompassing 1006 Australian museums and galleries. *The National Conservation and Preservation Strategy for Australia's Heritage Collections* and *re-Collections* publication were both well advanced, and a set of practical guidebooks for use principally by people other than conservators working with Australia's cultural heritage had been achieved. The latter publication was available for professional development workshops and constituted a ready reference tool to assist museum conservators.

In 2000 the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) commissioned Deakin University to undertake a 'Key Needs Study' that identified the next steps in coordinating Australian museum collections at a national level. The outcome was the 2004 establishment of the Collections Council of Australia (CCA) – amongst other things – to 'develop long term strategies to address issues facing our collections'. The CCA was promoted as the 'peak body' for the 'collections sector', encompassing four domains: archives, galleries, libraries and museums. Two separate councils of museum directors, one of art museums and one of other museums (CAAMD and CAMD), were represented on the governing council, as were libraries and archives. Its board, however, did not include a representative of Museums Australia. The small staff of the Collections Council commenced work in 2005; various submissions were made to government agencies and sector-wide meetings organised. A first national CCA-organised 'summit' was held in Adelaide in August 2008, on museums and digitisations of collections. [17]

The decision by the Cultural Ministers Council in October 2009 to cease funding of the Collections Council put back 20 years the development of a national policy for the distributed national collection comprising the collections of the museums of Australia. Australia, along with Canada, remains one of the few developed nations with no national body concerned with a national policy on museums. (Interestingly, Canada has no national education policy either.) Thus, in spite of all these initiatives specifically focused on collections – not least through financial contributions by museums themselves to the Heritage Collections Council's work – a broad national policy for Australia's museums has meanwhile continued to be an elusive goal.

Responding to a rapidly changing society

Over the last 35 years museums have strengthened their collection management, their programs and their scholarship. They have initiated a hugely escalated range of temporary and special exhibitions. There has been increased emphasis on engaging with communities, including Indigenous peoples, and in the 1990s museums began to return some of the most precious Indigenous cultural material to the communities from whence the material came as well as repatriate ancestral remains to source communities. Some museums have taken public stands on environmental issues, especially those relating to biodiversity, and on arguments about evolutionary theory.

Museums Australia, the amalgamated professional body representing museums and museum professionals established in 1994, has continued to serve the sector nationally – especially drawing together regionally dispersed and small museums across state borders. However its primary source of Australian government funding – through the Australia Council – ceased in 1999–2000.

A most dramatic change in Australian museums over recent decades has been in the areas of the visitor experience and learning, and in public participation and access – especially as facilitated by the growth of information technology. There have also been important developments in the portrayal of Australian society in its increasing diversity, and in the fundamental place of Indigenous Australians within this picture. However, the contribution that museums can make to teaching and learning in fields such as history, science and technology is yet to be fully realised.

A number of universities introduced museum studies courses during the 1980s. As is the case in many countries, tension remains between the museums community and universities as to the most appropriate courses and content for museum training.

Collection management issues have received substantial attention, although gains in widespread common access to linked collection information have not progressed to the extent they should have for a variety of reasons.

Museums have changed and greatly diversified the ways they develop exhibitions. Specialists from many disciplines and backgrounds – from fabrication and building through design, education, marketing, finance and sponsorship – now form project-style teams to realise finely honed exhibitions and associated publications. This has meant that, at least in the field of exhibitions, curators no longer have the sole driving position that they once exercised. While there have been fluctuations and differences in the attention given to scholarship, those museums that have developed active public programs have generally also continued – in many cases even augmented – their support for scholarship.

Museum professionals have increasingly found themselves faced with significant shifts in the structure and funding of their institutions; some have not been in a position to provide the appropriate leadership for change, or even been equipped to do so. As museums have raised more and more of their capital and recurrent funding from sources other than their sponsoring government, often commercial business organisations or granting agencies, they have effectively become public-private partnership institutions, although governance arrangements seldom reflect this important shift in structural orientation.

Since the 1990s many senior museum professionals have taken specialised short courses in leadership, such as the Museum Leadership Program, sponsored by the Gordon Darling Foundation, and closely associated with the Museum Management Institute (MMI) in Los Angeles (later the Getty Leadership Institute (GLI)), where a number of Australians have also studied in longer residential courses. Others have taken part in tailored courses at the Melbourne Business School at Mt Eliza, while some have undertaken a variety of university graduate courses in management. Nevertheless, governance, leadership and management have often remained alien fields at a crucial time of change when museum professionals should be steering institutional and public debates and projecting policies, ethics, codes of conduct and frameworks of governance designed specifically for museums (and for particular institutional needs), rather than passively accepting policies inappropriately borrowed from business or other not-for-profit fields.

Art museums have for the most part been entrepreneurial since the 1970s, especially in relation to exhibition sponsorship and philanthropic gifts, financial and in-kind. Exhibitions in art museums have been one of the main inspirations for extensive public learning programs, the unprecedented growth in membership bodies, and in volunteers working across diverse departments and programming of museums. These changes have assisted art museums immeasurably in public positioning, in achieving expanded facilities and generally warding off savage budget cuts.

Education and learning

As mentioned earlier, where there has been any national attention paid to museums as a 'sector' in Australia, it has tended to focus on collections and exhibitions rather than other crucial aspects of museums' policies and programs such as education, community engagement and public programs. This perhaps reflects the long-established role the states have played in school education generally, and also the fact that museum education programs had traditionally been oriented to supporting school curricula, while 'education' in museums has expanded to develop new and mature audiences, and take on more experimental roles.

Australian museums, along with museums elsewhere, have participated in research projects that have clarified the potential of museums to contribute to lifelong learning. The notion that museums can determine directly what is learned during a museum visit is being challenged. [18] Prior knowledge and experiences elsewhere are seen to relate directly to motivation for and expectations of a museum visit. Even though what is sought and what is learned may be very personal, this is still a very vital kind of learning. The fact that visitors can exercise considerable choice and control over what they see significantly increases the likelihood that they will find exhibitions and programs that are intellectually and emotionally appropriate for them.

Museums have deepened and broadened their understandings of the museum visitor, moving from simply collecting demographics which revealed little more than such observations that better educated and socio-economically advantaged people are more likely to visit museums, to catering for a diversity of interests and working to provide involving experiences based on substantial and regularly updated knowledge of the nature and reason for a visit.

Australian history

Major museums in Australia have only recently come to terms with social history, the stories of ordinary people as opposed to politicians, explorers and war heroes. Stories of contact between successive waves of immigrants and Australia's original inhabitants have been increasingly researched and portrayed, as have stories of immigrants other than those from Britain and Ireland. Museums dedicated to migrants and their experiences have been established in Adelaide and Melbourne, while a 'virtual' Migration Heritage Centre for capturing immigrant experiences has been established in Sydney.

Many state museums now have extensive programs on a diversity of historical themes and people, and have learned to address (and include) contestation of their representations of the past. The National Museum's opening exhibition of frontier conflict, incorporating oral history, drew criticism from some members of the Museum's Council, although subsequent reviews found no evidence of systematic bias.

There is also contestation at a regional museum level. Peter Hiscock, a past director of Sovereign Hill open air museum in Ballarat, wrote about depicting the Eureka Stockade, when gold miners engaged in violent armed struggle with soldiers on the goldfields, '... an attempt to write anything about the Eureka Rebellion is akin to scratching an ant's nest. Once disturbed, a horde of local historians emerge to bite one another's bottoms. There are many experts.' [19]

Museums and Indigenous peoples

In 1978 UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) sponsored a pivotal seminar, entitled 'Preserving Indigenous Cultures', in Adelaide, an event that brought together anthropologists and archaeologists, museum curators and Indigenous peoples from Australia and the Pacific. Organised by Robert Edwards (then Director of the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council), this gathering resulted in a number of important recommendations addressing principles and ethics concerning Indigenous people's cultural heritage management that were addressed to the Australian National Commission of UNESCO. [20] 'The seminar recognised the rights of Indigenous peoples to pursue their own traditional lifestyle by retaining and developing their own cultural traditions.' [21] Knowledgeable custodians who held the respect of their people and continued to live their traditions were recognised as the determining, dynamic force in the preservation of cultures, and it was established that museums should give priority to those custodians in exercising their role and customary practices without restriction or interference.

The Museums Association of Australia (MAA) conveyed the UNESCO seminar's recommendations to directors of major state museums concerned with anthropology. State directors generally responded favourably to the recommendations, although some made the observation that these

had already been museum policy for some time. The Australian Museum reported its adoption of a policy of return of human remains specifically, while another museum emphasised scientific values and proposed to return collection items only where a proof of 'undeniable claim of ownership' existed. [22]

The Australian Museum already had a well-established policy of return of significant cultural material to peoples of the Pacific and North America. This had led by 1988 to returns of material agreed through discussion with cultural representatives internationally. A number of museums were meanwhile moving well beyond previous practices, and meeting with Aboriginal peoples and discussing with them their cultural material and its place in the museum's programs. A leader in this development was the South Australian Museum in its dealings with Pititjantjara people.

Through substantial and wide-ranging consultative discussions, the Council of Australian Museum Associations (CAMA) meanwhile developed a policy to guide all museums in their dealings with Indigenous peoples. *Previous Possessions, New Obligations* (PPNO), released in two stages in 1993, addressed all aspects of museum practice from collections management through to exhibition development, employment and governance. This policy also acknowledged that Indigenous peoples had primary rights in respect of control and interpretation of their culture, although there were multiple interests engaged in ownership of cultural property. PPNO supported 'the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination in respect of cultural heritage matters' and the essentiality of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in management of collections and information, and their use in the public programs and communication of museums, including exhibitions, education and publications'. A complementary resolution was passed by the CAMA meeting of December 1993, on the eve of Museums Australia's emergence the following year in January 1994. PPNO was subsequently revised and republished as *Continuing Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities*. [23]

By the late 1990s, every major museum in Australia had redeveloped its collection display on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, often through extensive consultation with Indigenous peoples themselves. Many of these collection-based exhibitions also addressed controversial issues such as frontier conflict, Indigenous imprisonment and removal of children from their parents. All heightened recognition of the richness of Indigenous cultures and the rights of people to their beliefs and traditional practices, as well as appropriate recognition of their contributions within the larger Australian mainstream of social development.

Following the adoption and publication of PPNO, the Australian government provided financial support to have a Museums Australia Standing Committee review requests for grants to Indigenous groups, to develop plans for requests and receipt of cultural material returned from museum collections. The Australian government itself meanwhile pursued the return of significant Indigenous material held internationally, especially skeletal remains and associated material in collections in overseas museums. Museums in Australia embarked on a continuing process and a series of returns, in some cases through extensive collaboration, both across the museums sector and through building increasing networks of ongoing collaboration with Indigenous communities.

Museums, including art museums, continued to acquire significant Indigenous artworks, and increasing attention was given to diverse short-term and special exhibitions. Vigorous programs of such exhibitions were in place by the late 1980s. Meanwhile Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people began to be employed in museums in responsible positions concerned with collections and exhibitions development.

Science and technology

Recent decades have seen unprecedented developments in science and technology, from space exploration, medical research and genetics to biodiversity studies. Research has generated greater focus on such issues within education generally. Reviews of science education, including through museums and science centres, identified the need for natural history museums to be supported to document biodiversity.

The rising concern for knowledge of science and technology, and well-documented claims that improvements in education in these disciplines were needed, helped drive a demand for science centres. The success of the Exploratorium established in 1979 by Frank Oppenheimer in the Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, resulted in science centres springing up in other countries, including Australia's National Science Centre, Questacon, sponsored in part by the Japanese government as part of the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations.

Similar science centres were developed in a number of cities around Australia. They proclaimed that they were 'minds on' as well as 'hands on' by comparison with the 'static and unchanging' regular museum displays with which almost everyone was familiar. Science centres were new and they did not hold collections. The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney opened a number of science exhibition displays based on the science centre model, while the Museum of Victoria developed a new branch facility, 'Scienceworks', located in an industrial suburb of Melbourne. Other museums also developed exhibitions based on this interpretative model of engaging with scientific phenomena, involving the employment of 'explainers' within exhibitions and helping visitors to gain insights from their experience. Smaller science centres gradually opened in a number of regional centres, but twenty years later most of these had closed.

Museums and the natural environment

Most state museums in Australia, even if also collecting history, technology, art and craft, were long-standing centres for the collection of natural history specimens and for research on the natural environment (excluding plants, dealt with by botanic gardens).

Larger natural history museums, meanwhile, assisted in management of their collections by the rapid expansion of computer technologies, cooperated with each other and with Australian government agencies in making advances in mapping previous and present distributions of the nation's fauna. Through the funding of the Australian Biological Resources Study, established originally in 1974, complete catalogues of Australian fauna (and flora) were commenced.

Some museums also staged exhibitions addressing environmental issues, and advocated a greater concern with government measures to protect biological diversity and Australian landscapes and habitats on a national basis.

As more attention was given to collection management, natural history museums abandoned their reliance on research-trained curators who also had direct responsibility for collection management. Museums now appointed collection managers, many of whom gradually acquired advanced postgraduate degrees to enhance their standing in a highly tuned institutional research environment.

Information technology and social media

The proliferation of information technology has been amongst the most significant developments in museums in recent decades. At first gains were made in electronic recording of information about collections, although arguments about which categories of information should be included or excluded seemed interminable. Such advances paralleled those already being accomplished in digitisation of library and archive collections.

In almost every museum, the capacity of computers to manipulate large data sets and provide random access, and to store and manipulate images, revolutionised collection management. Efforts were made, promoted by the HCC and later by other bodies, to integrate the independent data formats of different museums to allow federated access to information about collections in all museums through a single portal. Visions of children in classrooms being able to access the images of objects in museum collections and information about them were promoted. Art museums, history museums and natural history museums faced similar challenges.

Greater progress in digitisation of collections has been made with some types of collections than others, and arguments about proprietary rights to certain information in state natural history museums have led to little information on animals being universally available. Meanwhile the National Library, through electronic feeds from cooperating art museums, as well as archives, libraries and some museums and history and heritage organisations, provides a huge collection of images for public access. Digitisation of images, adoption of standards for content management, digital asset management and query protocols have become essential management tools for all advanced museums today.

Every substantial museum now has its own website, some providing information not only about purposes, scope, history, collections, programs and of course its shop facilities, but also access to the collections themselves, sometimes including virtual tours of exhibitions. In recent years information technology has allowed more flexible access to the diverse ways that users access information about individual collection items. This has led to virtual visitors contributing new or revised information about items in collections.

The increasing availability of technology allowing transformation of digital information over radio and cable to hand-held devices – personal digital assistants (PDAs) – soon led to exhibition tours being available on museum websites and in museum exhibitions. ‘The watchword in planning the museum tour would be “Design for Experience, Not for Hardware”. [24] Software today assists visitors to capture images and record their own impressions about objects in museums and thereby construct their own tour – even their own virtual exhibitions. All of this has led to decreasing control by the museums community of how visitors utilise or access museums, their collections and their information. Although some museum professionals have expressed concern about this loss of control, the reality is that, in learning terms, the museum and its staff never did have the control they presumed that they had.

Museums that have taken advantage of these new technologies now encourage actual and virtual visitors to collaborate with each other, seeking contributions – through ‘crowd sourcing’ – of commentary and imagery to develop new interpretations and even promotions. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter encourage social networking and exchanges of views, and sometimes advance independent initiatives and discussion amongst interested people and specialised cohorts within the broader community.

Governance, funding and management

Museums in Australia, by and large, are still substantially government-funded. Originally established by colonial and state governments, they were governed by boards of trustees from their conception. Staff members were meanwhile subject to Public Service conditions of employment. In the 1960s it was common for board members to be appointed for their knowledge of one of the museum’s disciplines. Since the 1970s, however, board members have increasingly been appointed for their presumed knowledge – through business and other backgrounds – of how organisations should be run; or they are considered to be potentially useful in raising funds from the private sector.

It is now clear, however, through studies both of museums internationally and in Australia, that better performing museums are those where the executive has strong domain knowledge, and where there is at least a reasonable degree of separation from government through substantial delegation of responsibilities to shape resource allocation and performance. [25]

Changes in museum governance and management in recent decades have tended to reflect the adoption of perceived business practices by governments themselves. This certainly has resulted in greater accountability and transparency. However, it also carried the expectation that museums would readily make the transition to earning more of their own funds annually, even yielding ‘efficiency dividends’. Successive reductions in government allocations, however, have periodically increased pressures on museums to cut core operational budgets and develop alternative funding resources privately. Some governments determined that general admission charges should be imposed, leading to a decline in visitor numbers. Gradually, however, decisions regarding admission charges became the responsibility of museums themselves and the response has tended towards free admission, limiting entry charges to major exhibitions while also generating revenue-earning services.

Museum professionals have steadily become more highly trained over four decades, not only in the various museum disciplines and education, but also in new fields of specialisation such as management, conservation, collection management, communications, public programming, marketing and merchandising. There has been a greater employment of project teams to address new objectives. Organisational structures have tended to evolve steadily in response to management practice changes in the corporate sector, in government, and in universities – for example, incorporating additional levels of managers who may or may not have specialised ‘domain knowledge’. These changes often provide critical new sources of administrative support where needed. However there are accompanying dangers in distancing museum directors and senior managers from the core roles of museums in their mission and in their responsibilities for upholding public trust, on which the enduring community service and civic values of museums depend critically.

Footnotes

¹ *Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia* (the Piggott Report), AGPS, Canberra, 1975, p.5.

- ² The 1974 *Report on the National Estate* (the Hope Report) made recommendations on immovable heritage.
- ³ Pigott Report, p. 12.
- ⁴ Pigott Report, p. 6.
- ⁵ Pigott Report, p. 6.
- ⁶ Pigott Report, p. 4.
- ⁷ Pigott Report, p. 3.
- ⁸ The Pigott Report recommended a Museum of Australian Biography
- ⁹ Australia announced in 1983 that it would become a party to the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 14 November 1970 (generally referred to as the 1970 UNESCO Convention) and the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act of 1986 gave effect to the Convention. Australia notified UNESCO of its 'agreement' to be a party to the Convention in October 1989: it was the 64th nation to do so.
- ¹⁰ Three of the 11 founding members of the Council's Visual Arts Board were museum directors; another was a member of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art in New York; and a further member (a consultant member appointed by the Board) and the founding Board director were subsequently directors of major art museums.
- ¹¹ *Australian Council for the Arts First Annual Report 1973*, Australian Council for the Arts, Sydney, 1974.
- ¹² *Australian Council for the Arts Report 1973*, pp. 85–86.
- ¹³ *Australian Gallery Directors Council Report and Review 1979*, p. 7. This body went into liquidation in 1980.
- ¹⁴ A personal account of the development of policies for museums in Australia is available at 'Museums in Australia from Pigott to Carroll' (<http://desgriffin.com/essays-2/pigott-intro/>).
- ¹⁵ *What Price Heritage?*, Department of Finance, Canberra, 1989, p. 3.
- ¹⁶ *What Price Heritage?*, p. 12.
- ¹⁷ The CMC notified the withdrawal of support for the Collections Council in late 2009.
- ¹⁸ See *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, John H Falk and Lynn D Dierking, Altamira, Walnut Creek CA, 2000.
- ¹⁹ Peter Hiscock, 'Look into my eyes – read my lips: people facing people', paper presented at the Museums Australia Conference: Fringe Benefits: community, culture and communication, Albury, May 1999, quoted by Andrew Simpson, 'What mattered then, what matters now', *Museums Australia Magazine* 18 (1), September 2009, p. 21.
- ²⁰ Robert Edwards and Jenny Stewart (eds), *Preserving Indigenous Cultures: a new role for museums*, AGPS, Canberra, 1980.
- ²¹ Seminar Recommendations, in Edwards and Stewart, *Preserving Indigenous Cultures*, p. 9.
- ²² Correspondence with Museums Association President Professor Barry Reynolds and CAMD members, November 1980 through February 1981, CAMD Archives, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, consulted February 2010.
- ²³ Museums Australia, Canberra.
- ²⁴ Peter Samis, 'Visual Velcro: hooking the visitor', *Museum News*, November/December 2007, pp. 57–62, 68–73).
- ²⁵ Des Griffin, 'Advancing museums', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 23(1), pp. 43–61, 2008; Edmund Capon, Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, said, 'I don't care what anybody says about all these layers of accountability, administration, financial and legal expertise it is said we need to run an art museum, I say rubbish. The only thing you really need is your curatorial credibilities, commonsense and the

will. The amount of jargon and rubbish that's talked about museum management is enough to, well ignore it. You don't study being the director of a museum, you do it.', Lyndall Crisp, 'Director's Pluck – Capon masterminded rebirth of Gallery', *Australian Financial Review*, 27 November 2003.

Des Griffin AM is currently Gerard Krefft Memorial Fellow, Australian Museum, an honorary position commemorating one of the early directors of the Museum.

Leon Parroisien AM is the Chair of Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design in Sydney.

Cite as: Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien, 2011, 'Museums in Australia: from a new era to a new century', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/DGriffin_LParoissien_2011a.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Issues in museology

'The orphans of government': The Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (The Pigott Report), 1974–75

by Anne-Marie Condé

In May 1965 the *Australian* published a feature article on historic preservation in Australia by journalist and poet Max Harris. He noted that 'a vast national folk museum, preferably in Canberra' had been suggested, 'to enshrine Australia's past'. Harris declared himself not in favour of the idea. Public finance, he said, should be kept in the hands of people in the states and in regional centres, many of them volunteers, who had already done so much to develop a sense of national historical consciousness. 'Keep Canberra's dead hand off the relics of Australia's past', he begged. [1]

And yet less than 10 years later, in April 1974, the Australian government established a Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections. The museum sector, including the Museums Association of Australia, had been lobbying for it for years. Clearly there was a belief that Canberra did have a role to play in the museum field. In announcing the committee, Special Minister of State Lionel Bowen noted that, despite great public interest and dedicated service, the development of museums and collections had been piecemeal, and valuable collections were at great risk. Moreover, there was no institution committed to telling 'the story of Australia to Australians'. The new committee would give particular attention to the establishment of a national museum, 'not as a storehouse of things dead and past', but a 'living, dynamic institution'. [2]

This government was, of course, the Whitlam Labor government; one deeply committed to nation-building projects based on heritage. There was already in train a Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate, headed by Justice RM Hope. Bowen suggested to his Cabinet colleagues in relation to the museums inquiry that, beyond the cause of advancing knowledge and the spread of education in the longer term, the Inquiry would 'provide a positive focus now for our growing national feeling.' It would be, he added, a 'move symbolic of the "new nationalism"'. [3]

A committee with broad experience was appointed. Its chairman, Peter Pigott, was a Sydney businessman who also held positions with the National Parks and Wildlife Foundation and similar organisations. His fellow committee members were Frank Talbot, Director of the Australian Museum; Geoffrey Blainey, Professor of Economic History at the University of Melbourne; RW Boswell, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission; Mrs Andrew Clayton, Member of the Executive Board of the National Parks and Wildlife Foundation; John Mulvaney, Professor of Pre-History at The Australian National University; DF Waterhouse, Chief of the Division of Entomology at CSIRO, FJ Waters, ex-General President of the Amalgamated Postal Workers' Union of Australia; and EE Payne, who was seconded from the Department of the Special Minister of State to act as Executive Member. [4]

John Mulvaney headed a separate planning committee to investigate a 'Gallery of Aboriginal Australia'. The reports of the two committees were tabled and published together.

The Committee of Inquiry's Terms of Reference were:

- . to advise on the scope, objectives and functions of an Australia Institute to develop, co-ordinate and foster collections, research and displays of historical, cultural and scientific material of national significance, giving particular attention to its relationship with Government and other institutions;
- . to recommend steps to establish such an institute;
- . in relation to the Australian Government's direct field of responsibility and interest, to recommend measures which should be taken in the immediate future to:
 - a. improve collection and conservation facilities for national material, with particular attention to research needs and training;
 - b. ensure effective co-ordination of the Australian Government's activities in this field;

- c. institute new developments and institutions, with particular attention to the establishment of a national museum of history in Canberra;
- d. to recommend longer term measures in the field of museums and collections, with particular attention to the Australian Government's role in relation to state, local government and institutional authorities. [5]

The committee met formally 17 times, and visited 69 Australian collecting and exhibiting organisations. Members travelling overseas visited many other centres in the United States and Mexico, and the United Kingdom and Europe. Its members read over 400 public submissions and commissioned seven consultants to report on selected Australian museums outside metropolitan areas. The committee was supported by a Canberra-based secretariat which operated firstly at East Block in Parkes, and later at Mining Industry House on Northbourne Avenue. The committee's Report was based in part on background papers written by its members and by the secretariat. Peter Pigott credited Geoffrey Blainey as the Report's editor. [6]

The committee's investigations extended from Australian government and state museums, collections and galleries to university museums, and local, private and open-air museums. If suspicions were aroused within the museum profession by the fact that only one member of the committee was a full-time museum practitioner, there were benefits. [7] In common with the general public, most committee members would rarely have been behind the scenes in a major museum, and the shock of what they found had a powerful effect on the published Report. Deterioration of collections housed in basements and other storage areas could be acute. Collections spilled out into cellars and corridors, were stacked against external walls and hot water-pipes, and crammed into galvanised iron sheds. Only 10 per cent of museum storage space was temperature controlled. Few museums had the space for conservation laboratories and there were fewer than 10 professionally trained conservators in Australia. The Report is liberally illustrated with photographs contrasting spacious and inviting museum displays – at the Australian War Memorial, for instance – with ghastly storage conditions behind and beneath. The committee recommended the establishment of a Cultural Materials Conservation Institute, and postgraduate training for conservators. [8]

Perhaps the next most striking aspect of the Australian museum sector for the committee was the hundreds of small museums that had been founded in the previous 15 years. This was a 'popular and vigorous grass-roots movement', it thought, arising from a curiosity about everyday life in the past that was not being satisfied by the major state museums. [9] Dozens of these museums made submissions to the inquiry, and dozens more were visited by the committee or surveyed by its consultants, some of whom became weary and footsore in their work. 'The sun never sets on the homespun proliferation of museums throughout the land', one of them reported. [10]

Problems of definition troubled the committee. What could be counted as a museum? Where did the new outdoor 'living history' museums fit into its investigations? [11] The committee did include a discussion of outdoor museums in its Report, drawing largely on the findings of Ann Bickford, a Sydney-based museologist who visited Old Sydney Town and Lachlan Vintage Village for the committee. On the basis of Bickford's scathing views of these places in particular, the committee recommended against government support for outdoor museums such as these unless qualified professionals were engaged as advisors. Likewise, it recommended that regional associations or networks of small museums could provide an effective channel for Australian government support, but only if they were supported by professional curators.

Still, the committee admired the work of the volunteers who 'humbly and generously gave their best' in small museums. These were the people whose work Max Harris had been keen to protect from the 'dead hand of Canberra' in 1965. The committee did indeed urge against imposing any bureaucratic plan to centralise local museums into a 'grand regional museum'. [12]

Many submissions to the committee came from people and organisations advocating the establishment of specialist 'national' museums, especially on aspects of technology and natural history. It recommended just three: a national maritime museum in Sydney, a national aviation museum in a place such as Albury-Wodonga, and a museum of Australian biography in Canberra. [13] Among other major recommendations was legislation protecting shipwrecks along the Australian coast; encouraging the donation of items of national significance to museums and like authorities; and preventing the export of certain kinds of cultural property. The committee's proposal for an 'Australian Museums Commission' as a statutory authority to advise government

and co-ordinate federal expenditure on museums and art galleries was especially ambitious. It had been foreshadowed that such an organisation could be modelled along the lines of the Smithsonian Institution in the United States, but the committee recommended instead that the Commission be independent of the administration of a national museum complex. [14]

Most famously, the committee recommended the establishment of a national museum in Canberra. Its linked themes ought to be the Australian environment, Aboriginal history, and the history of Europeans in Australia. The argument for a major display of Aboriginal history, the committee said, was 'overwhelming', for the era of the white man in Australia had occupied mere moments of time compared to Aboriginal history. However, it believed that a major treatment of the history of Europeans in Australia was also needed. No museum in Australia had attempted it. And rather than duplicate the state museums' natural history collections and exhibitions, the new museum could interpret the natural environment in a different way, to show that 'the history of man in Australia' – Aboriginal and European – 'is tied to natural history' in a 'web of interaction'. [15]

The committee suggested a site for the museum west of Black Mountain, where there would be plenty of space for outdoor exhibition areas and activities, on-site storage, and space for conservation, research, education and parking. '[W]e have taken a long-term view of the museum's development', the committee declared. 'A living museum will never be completed.' [16] However, it took a long time for this museum even to get underway. Its legislation was enacted in 1980, and the building finally opened – not on the site proposed by the committee, but on Acton Peninsula – in 2001.

The Whitlam government fell just days after the Pigott Report was tabled. The ensuing political chaos and financial stringencies had a harsh effect on many of the committee's recommendations. In particular, the 'Australian Museums Commission', that according to Pigott himself was the most immediate and pressing priority, [17] was never established. Moreover, even as the Report was published there was criticism about the expense incurred by the Inquiry's processes. The Pigott Inquiry was said to have cost the taxpayer \$202,476, according to a report in the *Australian*. Peter Pigott snapped back in a letter to the Editor that, in purchasing a copy of the Report, readers would find it 'the best \$3.00 they are likely to spend.' His committee had disbanded, he said, and it was what happened next that mattered. 'Museums in Australia have been the orphans of Government in Australia for 148 years [and] it is time they were adopted and cared for.' [18]

Footnotes

¹ Max Harris, 'History on the Hoof', *Australian*, 1 May 1965, p. 9. This piece is quoted by Stefan Petrow in 'Sanitising or celebrating the past? The Van Diemen's Land Memorial Folk Museum, 1957–2007', *reCollections: journal of the National Museum of Australia*, Vol. 4, No. 2, available at http://reCollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_4_no_2/papers/sanitising_or_celebrating_the_past/ (accessed 17 May 2010).

² 'Statement by the Honourable Lionel Bowen MP, Special Minister of State', 10 April 1974, A7461, 74/135, pp. 2–3. All archival material referred to in this chapter is held by the National Archives of Australia.

³ 'National Collections', Cabinet Submission No. 846, 12 December 1973, A5915, 846, p. 1.

⁴ 'Statement by the Honourable Lionel Bowen MP ...', pp. 1–2.; and Commonwealth of Australia, *Museums in Australia 1975: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1975, [p. iii].

⁵ *Museums in Australia 1975*, p. 1.

⁶ Peter H Pigott, letter to the Editor of the *Australian*, 8 December 1975 (published 11 December 1975), A7461, 74/135.

⁷ [Peter Pigott], 'Notes on the background of the Committee of Inquiry for use in speech at opening of Museums Association Conference' [November 1974], A7461, 74/135, p. 5.

⁸ *Museums in Australia*, p. 41, and recommendations 2.9 and 2.10, p. 3.

⁹ *Museums in Australia*, p. 21 and p. 71.

¹⁰ Frank Strahan, 'Consultant's summary report of a survey of museums in the Albury-Wodonga region, and

of two museum projects in Gippsland', 26 June 1975, A7461, 75/77, p. 5. Frank Strahan was University Archivist at the University of Melbourne.

¹¹ Peter Ryan, 'Folk Museums', paper No. 8, A7461, 75/15 part 1; *Museums in Australia*, p. 7.

¹² *Museums in Australia*, pp. 19–29. See also Anne Bickford's consultant's report, A7461, 75/77. On the Pigott committee's analysis of country museums in Australia, see Anne-Marie Condé, 'A "vigorous cultural movement": the Pigott Inquiry and country museums in Australia, 1975', *reCollections: journal of the National Museum of Australia*, Vol. 6, No. 2, available at http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_6_no_2/papers/vigorous_cultural_movement/ (accessed 14 September 2011).

¹³ *Museums in Australia*, p. 4.

¹⁴ 'National Collections', Cabinet Submission no. 846, 12 December 1973, A5915, 846, p. 3; *Museums in Australia*, p. 57.

¹⁵ *Museums in Australia*, pp. 71–2.

¹⁶ *Museums in Australia*, p. 79.

¹⁷ Telex, Peter H Pigott to Prime Minister, 16 December 1975, A1209, 75/1024, ff.13-14.

¹⁸ Letter to the Editor of the *Australian*, 8 December 1975 (published 11 December 1975), A7461, 74/135. The published letter was edited, and did not include the \$3.00 or the 148 years remarks.

Anne-Marie Condé is a curator at the National Museum of Australia.

Cite as: Anne-Marie Condé, 2011, "The orphans of government": The Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (The Pigott Report), 1974–75', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/AMConde_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Australian Museums and Museology

Conservation in Australian museums

by Ian Cook, Jan Lyall, Colin Pearson and Robyn Sloggett

Introduction

In Australia the concept of conservation can be traced back to 1827 when the Australian Museum in Sydney – the oldest in the country – was established to collect and preserve ‘many rare and curious specimens of Natural History’. [1] However it was not until the 1960s that conservation began to be regarded as a discipline in its own right. It is now a truly interdisciplinary profession strongly informed by cultural context, and with a major scientific element. [2]

Today the role of the conservator is integral to museum management and conservators are engaged with movable, immovable and virtual heritage collections. Many events have led to the incorporation of conservators into mainstream collections management positions. Contributing factors include research, disasters, application of the concept of significance, adoption of risk management strategy, economic factors, enhanced emphasis on access, an increase in the number of loans of important material, travelling exhibitions, and the opportunities and challenges presented by modern technology. Over 600 conservators are now employed in Australia.

Contemporary conservation is perhaps best understood in terms of the following definition:

Conservation: all actions aimed at the safeguarding of cultural material for the future. Its purpose is to study, record, retain and restore the culturally significant qualities of an object with the least possible intervention. [3]

Creating a genuine profession

Appointment of conservators

In 1953 the Art Gallery of New South Wales sent William (Bill) Boustead, then the in-house-trained assistant conservator, overseas to broaden his knowledge and experience. On his return he was appointed as conservator [4] and seven years later commenced his pioneering conservation training program.

Many of Australia’s early conservators including Alan Lloyd, [5] Ian Cook, [6] Allan Byrne, [7] and Chris Payne [8] owe their initial training to Bill Boustead. They have recounted in oral history interviews their tales of Bill’s sometimes radical approach to treatments and his unique teaching methods. Boustead put conservation on a sound footing in Australia. His opinion was respected in government circles in the national capital; when the Arno River flooded in Florence in 1966 he was sent by the Australian government to assist in the recovery process, so placing Australia firmly on the international conservation scene.

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s Boustead’s cadets moved into the workforce: four to Canberra to establish conservation programs at the National Library of Australia, the Australian War Memorial and the National Gallery of Australia. Other influential figures of the time included George Baker at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Harley Griffith, Maxwell Hall and David Lawrence at the National Gallery of Victoria, and Wallace Ambrose [9] in the Prehistory Department at The Australian National University in Canberra.

In 1970 Colin Pearson, a corrosion scientist, [10] was invited to set up the conservation laboratory of the Western Australian Museum. The initial focus of the new laboratory was the treatment of artefacts from early Dutch and colonial shipwrecks off the WA coast. Pearson had developed specialist knowledge during his time at the Materials Research Laboratories in Melbourne, where he conserved the six cannon and ballast jettisoned by James Cook during the *Endeavour’s* first voyage of discovery in 1770.

The first tertiary trained conservation graduate to be appointed to an Australian museum was Susan Walston, [11] a graduate from the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London, who

was appointed head of conservation at the Australian Museum by director Frank Talbot.

The increasing number of conservators was confronted with enormous problems, including lack of laboratory facilities, lack of conservation materials, and inadequate financial and human resources. Collections were poorly housed; collection managers and other staff were generally unaware of conservation procedures and did not accord appropriate recognition of conservation's importance. All of these problems were enumerated in the Pigott Committee Report. [12]

Creation of a professional organisation

The first National Seminar on Conservation of Cultural Material was held in Perth in 1973. [13] Whereas today the majority of papers at such conferences are from practising conservators, only 17 of the 52 papers presented at Perth were delivered by conservators. Moreover, there are now specialised conferences for specific types of conservation.

A major outcome of the Perth seminar was the establishment of the Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (ICCM) which gave conservators a voice and a sense of profession; most early council members were conservators in museums and similar organisations. An early development was the establishment of the *ICCM Bulletin*, a refereed journal, edited by Wal Ambrose and funded by the Australian National University, which established a notable national and international reputation. The Institute was incorporated in 1978 and the name changed to the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM).

When negotiations took place in 1990 between representatives of various museum professional associations concerning the establishment of a single industry body to represent museums, AICCM remained independent, taking the position that it represented a wider interest base covering libraries, archives, the private sector, historic places and archaeological sites as well as museums. Museums Australia was subsequently established, with some conservators joining as a special interest group. Today the AICCM has around 500 members including individuals and organisations; it has developed professional codes and charters, and is now an effective and cohesive organisation with 13 Special Interest Groups covering such topics as Antarctic heritage, books and paper, paintings, preventive conservation and conservation science.

Establishing a formal training program

Dr AEA Werner, Keeper of Conservation at the British Museum, was appointed by UNESCO in 1970 to conduct a survey of the state of conservation and the conservation needs of Australia and Papua New Guinea. [14] Werner's recommendations influenced the Pigott Committee in its Report. [15] In particular, one important recommendation, regarding the establishment of a postgraduate course to train professional conservators at a degree-granting institution, [16] developed momentum. [17]

Conservation training in Australia

The Pigott Committee's recommendation on conservation training was actively pursued by Sam Richardson, founding Principal of the Canberra College of Advanced Education, now the University of Canberra (UC). The course commenced in 1978 under the directorship of Dr Colin Pearson as the first tertiary-level program in materials conservation in the Southern Hemisphere.

In its 27-year life the course underwent many changes: a total of 367 people, including Indigenous Australians and practitioners from Southeast Asia and the Pacific, in particular New Zealand, graduated and gained employment across the broad spectrum of cultural heritage institutions in Australia and abroad. Other programs were developed and several continue.

For example, the University of New South Wales (in collaboration with the National Film and Sound Archive) offered a course focusing on film and sound archive preservation. This was established in 1996 and was transferred to the Charles Sturt University when the University of NSW wound up teaching programs in library and archival studies in 2000–2001. A Masters by coursework program at the University of Western Sydney began in 1997 and closed in 2003. The Canberra Institute of Technology program, still operating, provides training for conservation technicians mainly for the national collecting agencies in Canberra.

The closure of the University of Canberra course in 2002 resulted in a number of other universities expressing interest in developing conservation programs based generally on their experience with museum studies programs, or the fact that they taught both art history and chemistry.

In the meantime the University of Melbourne Conservation Service, directed by Associate Professor Robyn Sloggett, was approached by the University of Canberra to provide support for students who were completing the UC program. In 2004 the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC) established a new program at Masters level, incorporating a strong element of professional practice though teaching staff in the University's Conservation Service. [18] The first graduates of this course are now in the workforce.

In 2009 the University of Canberra re-established the degree of Bachelor of Cultural Heritage Conservation as part of the new Donald Horne Institute for Cultural Heritage launched on 30 July 2008. The conservation program works closely with the national collecting institutions in Canberra to provide the practical training component of the program.

Continued growth of the profession

Institutional conservation facilities

Throughout the 1980s Australia saw substantial growth in the number, scope and scale of both new and refurbished conservation facilities. There were major new laboratories established at the Australian War Memorial, the National Archives of Australia, the State Conservation Centre of South Australia and the National Gallery of Australia. Expansion of existing laboratories took place at the Art Gallery of NSW and the National Library of Australia. New museum facilities in Sydney, such as the Australian National Maritime Museum and the rebadged Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences as the Powerhouse Museum, created extensive conservation laboratories and workshops.

Staffing these laboratories was a challenge. Graduates from the Canberra conservation program quickly found employment and overseas conservators were recruited, such as Nathan Stollow (National Gallery of Australia), Julian Bickersteth [19] (Powerhouse Museum), and Alan Howell [20] (State Library of NSW). All major collecting institutions now have conservation units staffed by trained conservators.

Private conservation practices and central conservation facilities

There is a long history of conservation work being outsourced by institutions to private practitioners, including artists, framers and other craftsmen. Many of these people did not always have the training or experience required, and this sometimes led to material being treated in ways that was at odds with conservation professional practice. With the increase in emerging graduates the ratio of trained conservators working privately increased with a commensurate alignment of private and institutional standards.

The majority of private restorers and conservators practising up to the mid-1980s were sole practitioners, but a major shift in the way conservation services were delivered was heralded with the opening in Adelaide in 1985 of the State Conservation Centre of South Australia (later renamed Artlab Australia, directed by Ian Cook), a government business enterprise operating in the public and private sectors. Similarly, Campbell Conservation – established in 1987 as a private company in Sydney, and officially launched as International Conservation Services (ICS) under Julian Bickersteth in 1992 – began a similar push to develop the market for a broad range of conservation services. [21] Artlab and ICS between them now employ some 50 staff, perhaps 10 per cent of conservators in Australia.

Regional programs

Owing to the widespread distribution of museums in Australia, the diversity of their size and varying levels of funding, many capital-city-based museums have offered outreach services to smaller museums. The Western Australian Museum initiated regional conservation services in the 1970s, and Karen Coote [22] and Phil Gordon at the Australian Museum in Sydney pioneered services to Indigenous communities during the 1990s.

Ideas for mobile conservation services, like those at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa, were embraced by Les Byron, one of Boustead's cadets who resigned from the Australian War Memorial to establish a mobile conservation service in the early 1970s. In 1980 the Regional Galleries Association of New South Wales, with support from the Art Gallery of NSW, employed Cathy Lillico-Thompson to provide regional conservation services. She travelled regularly, conducting basic work and transporting items requiring more extensive treatments back to the Art Gallery. [23] During the Australian Bicentennial in 1988 a fully equipped mobile conservation laboratory was constructed for the Regional Galleries Association of NSW, with funding [24] from

the NSW Bicentennial Council and the National Australia Bank. The laboratory toured much of NSW and during its operation provided a great service to rural and regional NSW.

In Victoria, a regional conservation centre was established in Ballarat in the early 1980s. This was superseded by the Victorian Centre for the Conservation of Cultural Material which folded in 2002. [25] The National Library of Australia's Community Heritage Grants Scheme, initiated by Jan Lyall in 1994, continues to provide assistance to the small and regional museum sector. [26]

The Heritage Collections Committee

Conservators played a valuable role in supporting the establishment and development of the National Collections Working Group, later the Heritage Collections Committee (HCC), and its successor, the Heritage Collections Council (also HCC).

The HCC established the Conservation Working Party, later to become the Collections Management and Conservation Working Group, in 1993. Major achievements of these groups were the development of the *National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage* in 1995 [27] and the *National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy for Australia's Heritage Collections* in 1998. [28]

The 10 policy statements articulated in both the 1995 and 1998 publications provide a powerful set of overarching principles that establish foundations for developing strategies to manage national heritage collections. The principles were grounded on broad cultural issues, including community well-being, diversity and access, as well as cornerstone activities to improve and sustain the conservation of collections through intergovernmental coordination, the application of significance methodology, community awareness raising, education, and research and development. When the *Policy and Strategy* document was launched in 1998 copies were distributed widely throughout the country. It remains today as a benchmark document that offers professional frameworks for those working in and with museum collections.

The Conservation and Collection Management Working Party went on to develop a series of consultancies that resulted in important publications including *Significance*, [29] a ground-breaking publication that has been used by organisations worldwide; and the training package *re-Collections*, [30] *Be Prepared* [31] and *Guidelines for Environmental Control in Cultural Institutions*. [32]

Developments in professional practice

In the 1970s most conservation departments were little more than service components of museums with limited input to their general management. They are now integral to much of the work of museums.

Research

The reputation of conservation practice depends on the scientific research which informs it. Both Werner's 1970 UNESCO report [33] and the 1975 Pigott Report [34] recommended the establishment of a central conservation research facility. None has ever been established and opinion remains divided as to the merits of the proposal, both in respect of the conduct and the promotion of research.

Many Australian museums and other collecting institutions have active research programs and some Australian conservators have distinguished themselves internationally. Examples in traditional conservation fields include: the Western Australian Museum, in maritime archaeological conservation and marine corrosion science; the National Museum of Australia, the Australian War Memorial and the Powerhouse Museum in research on large items of technology; and the Australian Museum in its treatment of bark paintings and other Indigenous cultural items. The National Library of Australia, the National Archives of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive are active in the newer field of digital preservation.

Cultural materials conservation is recognised by the Australian Research Council (ARC) as a high impact, interdisciplinary research area; conservators have received numerous research grants. In particular the University of Melbourne Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC) has been successful in applying for these grants. The CCMC has also graduated conservators who have undertaken conservation study at doctoral level. In addition it is educating an increasing cohort of professionals enrolled in research higher degrees.

Minimal intervention is one of the important contemporary paradigms in the conservation profession. In the past, many items have been damaged by invasive treatments. Classic examples of procedures no longer in use because of adverse long-term effects include the use of chloramine-T for bleaching works of art on paper, soluble nylon as a consolidant for stone, and certain acrylic polymers for consolidating pigments on bark paintings.

Research into the life cycles of museum pests, issues related to the toxicity of pesticides and staff and visitor health, and examination of damage to collections by pesticides has resulted in the widespread adoption of integrated pest management (IPM) in many museums. IPM places an emphasis on controlling and monitoring pest activity in museum environments such as storage and display spaces, and using least harmful chemicals to control pest activity. Safe alternatives to treat infested material include freezing, oxygen deprivation, and high temperatures. [35]

Research has also led to alternative means of controlling light, temperature and humidity in museums. The building of new museums and the refurbishing of existing ones saw an increased reliance on air-conditioning to provide safe, stable environments for the preservation of collections. However the expense and unreliability of many such systems has led conservators to explore the building envelope as the mechanism to buffer against adverse external conditions. Passive climate control is the term used to describe procedures relying on analysis of local climates and appropriate building strategies to minimise the reliance on full or partial air-conditioning. [36]

Disaster preparedness

Disasters placed conservation centre stage in the 1980s. The serious fire in the roof of the National Library in 1985 alerted the Australian government to the need to provide greater protection to its heritage collections. All federally funded institutions were required to develop counter-disaster plans, to implement them and to report annually on their status. Disaster preparedness has been a valuable means of integrating conservation with collections management. Developing counter-disaster plans around the country created an awareness of the need to identify the significance of collection items. [37]

Occupational health and safety

Awareness of occupational health and safety (OHS) issues was very patchy in the 1970s – some conservation laboratories practised procedures that conformed to the accepted standards of the day, but others fell dramatically short. This lack of awareness and/or lack of appropriate facilities resulted in some conservators suffering acute or chronic health damage. Examples of problems include repetitive strain injury (RSI), chronic back problems, respiratory illnesses, asthma, eczema and dermatitis.

At the same time, OHS issues barely rated a mention in conservation publications – they were usually covered in an appendix that merely listed dangerous chemicals. [38] No mention was made of how to work with these substances, nor was there any discussion of topics such as effective extraction systems, protective equipment, storage and disposal of chemical waste, the dangers of treating mouldy objects, dangers of pesticides and fumigation chemicals, safe handling procedures, or standards and regulations.

In line with more rigorous OHS requirements that have been developed across all industries, conservators are now required to have detailed relevant training. In addition they have to have knowledge of and adhere to relevant legislation, such as that for the storage of dangerous chemicals. Excellent publications that address the full spectrum of OHS issues are available. [39]

Significance assessments and risk management methodology

The use of significance assessment as a management tool for objects and collections was introduced to conservators in the late 1990s. Significance methodology in the collections sector evolved out of earlier work by Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) which developed the Burra Charter for places of cultural significance in 1979. The work of the Heritage Collections Council was instrumental in developing methodologies for museum collections.

Many museum professionals, now familiar with making significance assessments for specific items and collections, are still coming to terms with the concept of significance 'thresholds' and the specifics of its application in collections management. The concept of quantifying significance levels as an input to quantitative risk management methodology is at an early stage of development, both in Australia and internationally. Interestingly, the Australian/New Zealand Standard, Risk

Management (AS/NZS 4360:2004), [40] developed by Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand, is being used both internationally and locally for conservation risk management work.

Risk management has been used in a number of conservation applications; for example, it has contributed to a relaxation of environmental standards in certain parts of museums such as those in exhibition and storage areas. The standards previously specified for relative humidity levels have been modified and fluctuations of $\pm 10\%$ RH or more are seen as an acceptable risk for some collections. [41] A risk management strategy accepts a calculated risk and an acceptable level of uncertainty. It also enables limited resources to be used more wisely. [42] The AICCM has recently set up a *Taskforce on Environmental Guidelines* to address these issues. It will report on its finding in 2011/12.

Economic factors

As a consequence of the increasing influence of financial considerations, preventive conservation occupies a more prominent role in modern day conservation than it did in the past. Such practices are generally less expensive than traditional conservation and restoration procedures. This is reflected in the *AICCM Code of Ethics and Code of Practice* (1999) which states:

The AICCM member should recognise the critical importance of preventive conservation as the most effective means of promoting the long-term preservation of cultural property. The AICCM member should provide guidelines for continuing use and care, recommend appropriate environmental conditions for storage and exhibition, and encourage proper procedures for handling, packing and transport to a level of detail as appropriate. [43]

Emphasis on access

A major recommendation of the Heritage Collections Working Group was to improve access for those living in regional Australia to the nation's cultural collections. Two developments have assisted in this regard: an increase in the number of travelling exhibitions featuring material sourced from widely dispersed institutions; and a massive expansion of digitisation activity in most institutions and the subsequent provision of free access to the resulting digital images. While a digital image is not the same as the real thing, it is becoming an accepted method of viewing collection material. Common sense decrees that not all material can or should travel, and a decision as to whether a valuable part of a collection can safely travel should only be made after a careful examination of the risks involved.

Conservators now play a vital role in managing travelling exhibitions. Decisions regarding the safety of travelling fragile objects were often contested among curators, conservators and the senior managers of museums. Conservators on occasions assumed a right to veto the movement of works on conservation grounds, which sometimes led to conflict with other museum staff and management. On other occasions museum directors and curators found it expedient to ask conservators to provide evidence of fragility so that they could refuse the loan of specific works, thus politicising conservation practice. The adoption of clear guidelines and procedures related to loans has made this process considerably less fraught.

Digital preservation

Major Australian libraries and archives have been developing strategies for the preservation of digital material since the early 1990s. [44] For museums, awareness of born-digital preservation has been slow to develop, but increasingly born-digital material is being created by artists and is being collected by museums. For conservators the issues are twofold: preserving the information and preserving meaningful access to it. It is the latter which is the most challenging because of the need to manage frequent changes in technology.

Future directions and challenges

What are the fundamental challenges that museum conservators face in the twenty-first century? There are many, including managing technical, ethical and cultural issues, and their interrelationships. Some key challenges include:

- the complex and costly problems of caring for late twentieth and twenty-first century technological objects, from computers to machinery, vehicles, aircraft and vessels;
- the management of collections and objects broadly dispersed as a result of repatriation to

originating communities, especially if this happens on a global scale;

- cultural impacts resulting from increasing community dependence on digital technologies;
- the costs of conserving collections and providing access to them in a world of global economics, fuel crises and global warming; and
- developing training models that are accessible and relevant across social and cultural communities.

The capacity of museums to manage technological objects in terms of costs and expertise represents an unprecedented challenge. Such objects not only include those that illustrate technological development, but also cover materials that constitute installations and other works of art that interpret our times.

Repatriation of collections to Indigenous and other communities will result in both positive and negative cultural and technical outcomes. The wider distribution of collections may have the potential to both increase and decrease risks related to their sustainability. Such analyses will become more complex, and the overall costs for the management of a distributed global collection will unquestionably rise. However, the politics and economics of caring for collections may be better supported across communities in the coming century because they are more widely 'owned'.

Alternatively, as more collections are available digitally, the value of real objects for governments which have traditionally provided most of the funding for conservation may disappear. This is a debate about authenticity and significance versus substitution of the real with the virtual. It also covers the debate about virtual manipulation of images and the ethics of such practices, and the political will of the conservation profession to keep its agendas front and centre.

Will digital access increase the value of the authentic or render the original less valuable? Alternatively, will processes such as virtual repatriation of objects foster growing support for museum collections and investment in conservation work? What are the consequences of such thinking for conservators and museums more generally? How will museums be able to justify the high costs of storing the real object versus the perceived relatively inexpensive costs of digital storage? How will art museums manage the long term preservation of digital heritage materials?

In a world faced by economic crises, diminishing fossil fuel resources and environmental challenges including climate change, will only those objects of high market value or some other popular criterion be considered to warrant costly remedial treatments? What will be the opportunities for conserving collections that sit outside national value systems or norms? What are the implications of such outcomes for, for example, social history collections versus fine art collections? Will escalating energy costs drive conservation research further towards preventive conservation solutions such as passive climate control? Will such developments prove too difficult for the profession to survive as we know it?

Nobody knows what the future will hold. The conservation profession today is concerned primarily with caring for collections in institutions and a change in the economy of any one country could impact on priorities there and elsewhere. The effects of civil unrest and natural disasters (which may or may not be a result of global warming) present immediate challenges to the preservation of cultural materials. Will the unique skills of conservators and their ability to find pragmatic solutions which are politically and economically acceptable be such as to allow museums to manage their collections effectively for the benefit of society? The Australian conservation profession, with 40 years of experience and a pool of university-trained conservators, is now in a strong position to tackle these challenges.

Footnotes

¹ A brief history of the Australian Museum www.amonline.net.au/archives/fact01.htm.

² *In an attempt to capture the recent history of the profession, the National Library of Australia has embarked on an oral history project involving interviews with a range of people who have been instrumental in shaping the conservation profession in Australia. References to specific interviews occur frequently in this chapter.*

³ Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material Inc., *Code of ethics for the practice of conservation of cultural material in Australia*, AICCM, Canberra, 1986.

- ⁴ Alan Lloyd, 'One hundred years of art restoration/conservation at the Art Gallery of New South Wales', *ICCM Bulletin*, vol. 7, nos 2 and 3, 1981, pp. 3–15.
- ⁵ Alan Lloyd, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5330, Record Id: 3296700, 4–5 November 2004.
- ⁶ Ian Cook, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 4795, Record Id: 1143255, 18 September 2001.
- ⁷ Allan Byrne, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 4843, Record Id: 23449079 26 March 2002.
- ⁸ Christopher Payne, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5592, Record Id: 40203832, 7 January 2006.
- ⁹ Wallace Raymond Ambrose, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5325, Record Id: 3296649, 15 November 2004.
- ¹⁰ Colin Pearson, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 4938, Record Id: 24538246, 24 and 30 April 2003.
- ¹¹ Susan Walston, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5329, Record Id: 3296625, 30 September 2004.
- ¹² Peter Pigott et al, *Museums in Australia 1975: report of the committee of inquiry on museums and national collections including the report of the planning committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975.
- ¹³ Cook, Byrne, Pearson, Walston, Ambrose interviews.
- ¹⁴ AEA Werner, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 4969, Record Id: 901595, 12 May 2003.
- ¹⁵ Pigott Report.
- ¹⁶ Pigott Report.
- ¹⁷ The Pigott Report noted that the Canberra College of Advanced Education had expressed interest in establishing such a course and recommended that it be established in 1977.
- ¹⁸ Robyn Sloggett, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5498-0000, Record Id: 28278729, 22 August 2005.
- ¹⁹ Julian Bickersteth, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5197, Record Id: 3229447, 20–21 July 2004.
- ²⁰ Alan Howell, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5002, Record Id: 2607498, 23 August and 1 October 2003.
- ²¹ Bickersteth interview.
- ²² Karen Coote, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5331, Record Id: 3296735, 9 November 2004.
- ²³ Catherine Lillico-Thompson, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5198, Record Id: 3240253, 20 July 2004.
- ²⁴ Lillico-Thompson interview.
- ²⁵ Jude Fraser, interviewed by Jan Lyall for the National Library of Australia's Oral History Collection, ORAL TRC 5497, Record Id: 3546701, 23 August 2005.
- ²⁶ National Library of Australia, Community Heritage Grants Scheme – www.nla.gov.au/chg.
- ²⁷ Heritage Collections Committee and Cultural Ministers Council, *National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage*, Canberra, 1995.

- ²⁸ Cultural Ministers Council and Heritage Collections Council, *National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy: Australia's heritage collections*, Commonwealth Department of Communication and the Arts, Canberra, 1998.
- ²⁹ Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth, (*significance*): *a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections*, Heritage Collections Council, Canberra, 2001, <http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/search.php?search=significance&x=15&y=13>.
- ³⁰ Heritage Collections Council, *reCollections: caring for collections across Australia*, Heritage Collections Council, Canberra, 2000, <http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/search.php?search=reCollections&x=16&y=15>.
- ³¹ Heritage Collections Council, Söderlund Consulting Pty Ltd, *Be Prepared: guidelines for small museums for writing a disaster preparedness plan*, Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra, 2000, <http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/search.php?search=be+prepared&x=13&y=15>.
- ³² Heritage Collections Council, *Guidelines for Environmental Control in Cultural Institutions*, Heritage Collections Council, Canberra, 2002, http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/13.
- ³³ Werner, *Conservation of Cultural Property*.
- ³⁴ Pigott Report.
- ³⁵ Heritage Collections Council, *Guidelines*.
- ³⁶ Heritage Collections Council, *Guidelines*.
- ³⁷ Heritage Collections Council, *Be Prepared*; Heritage Collections Council, *Guidelines*.
- ³⁸ HJ Plenderleith and AEA Werner, *The Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art*, Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 356–9.
- ³⁹ American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works of Art, Health and Safety Guides and Publications, <http://www.conservation-us.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=751>; Heritage Collections Council, 2000, *reCollections*, Health and Safety, pp. 53–62, http://archive.amol.org.au/reollections/5/pdf/health_safety.pdf National Film and Sound Archive, Occupational Health and Safety, http://www.nfsa.gov.au/preservation/film_handbook/film_conservation_hazards.html
- ⁴⁰ Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand, *Risk Management: AS/NZS 4360:2004*, Standards Australia, Sydney, 2004.
- ⁴¹ Stefan Michalski, 'Relative humidity and temperature guidelines: what is happening?', *CCI Newsletter*, No. 14, September 1994, pp. 6–8.
- ⁴² Robert Waller and Stefan Michalski, 'Effective preservation: from reaction to prediction', *Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter*, 19.1, Spring 2004, www.getty.edu/conservation/publications/newsletters/19_1/feature.html.
- ⁴³ Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material and Heritage Collections Council, *Code of Ethics and Code of Practice*, AICCM, Canberra, 1999.
- ⁴⁴ The National Library of Australia established one of the first web archiving programmes in the world (PANDORA); and the National Archives of Australia has developed an open source tool to help preserve digital records (XENA). A large body of information is available from PADI – Preserving Access to Digital Information <http://www.nla.gov.au/padi/index.html>, which is a subject gateway to international digital preservation resources.

Ian Cook is a Deputy Chair of AusHeritage, Deputy Chair of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Program and Manager of 3CS Asia Pacific.

Jan Lyall chairs the Australian UNESCO Memory of the World Program Committee.

Colin Pearson AO MBE was Professor of Cultural heritage Conservation and is currently Emeritus Professor at the University of Canberra.

Robyn Sloggett is Director and Grimwade Chief Conservator of the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne.

Cite as: Ian Cook et al, 2011, 'Conservation in Australian museums', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/ICook_etal_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Issues in museology

Digitisation to social media

by Des Griffin

At the 2007 'Museums and the Web' conference in San Francisco, Sebastian Chan from the Powerhouse Museum recounted the history of a project that offered visitors to the museum's website additional ways of interacting with the museum and its collections. In June 2006, the museum had launched a new means for browsing and searching almost all its collection database in order to optimise usage. The site offered 'folksonomies', ordinary words (tags) employed by users without any hierarchy or reliance on the technical terms used by the museum's curators to describe and classify the objects in the collection. 'Visitors' no longer required familiarity with collecting and museological practice to locate objects of interest to them. They could get the information they wanted about these objects using any search terms they liked. The path they used to get there would be recorded electronically by the museum's software.

From the first use of computers by museum people in the 1960s – astonishingly slow machines accessible by punched tape – computers and electronic devices of all kinds have come to dominate life in museums, as everywhere else, and not simply in size and computing power. It is no longer acceptable simply to provide information and expect people to accept the truth of what is written there. It is now expected that museum visitors – real and virtual – will be able to access the museum's resources in any way they, not the museum curator or IT technical experts, believe to be most appropriate.

From the email and websites of the 1980s, the web has morphed into a resource accessible in multiple ways that are determined by the user, with little or no input by the organisation or person who originally communicated the material. In the very near future, something akin to artificial intelligence will provide information on Internet sites using complex routines that extract and abstract data of all kinds from elsewhere. Portable devices will be able to access this information.

This extended introduction outlines developments and opportunities that museums have used to exploit these innovations.

Information Technology: the revolution in museums

The application of information technology to almost everything museums do is perhaps the fastest growing area in museums, as in many other areas of human endeavour. This is shown by the developments that have occurred since Tim Hart and Martin Hallett completed their chapter on digitisation featured in this section of the publication. They were writing as what is known as Web 2.0 was just emerging. Web 2.0 facilitates information sharing. But it does more than that: it is user-oriented and allows user-centred design. The consequences are social media.

As Hart and Hallett write, referring to the developments of folksonomies at the Powerhouse Museum, 'This approach leverages user interest and community knowledge, which has paid immediate and substantial dividends for the Powerhouse Museum. In the twelve months following the implementation of OPAC2.0, online visitation has increased threefold. This project is attracting significant international interest and is one to watch.'

They also say, 'There are many complex issues around the "voice of the object" and our position of trust and authority. Australian museums cannot simply rely on their existing reputations for authoritative expertise and knowledge if they are to remain relevant and sustainable.'

Everyone associated with museums – especially those working with collections – will recall, often with rather strong feelings, those expressions of surprise by people who do not work in museums as to why museums hold so many objects: 'what is it that museums do with all that stuff?' Web 2.0 offers exciting ways to overcome the seeming remoteness of the collections.

The development of digitisation – conversion of information in analogue form to digital information – allows greater access to museum collections and interaction with the information about objects in those collections. This is especially made possible by the nature of Web 2.0. This was supported throughout the 1990s in Australia by government funding, and by funds from museums

themselves, in a project managed by the Heritage Collections Council sponsored by the Cultural Ministers Council.

But government funding declined and eventually ended in the last couple of years. One could ask why governments, supposedly concerned about efficient and effective use of the 'assets' which they have supported financially, turn away from the opportunities that are now on offer?

Instead of funding further access to collections, in the name of accountability – that so often misused piece of jargon – governments, at the behest of auditors have demanded financial valuation of collections and the placing of the value in the balance sheet. That the valuing of objects that cannot be traded is meaningless is steadfastly ignored. But the huge time and effort is not ignored by the staff whose time is diverted to the task!

Digitisation of collections

The project started by the Heritage Collections Council, Australian Museums on Line (AMOL), as described by Hart and Hallett, aimed to digitise collections and make the information available on the Web, even to children in schools. It later became the Collections Australia Network (CAN), and continued to be funded by governments. But with funding withdrawn, as the Cultural Ministers Council itself ceased to exist, the platform is still managed by the Powerhouse Museum. Further partner organisations are not being sought but social media functionality has been retained.

The CAN site is running essentially as a professional network for the exchange of ideas. Most participants are regional and smaller museums. Listservs – sites using email list management software to which users subscribe so as to receive notices and information by email as they are posted – are managed by CAN's administrators and serve about 3000 users. Administrator Geoff Barker aggregates live Twitter streams into 'The Museum Community Daily'. (There are numerous sites, especially dealing with politics, that aggregate items from other sites.) Traffic on Twitter is high, perhaps because signing on to it is easier than logging into sites like MANexus and Museum 3.0 (see below).

In the area of natural history there are sites containing information mainly for scientists. However, the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) combines observational and collection/object-based information for a large number of groups of flora and fauna, allowing mapping and inspection of individual records. 'Themes provide stories of general interest to the Australian public about particular groups of organisms. The Atlas aims to provide insight into the importance of these animals, plants and microbes through the amalgamation of rich data sources. However, we cannot develop themes without the assistance of scientists, researchers and other interested parties.' OzCAM, online zoological collections of Australian animals, and the Australian Virtual Herbarium (AVH) form a very solid base, allowing museum and botanical collections to be a central part of the ALA. Restrictions on the use of Australian government funds for digitisation are holding back development in some areas. OZCAM is a great resource for researchers, and a terrific example of collaboration at a national level in the natural sciences.

There are other sites that aggregate collections of various kinds. The National Library aggregates images of artworks from other sites such as Picture Australia. Individual art museums have images of works from their collections on their own websites.

Social Media: engagement and access for audiences

As in so many other things about museums – and anything else – the best ideas are not necessarily found by talking to those who work in that area, or reading only the literature about that area. Too many missteps have been made in managing and leading museums because the reference points were only other museums rather than the wider world.

So it is with social media and museums. After all, the challenges are essentially the same. Social media with its blogs, wikis, nings, Facebook exchanges, tweets, dig commentary, Flickr photos, the journeys on FourSquare and the videos on YouTube all offer new opportunities for communicating about the trivial and the serious, all ignore any notion of authority, all pose the same challenges to distinguish what will make a difference from what will simply satisfy today's problems. Delicious.com lists the best ('tastiest') bookmarks on the Web. New adaptations seem to appear every week. It doesn't matter what organisations we are talking about, though each will have individual approaches and wholesale transposition would be silly.

Social media can also marginalise traditional print and electronic media with their mandatory

mediation by reporters and editors. The temptation is to ignore the traditional media and to believe that new media will attract new audiences, especially younger people who have not previously been part of the audience or customer base. It can be easy to believe that those who are reached by social media will come to value the organisation's offerings, and the organisation itself, more highly. It is reasonable to believe that greater engagement and easier access would lead to larger audiences. Museums already strongly oriented to their audience are more likely to structure their social media strategy in an appealing manner.

One thing is obvious. As soon as even a reasonably large number of people start using any of these platforms, any person or organisation that is the subject of conversation had better take notice of what is being said, just as if there were a near-libellous or fabulously positive piece in traditional media.

In social media, access for anyone posting a comment or request can be directly to the particular platform and not via some other medium such as a website. Go to Facebook or Twitter and search for your favourite museum. The response is near instantaneous, and the capability for galvanising action is astonishing. The 'Arab Spring' is just one example in the political world: photos and comments posted on various sites accessible by hand-held devices drew very rapid comment from traditional media and other platforms, leading to international responses.

Flash mobbing facilitated by text messages on mobile devices can gather hundreds of people for an afternoon of training for a dance routine to become part of an advertisement. Concerted commentary aimed at some person or organisation can create positive awareness or become a source of anguish or misery.

Blogs have been used as part of the 'Open Science' movement allowing, for instance, a mathematician to post an invitation to others to find a mathematical proof about the properties of multidimensional objects. Within days, readers, including high-ranking academics, had chipped in vital pieces of information or new ideas. The joint effort led to several papers published in journals. It was an astonishing and unexpected result. [1]

People using social media have little concern for issues such as privacy, traditionally correct spelling of words, and even the continuation of whatever site they are using. That much of the traffic is superficial is not seen as a problem. People inhabit different sites.

Social media: opportunities for museums

What does all this mean for museums? Firstly – and this is one of the issues most commonly mentioned by many museum people – the museum no longer has control over what is said, what interpretation is drawn out from visits, other people's comments, publicity or lack of it, the nature of the objects, exhibitions or public statements or behaviour of staff or executives. It matters little whether that worries the museum's executives!

Secondly, attention to sites like Facebook and Twitter is very demanding: the museum that decides to involve itself with these platforms needs to have good evidence that it is worthwhile in terms of achieving its goals and, as always, in being distinctive. More than that, genuine communication about issues of importance requires care and attention. Therefore the museum can't just treat this communication in the same way as one would treat casual conversation.

The obvious benefit is engagement with an audience, an opportunity to find out what people think and, more importantly, to encourage people to discuss issues involving the museum and its 'business focus', whether it is an art prize, or an exhibition on some scientific subject.

Museums have made use of social media to publicise exhibitions, by running competitions such as submitting photographs or other artworks relating to some object or exhibition in the museum, even bringing people together (termed crowdsourcing) for the opening of an exhibition. These are part of the marketing function!

Crowdsourcing has been used by a number of museums to create exhibitions. A leading exponent is the Brooklyn Museum where Shelly Bernstein, Chief of Technology, works to further the museum's community-oriented mission through projects including free public wireless access, web-enabled comment books, projects for mobile devices and putting the Brooklyn Museum collection online. Bernstein created 1stfans, a socially networked museum membership, and organised *Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition* and *Split Second: Indian Paintings*.

Click! was based on the proposition that the wisdom of crowds is superior to that of individuals, something that has been replicated in social behaviour experiments. *Click!* was an exhibition in three consecutive parts: an open call to artists to electronically submit a work of photography that responds to the exhibition's theme, 'Changing Faces of Brooklyn', along with an artist statement; an online forum for audience evaluation of all submissions (as in other juried exhibitions, all works were anonymous); and an exhibition at the museum, where the artworks were installed according to their relative ranking from the juried process. Visitors were able to see how different groups within the crowd evaluated the same works of art, and the results were analysed and discussed by experts in the fields of art and online communities. Crowd theory (advanced by *New Yorker* business and financial columnist James Surowiecki in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds*) was tested.

For quite a few years visitors, real and virtual, have been able to download exhibition 'guides' to some sort of portable device, including smartphones, or even capture images and commentary to make their own guide to the museum. Obviously a museum has to have a very superior product if it wants visitors to use the audioguide it has developed. The key point is the usability of the information in terms of access, and the quality of the information as determined by the user. Nothing new in that!

Many museums in many countries have made images of objects in their collection available on their websites. Natural history museums have asked people to inform them of the sightings of various animals or plants, images of which are found on websites which can now be viewed on an iPad. Of course this can be problematic because the identification may not be accurate. There are 'workarounds' for this of course.

Most museums and most arts and cultural organisations in Australia make use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. What else would one expect! Most of the attention is directed to marketing: informing and seeking to attract audiences to the program or event, even creating special events through video on YouTube promoted through Twitter, publicising a program such as a play or exhibition. Microblogging platforms such as Tumblr allow users to post text, images, videos, links, quotes and audio to a short-form blog from one posting.

The Australian Museum offers blogs on a variety of subjects including social media and a variety of other material. Education outreach programs, such as the long-running 'Museum in a Box' which goes to schools distant from the museum, are assisted by the use of video links: education staff can talk 'face to face' to students using the objects and explanatory notes in the box. There are pages on almost everything within the field of interest of the museum, from biodiversity to microscopy. The National Museum of Australia offers a number of blogs, including one by Director Andrew Sayers; there are links to research diaries, stories about Forgotten Australians and cartoon competitions for schoolchildren.

Museum Victoria has numerous blog posts by staff dealing with subjects ranging from holothuroids – sea cucumbers – to the eclipse of the moon, to the visit by Director Patrick Greene to Egypt (with links to his lecture commencing the Tutankhamun Tuesday lecture series). There are also blogs on exhibitions and behind the scenes happenings and photographs from the collection. Like a number of museums, Museum Victoria also offers podcasts, something that media sites such as the BBC, the ABC and a number of other newspaper, journal and electronic media sites have featured extensively. A number of museums offer video presentations by staff or visiting speakers.

Almost all art museums have pages on Facebook and Twitter with posts about events and exhibitions, and links to stories in other media which are relevant to the museum: for instance the release by Chinese authorities of the artist Ai Weiwei. Museum Victoria offers images of animals and plants and seeks information from the community about sightings of the species depicted. The images are available on iPad and other devices as well as computers.

Art museums such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Victoria, the National Gallery of Australia and the Queensland Art Gallery make extensive use of platforms such as Facebook, gathering between 5000 and 15,000 'fans'. (Non-art museums have between half and a fifth of this number.) Success can be judged by the number of visitors to Facebook who click through to the main web page of the Gallery, as well as the number of fans who like the site. These people are highly engaged, and staff keep up with visitor comments. For its 150th anniversary the National Gallery of Victoria selected 150 artworks from its collection which it posted on its website and asked people to vote for their favourite work: visitor comments were posted. The 10 favourites became part of a tour for visitors.

The National Library of Australia's Trove project has placed online digitised newspapers, journals, articles and datasets, over 100 million Australian and online resources. Trove invites contribution from all users in a variety of ways: they can tag items found with keywords; make comments that could be useful to other users; participate in the user forum; contribute digital photographs via Flickr; and even correct the text of digitised newspaper articles. The Powerhouse Museum provides images of Sydney and its people from its archives on Flickr; visitors to the site can comment on the images.

Nings, platforms for creating social websites that can be used for commenting and exchanging views, currently exist in the museum domain. MANexus, managed by Museums Australia, and Museum 3.0, managed by a small non-profit group founded by Angelina Russo (of RMIT) and Lynda Kelly (of the Australian Museum), each have members who can contribute to forums, post notices of events including conferences, photos and so on. Museum 3.0 has 3000 members around the world. But the question that must be asked is, what difference is this making? The sad fact is that a trawl through the entries on the forum page of both sites reveals very little response to any of the topics. Calls for comments seldom end up with responses from more than half a dozen people. Possibly all the action is on Twitter. The number of responses as well as 'hits' is surely more important than the number of subscribers.

The semantic web, the next wave

Now Web 3.0, termed the 'semantic web', is emerging as the next wave. Wikipedia tells us the following about this.

The Semantic Web is a 'web of data' that enables machines to understand the semantics, or meaning, of information on the World Wide Web. It extends the network of hyperlinked human-readable web pages by inserting machine-readable metadata about pages and how they are related to each other, enabling automated agents to access the Web more intelligently and perform tasks on behalf of users. The term was coined by Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web and director of the World Wide Web Consortium ('W3C'), which oversees the development of proposed Semantic Web standards. He defines the Semantic Web as 'a web of data that can be processed directly and indirectly by machines'.

One example is Qwiki, a site linked to Wikipedia from which it extracts the text and to which it adds voice over and images. Qwiki promotes itself thus: 'Qwiki's goal is to forever improve the way people experience information.' The assertion is, 'We are the first to turn information into an experience. We believe that just because data is stored by machines doesn't mean it should be presented as a machine-readable list. Let's try harder.' The Qwiki website offers a glimpse of one possible avenue for online searching where a coherent data source (Wikipedia) is queried and mashed-up to provide a summary response to almost any question in seconds, accompanied by a slideshow.

In Web 3.0 the possibility is that algorithms can be developed to both extract and abstract information from multiple sites and present that as seemingly new matter. How do we know whether what is being presented on such sites is reliable? Who are the authors of this information? On the Wikipedia site it is possible to trace authorship, and the people managing the site place qualifications about entries that for whatever reason are thought not to adequately or accurately represent the topic. (And we should note that algorithms now govern much of the share trading in equities markets, and that by itself has been an important reason for occasional violent fluctuations in share prices on some exchanges.)

Challenges: real opportunities

Discussions amongst museum people about the increasing attention to social media feature comments that question whether, through the emergence of social media, collections are being ignored. Is this part of the same argument we heard 30 years ago when 'blockbuster' exhibitions were all the rage? Back then some people asserted that blockbusters diverted attention from what should be the principal concern of each museum, the presentation of its own collections. Arguably this missed the point! The principal objective – not mission statement – of museums remains encouraging the understanding and appreciation of art (or science or whatever is the principal area of collection focus) amongst the community: social media ought to aim at that, just as should exhibitions of all kinds.

Should we be concerned about social media being most commonly used for marketing and

promotion rather than engagement of audiences in discussions about mission-oriented subjects? We can't get away from the fact that in a number of cases museums use these various platforms to enlarge their information resources for visitors. A link on the Australian Museum's Facebook page takes you to a talk on recycling waste, for instance.

It isn't social media that determines what the museum's spokesperson says or doesn't say. That is a function of the museum's personality and what it sees as its competitive advantage, its uniqueness and its role. This is shown by the success of the Tate in the UK in the way it interacts with visitors on Twitter: it says what is on, when and where in a simple and straightforward way, asks visitors about their experience, helps people with queries or problems and communicates a sense of fun, so revealing that real people are dealing with this interaction. [2] In this age when anything official takes forever and is usually unhelpful if not rude, this is refreshing!

But the point is this. Museum people can control what use they make of the opportunities afforded by Web 2.0 and Web 3.0. As Kristen Purcell, associate director for research at Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project said at the 2011 Museums and Web conference, 'these technologies, and others, are revolutionizing how audiences consume information, and are reshaping the public's expectations about information access and immersion, concrete knowledge of their penetration and the speed at which they are being adopted is crucial to shaping responsible institutional responses'. [3]

Social media developed through the emergence of Web 2.0 has enormously broadened and deepened the information and opportunities for learning which museums can provide. Part of the reason is to be found in the kind of thing that online music and book stores provide, sometimes termed the 'long tail'. Rather than focusing on a narrow range of the most popular, a vast array of material can be made available, with the result that far more people are attracted. Populism is discarded as a governing strategy.

Of course there are valid criticisms of some aspects of social media: that much of it is superficial, that people can say they haven't got time to read or listen to other material that some – such as distinguished historian and writer Simon Schama, University Professor of History and Art History at Columbia University in New York – would consider more valuable. But that does not condemn all social media, and certainly does not diminish the richness of offerings and the opportunities for engagement

In every major development undertaken by a small group, an organisation or a country, a person with some form of authority, sometimes position power but more successfully knowledge power, a person respected by others, drives the development and legitimises it. Whether it is action on climate change, support for contemporary dance, attention to Indigenous people, or support for the contribution that art or science makes to our lives, a leader is essential. That is demonstrated by museums' approach to Web 2.0 and social media. Genuine leadership, not by any means always at the top of the organisation, has made a difference to the outcome.

Unfortunately, in some cases, because social media seems to allow everyone to express their opinion, every view comes to be considered equally valid, the ultimate in social constructivism where truth comes to mean only what the majority accepts it to be. That is hardly a position that museums ought to take. Museum people might be concerned about the perceived loss of control – something they never had anyway – but to miss opportunities to broaden and deepen the interaction with the museum by people out there would be to exit the stage.

Compilation of this essay has been very significantly and generously assisted by discussions with Seb Chan and Geoff Barker (Powerhouse Museum), Russ Weakly (Australian Museum), Tikka Wilson (National Museum of Australia), Tim Hart (Museum Victoria), Martin Hallett (Arts Victoria), Brooke Carson-Ewart and Francesca Ford (Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Footnotes

¹ Bobbie Johnson, 'Open science: a future shaped by shared experience', *The Observer*, 22 May 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/may/22/open-science-shared-research-internet>. For another example, see 'Gamers succeed where scientists fail: molecular structure of retrovirus enzyme solved, doors open to new AIDS drug design', *ScienceDaily*, September 19, 2011 <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110918144955.htm>, an account of how gamers at the University of Washington solved the structure of a retrovirus enzyme which has a critical role in how the AIDS virus matures and proliferates. The configuration of the protein had stumped scientists for more than a decade. The gamers achieved their discovery by playing Foldit, an online game that allows players to

collaborate and compete in predicting the structure of protein molecules.

² Matt Rhodes, 'Why a museum is the UK's top brand on Twitter', freshnetworks, 13 June 2010, <http://www.freshnetworks.com/blog/2010/06/tate-museum-uk-top-brand-twitter/>

³ http://conference.archimuse.com/mw2011/programs/grounding_digital_information_trends

Des Griffin AM is currently Gerard Krefft Memorial Fellow, Australian Museum, an honorary position commemorating one of the early directors of the Museum.

Cite as: Des Griffin, 2011, 'Digitisation to social media', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/DGriffin_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Issues in museology

Australian museums and the technology revolution

by Tim Hart and Martin Hallett

In the early 1970s, museums began to respond to new opportunities arising from computer developments and new forms of electronic communication, in particular for collection documentation, collection management, and scientific research. These early uses of computers provided the first clear demonstration of the power of emerging technology to transform the activities of traditional museology. However, technology's influence soon spread rapidly across almost all areas of museum practice.

Early electronic museum documentation and digitisation

The evolution of systems to transfer traditional paper-based documentation into electronic formats was significantly influenced by library developments and international innovation. The Information Retrieval Group of the Museums Association (UK), now the Collections Trust, pioneered the establishment of standard formats and procedures required for computer-based information systems. Canada's National Museums Policy of 1972 ambitiously proposed a National Inventory Programme to computerise all museum records across the nation, later implemented by the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN). In the United States, the Smithsonian Institution, the Getty Museum, and other major institutions established important documentation projects. The Getty Information Institute (GII), established in 1983 as the Art History Information Program (AHIP), pioneered work that underlies much current documentation practice in Australia and across the world. The influential Consortium for the Interchange of Museum Information (CIMI) was founded in 1990. These developments were closely followed in Australia and stimulated thinking and action.

Early Australian developments emerged during a 10-year period from 1976 at the Science Museum of Victoria and the National Museum of Victoria (now Museum Victoria), the Australian National Gallery (now National Gallery of Australia), the Australian Museum and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (now the Powerhouse Museum).

These developments faced many challenges. Computing technology was primitive. In addition to the technological challenges, the developments required museums to create new disciplines, recruit new categories of staff, and re-skill their existing staff.

The first electronic museum documentation databases required main-frame or mini-computers. Both the software and the hardware involved a capital investment beyond most museums at the time. In this new environment, many museums could not afford to enter the world of computing.

Work on electronic systems for natural science collections emerged in the late 1970s, especially through the joint activities of The University of Melbourne, the National Museum of Victoria and the Australian Museum. This led to the development of the Titan Database (subsequently Texpress and KE EMu). [1] These packages offered powerful tools for those working with material culture collections, as well as those in the natural science disciplines.

Vernon Systems from Auckland, New Zealand, developed the world's first PC-based collections management system, 'Collection', in 1986, [2] based on MDA [3] standards. [4]

By the mid-1990s a wide variety of collection management systems were available to Australian museums; at this time image digitisation also became possible as scanning technologies emerged. As a result, a number of projects were initiated by Australian museums and libraries to include on their documentation systems digital images of collection objects, and other digitised elements such as sound and video. The first JPEG and MPEG [5] standards for digital images were established in 1988 and provided an important basis for this work. Digital cameras were still some years away, [6] and even when they first emerged were of low quality and very high price; it was 2000 before they were used in museums in any number.

Museums also began to add to their documentation systems information on the processes used to manage collections, such as loans, object movements, conservation activities and rights

management, creating the complex integrated systems widely deployed in museums. In the early twenty-first century systems incorporated barcoding or Radio Frequency Identification (RFID).

Setting standards for electronic documentation

Traditional paper-based documentation systems used in museums did not depend on standards. Most organisations and disciplines handled specific data elements in very different ways. Electronic systems, however, demanded data consistency, which raised challenging issues for Australian museums, especially given the inherent differences between natural science specimens and artefacts from social history, technology or Indigenous collections.

Despite such complications, standards are emerging, shaped by international initiatives [7] and ongoing consultation between key stakeholders.

Computer technology also expanded research opportunities for scientists, curators, registrars and conservators. For example, databases provided natural scientists with the means to statistically analyse large volumes of collection and geographic data relating to biological populations. This stimulated ecological and environmental research on a regional, national and global scale, crucially influencing the effective management of Australia's natural resources. The introduction of geographic information systems (GIS) [8] allows the linkage of specimens to locations.

A dramatic impact of technology was the incorporation, from the early 1980s, of multimedia in exhibitions. Multimedia transformed the visitor experience from passive to active engagement.

During the 1980s and 1990s many multimedia technologies came and went. Audiovisual screens proliferated; CD-ROMs and DVDs were widely deployed, replaced in the early twenty-first century by the delivery of multimedia over networks.

Visualisation/simulation is an example of the new presentation methods that have become available to museums over the past 10 years. Using cost effective 'special effects' derived from techniques used in movies and computer games, museums have unprecedented opportunities to offer their audiences powerful storytelling experiences. Many museums have established in-house teams that produce programs of stunning quality on modest budgets – depicting photo-quality scenes of almost anything imaginable effects derived from these techniques, from the planetary system to dinosaurs.

Major museums and many regional and community museums routinely incorporate various audiovisual experiences: projections (large and small), soundscapes, interactive and immersive elements, computer games, simulations and 3-D experiences. These elements are integrated with traditional elements such as objects, labels, text panels, images, illuminated signage and built form to provide audiences with unique and compelling multi-dimensional experiences.

Many of the early experiments with multimedia drew heavy criticism from within the profession and the media. The term 'Disney' was used to denigrate a museum perceived to have forsaken traditional roles and crossed the line where entertainment was valued above traditional approaches and curatorial authority. The word 'edutainment' was coined in the 1990s to describe this phenomenon. The Powerhouse Museum when it opened in 1988 was dubbed a 'Disney' experience. In 2000, Melbourne Museum suffered similar criticism.

However the modern museum is an increasingly complex environment and its visitors have come to expect to use interactive technologies, based on their experience outside museums. Users of mobile devices, for instance, are increasingly expecting cultural information to be available to them. Fortunately the multimedia delivery platforms and software are becoming more intelligent, simplifying the task of distributing quality content.

As technologies converge and become even more complex and sophisticated, maintaining a central place for collection objects and core museum values will be critical in resolving a creative, intelligent, and responsible integration of technology in museum practice. [9]

Arguably, the most significant impact of technology on museums has resulted from the development of the Internet, with its potential for online access to digital content.

Australian museums first began to develop websites from 1993, following the development of the World Wide Web (WWW) through the groundbreaking work at CERN [10] by Tim Berners-Lee. [11] Early Australian networking history is complex, involving a mix of university, government,

private, corporate and telecommunications initiatives from the mid 1970s. Major museums were in a good position to be early adopters of the Internet, because of their links with CSIRO and universities, where the first Australian networks were developed. [12] The role of libraries and their early networks was also influential. The Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) was established in 1981 by the National Library of Australia, linking for the first time computerised library catalogues from around Australia.

Over the past 15 years, hundreds of Australian museum websites have been developed, providing access to a vast array of collection records and significant stories. For the larger museums, websites constitute an essential core element of their business, with online visitors outstripping physical visitors by a significant margin.

The development and maintenance of museum websites was difficult for most Australian museums during the first 10 years of their evolution. Initial reactions from within the sector often involved fear and suspicion. Many museum professionals struggled with the concept and felt that building 'virtual museums' would reduce visitation to venues. Other museum professionals sensed that the opposite was the case. Recent Australian and international studies suggest websites encourage venue visitation and greatly facilitate access to information. [13]

The need to deliver information online to the education sector, professional industry, internal users and the general public is now an essential consideration and key aspiration for museums. A consequential question is how to enhance and digitise traditional museum documentation so that it is of sufficient quality for effective online use. This issue has major resource implications for large institutions holding hundreds of thousands or millions of records. Content Management Systems (CMSs) and Digital Asset Management Systems (DAMS) jockey with traditional collection management systems as core resource-management tools, particularly to address the imperative for international and national interoperability standards and protocols.

The Australian Museums and Galleries Online (AMOL) project, a key initiative of the Heritage Collections Committee, is an interesting case study reflecting the early efforts of Australian museums to provide online access for national and international audiences to the nation's 'distributed national collection'. [14]

A prototype system [15] was built at the Museum of Victoria in 1993 to guide the development of the first Australian Museums and Galleries Online (AMOL) website. The National Museum of Australia (NMA) developed and launched the first AMOL website in October 1995.

In December 1996, the Cultural Ministers Council established the Heritage Collections Council (HCC) to build on the work of the Heritage Collections Committee. The HCC's On Line Working Party guided the ongoing development and expansion of the AMOL website, supported by the Commonwealth Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts. The original principles guiding the website's development were collaboration, comprehensiveness, convergence, and a regional and national focus.

In January 1998, the Powerhouse Museum took on the role of hosting AMOL. Until 2001, the Powerhouse Museum's AMOL Coordination Unit worked closely with the On Line Working Party to ensure that AMOL continued to provide an effective portal to Australia's collecting institutions, and to the collections they hold.

A notable first came in 1994 when AMOL linked to the Western Australian Maritime Museum's online databases.

In 1997, some Australian universities, led by The University of Sydney and funded by an Australian Research Council grant, used AMOL as a model to establish Australian University Museums On Line (AUMOL).

In order to facilitate reliable access to the collection data, AMOL established regional servers at the Museum of Victoria, Western Australian Museum, Queensland Museum, the History Trust of South Australia, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (Launceston). As a result, by the end of 1998, online users could search the collection records of 52 museums and over 600,000 item-level records. [16]

AMOL took important steps in assisting regional and community museums to provide digital access to their content and collections. Almost 1400 museums across the nation became involved with the

project.

In 2005 AMOL was re-badged as the Collections Australia Network (CAN), with greater emphasis on supporting community museums, and coverage of archives and libraries sectors.

For its time, the AMOL project was remarkably innovative, and the team behind the project was involved in working with international bodies to set international standards for museums and in some cases the World Wide Web in general. AMOL was represented on international standards committees and worked with CIMI on Dublin Core elements for museums, and the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) on the Resource Discovery Framework. AMOL represented radical thinking and pushed the available technologies and cooperation of museums to their limits. In 1998, AMOL won a prestigious Museums and the Web prize for 'Best Professional Website',^[17] sharing the prize with the Getty Information Institute. AMOL won the award for a second time in 2002.

With the demise of the Heritage Collections Council (HCC) in 2001 the guidance, support and leadership given to the AMOL project through the HCC's Online Working Party was lost. In addition, despite its success, financial support for AMOL/CAN declined in real terms.

The Internet search engine Google has changed the world. Organisations in the cultural sector are its beneficiaries. Their traditional status as trusted sources of information has helped them to establish a similar status in the virtual world.

Web technologies are rapidly evolving in ways that enable people to fully engage with content in modes only dreamed of in the past, as described in Des Griffin's Introduction to this section. The OPAC 2.0 project (2006) at the Powerhouse Museum, led by Sebastian Chan, incorporated Web 2.0 'social media' technologies for the first, including tagging and folksonomies. This approach enabled the public to contribute as well as consume content. There has been a strong public response to this type of engagement with museums.

The extensive use of technology placed new demands on museum management. Information technology departments were established in Australia's larger museums in the early 1980s. Along with new requirements for public accountability and regulatory compliance, the backup of digitised information has become a significant responsibility and risk-management issue. These developments have profoundly reshaped the skills that museums need to recruit and cultivate in their staff.

Australian museums can be proud of their reputation as innovators and leaders in the use of technology; however they need to maintain a creative balance between traditional scholarship, research, and the application of appropriate technologies in all aspects of their operations.

The Australian government and state governments have been an integral part of the adoption of technology by Australian museums over the past 40 years. They have been the primary source of funding for most large-scale computerisation and digitisation projects. Continued government support for ICT in museums is essential to ensure that Australian cultural resources held in museum collections remain visible in the online world and accessible to the community.

Footnotes

¹ An Australian-developed and widely used early database (released in 1984) suitable for large collections that subsequently evolved into KE Emu (2000), now used across the world in natural science museums with huge collections.

² Bil Vernon founded Vernon Systems in 1985 after developing a custom dealer gallery application. From this initial system he saw the need for a general museum and gallery cataloguing system, and he began work on a prototype of the world's first commercial PC-based museum system.

³ MDA Museum Documentation Association <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/target/126921>

⁴ <http://www.vernonssystems.com>

⁵ The name JPEG stands for Joint Photographic Experts Group, the name of the committee that created the standard. The group was organised in 1986, issuing a standard in 1992 which was approved in 1994 as ISO 10918-1. JPEG is distinct from MPEG (Moving Picture Experts Group) which produces compression schemes for video. From Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JPEG>

⁶ <http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/bldigitalcamera.htm>

⁷ A range of standards is available at <http://www.pro.rcip-chin.gc.ca/index-eng.jsp?Ne=8080&N=8329>

⁸ <http://www.gis.com/whatisgis/index.html>

⁹ As Pat Cooke states, 'Museums, therefore, must constantly interrogate and reformulate their roles, and search for ways of making their collections, their object worlds, more engaging for visitors whose perceptions and expectations are being transformed in any case by the new technology.' Pat Cooke, 'Things and technology: museums as hybrid institutions of the 21st century'. From the excellent paper given at the University of Limerick 2005, at <http://www.idc.ul.ie/museumworkshop/Papers/Cookefull.pdf>

¹⁰ European Organization for Nuclear Research – known as CERN, established in 1954 – the world's largest particle physics laboratory complex.

¹¹ The first website built was at CERN and was first put online on 6 August 1991. It provided an explanation about what the World Wide Web was, how one could own a browser and how to set up a Web server. It was also the world's first Web directory, since Berners-Lee maintained a list of other websites apart from his own. In 1994, Berners-Lee founded the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It comprised various companies that were willing to create standards and recommendations to improve the quality of the Web. In December 2004 he accepted a chair in Computer Science at the School of Electronics and Computer Science, University of Southampton, UK, to work on his new project — the Semantic Web (this information is from Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Berners-Lee)

¹² <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/II/OzIHist.html>

¹³ A 2002 study by the Colorado Digitization Program, for instance, showed that for 70 per cent of visitors, using a museum website would increase their likelihood of a visit. <http://www.cdphheritage.org/cdp/presentations/documents/aampresentationmay2003.pdf>, [Http://interconnectionsreport.org](http://interconnectionsreport.org)

¹⁴ The concept of a 'distributed national collection' was championed by the Heritage Collections Committee, formed by the Cultural Ministers Council in 1993.

¹⁵ The prototype was known as the Australian Museums Information System (AMIS).

¹⁶ http://web.archive.org/web/19990418083410/amol.org.au/collection/collections_index.asp

¹⁷ http://www.archimuse.com/mw98/best/win_professional.html

References

Australian Museums Online (AMOL), *More about AMOL's history and structure*, archived AMOL website: web.archive.org/web/19990202145026/http://www.amol.org.au/

Baynes, Frances Lloyd, '[The realities of museum collections in a web 2.0 world](#)', a not so formal ongoing commentary and discussion on the AHRC-funded think-tank, UK Museums and the Semantic Web: A not so formal ongoing commentary and discussion on the AHRC-funded thinktank (blog).

Birtley, Margaret, 'The Collections Council of Australia' paper prepared for the 2006 Australian State of the Environment Committee, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra, www.environment.gov.au/soe/2006/publications/emerging/collections/index.html

Birtley, Margaret, 'Origins and antecedents of the Collections Council of Australia – an historical perspective in two pages', prepared by the Collections Council of Australia Ltd, 21 September 2005.

Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), *Metadata Standards for Museum Cataloguing*, 27 April 2002, <http://www.pro.rcip-chin.gc.ca/index-eng.jsp?Ne=8080&N=8329>

Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), *Canadian Heritage Information Network Since 1972*, www.chin.gc.ca/English/About_Chin/chin_1972.html.

Cathro, Warwick, 'Libraries in the Digital Environment', report by the National Library of Australia to the Digital Collections Summit, Adelaide, 16–17 August 2006.

Chan, Sebastian, 'Part one: design hub and 'opac 2.0' web 2.0 enabled collection searching at Powerhouse Museum, PowerPoint presentation to the Collections Council of Australia Summit on Digital Collections, Adelaide, 16–17 August 2006.

Chan, Sebastian, 'Tagging and Searching – Serendipity and museum collection databases', *Museums and the Web 2007*, 11–14 April, 2007, San Francisco, California.

Cato, Paisley S, *Guidelines for the Care of Natural History Collections*, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byorg/spnhc/spnhc1.html>

Collections Council of Australia, *Australian Framework and Action Plan for Digital Heritage Collections*, Collections Council of Australia Ltd, July 2007.

Commonwealth of Australia, Economic Benefits from Cultural Assets, The Digitisation Programs and Standards of Collecting Institutions and the Scope for Collaboration with the Creative Industries Final Report 10 June 2003.

Commonwealth of Australia, *recollections*, Heritage Collections Council, www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/3

Craik, Jennifer, 'How can cultural sub-sectors respond? Three indicative case studies', *Re-Visioning Arts and Cultural Policy Current Impasses and Future Directions*, eprints.anu.edu.au/anzsog/revisioning/mobile_devices/ch05.html.

Dean, David and Peter E Rider, 'Museums, Nation and Political History in the Australian National Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization', *Museum and Society*, March 2005, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 35–50, www.le.ac.uk/ms/m&s/Issue%207/deanrider.pdf.

Ellicot, JJ, 'The Future of the Museum Movement in Australia', *KALORI*, No. 56, June 1979, pp. 6–10.

Fink, Eleanor E, 'The Getty Information Institute: A Retrospective', *D-Lib Magazine*, March 1999, Vol. 5, Issue 3.

Griffiths, José-Marie and Donald W King, *InterConnections: The IMLS National Study on the Use of Libraries, Museums and the Internet*, Conclusions Summary, February 2008, <http://interconnectionsreport.org>.

Hallett, Martin, 'Development of a Computer Catalogue for Science Museum Collections', *KALORI*, No. 56, June 1979, pp. 52–67

Hallett, Martin, 'Problems and Control of Data Categories', ICOM Australia, report of the seminar on Museum Documentation, Sydney 1982, pp. 48–50.

Hart, Timothy, 'Collection management and the Internet: an Australian perspective', *CIDOC Newsletter*, Vol. 9, August 1998.

Hart, Timothy, 'Digitisation: an Australian museums perspective', prepared for CAMD, presented to the Collections Council of Australia Summit on Digital Collections, Adelaide, 16–17 August 2006.

Hauenschild, Andrea, *Claims and Reality of New Museology: Case Studies in Canada, the United States and Mexico*, Hamburg, 11 January 1988.

Hofmann, Thomas, John Perkins and Paul Miller, *Dublin Core for Museums – Day 2 PowerPoint presentation*, CIMI 1999 www.cimi.org/

KE Software, History, www.kesoftware.com/ke-software/blog.html

McGrouther, Mark A, 'Ichthyology at the Australian Museum: collections, databases and the Web', in Y Tomida *et al.*, *Proceedings of the 7th and 8th Symposia on Collection Building and Natural History Studies in Asia and the Pacific Rim*, National Science Museum Monographs (34): 00–00, 2006. www.amonline.net.au/FISHES/about/research/pdf/McGrouther2006.pdf

Prosser, Cherie, 'Born Digital: challenges to institutions forming digital collections', University of South Australia, Collections Council of Australia Summit on Digital Collections, Adelaide, 16–17 August 2006.

Reeder, Warwick, 'The Rise of Registration in the House Under Construction', in Pauline Green (ed.), *Building the Collection*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, April 2003.

Robertson, José, 'Digitising collections in the Galleries domain Part 1', Collections Council of Australia Summit on Digital Collections, Adelaide, 16–17 August 2006.

Schwirtlich, Anne-Marie, 'Libraries domain, libraries in the digital environment', Collections Council of Australia Summit on Digital Collections, Adelaide, 16–17 August 2006.

Specht, Jim, 'Where Does Documentation Begin?', ICOM Australia, report of the seminar on Museum Documentation, Sydney 1982, pp. 21–22.

Statement of Principles of Museum Documentation, Version 6.0, August 2007,
<http://cidoc.mediahost.org/principles6.pdf>

Trant, Jennifer, 'Social Classification and Folksonomy in Art Museums: early data from the steve.museum tagger prototype', a paper for the ASIST-CR Social Classification Workshop, 4 November 2006.

Trudgeon, Roger, 'Manual Systems and Problems', ICOM Australia, report of the seminar on Museum Documentation, Sydney 1982, pp. 33–37.

Wallace, Greg 'Digitisation – success on a shoestring? Scoping some issues in sustaining digital collections', DNC Services, Collections Council of Australia Summit on Digital Collections, Adelaide, 16–17 August 2006.

University College London, *Collection Management Policy: American History*, University College London, last reviewed February 2004, www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucylmjr/amhist.doc

Tim Hart is Director, Information Multimedia and Technology, Museum Victoria. He has worked in museums for the past 21 years, in collection management, policy development, project management, information technology, multimedia and as part of senior management. He is committed to working towards increasing the integration of multimedia/interactivity in museum exhibitions and websites in order to fully utilise the opportunities now available using digital media techniques and emerging technologies.

Martin Hallett is Senior Arts Officer at Arts Victoria where he facilitates collaborative digital projects including Culture Victoria (www.cv.vic.gov.au), a project helping metro-regional organisations to create online content about their cultural collections. Previously, he worked as a curator, manager and Deputy CEO at Museum Victoria.

Cite as: Tim Hart and Martin Hallett, 2011, 'Australian museums and the technology revolution', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/THart_MHallett_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

**Understanding Museums:
Australian museums and museology**

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



Indigenous people and museums

Australian museums have had a leadership role in the wider recognition of the richness of Indigenous Australian culture and in addressing the history of contact between Indigenous Australians and those whose ancestral origins lay elsewhere. This section looks at ethnographic museums and collections, the intersections of culture and museological practice and the repatriation of Indigenous material.

Contents

- Introduction, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- Ethnographic museums and collections: from the past into the future, John E Stanton
- Transforming culture: Indigenous art and Australian art museums, Bernice Murphy
- Repatriation: the end of the beginning, Michael Pickering and Phil Gordon

Online version: http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Indigenous_people_and_museums.html

Image credit: *Budgerigars in the Sandhills*, Billy Stockman Tjapaljarri, 1975.
http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/papunya_painting/the_artists

Understanding Museums - Indigenous people and museums: Introduction

Indigenous people and museums: introduction

by Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien

Australian museums have had a leadership role in the wider recognition of the richness of Indigenous Australian culture and in addressing the history of contact between Indigenous Australians and those whose ancestral origins lay elsewhere.

Recent decades have seen major changes in semi-permanent and temporary Indigenous exhibitions in all major museums, and there have been numerous events and symposia, such as the Australian Museum's two major conferences of Indigenous people in the 1990s, including 'The Future of Australia's Dreaming'. Consultation with Indigenous peoples regarding exhibition content and interpretation has become widely accepted. Many museums now have Indigenous staff and some Indigenous people have been appointed to museum boards.

Changes in Indigenous representation and relationships in museums, and the inclusion of oral histories, have often been accompanied by controversy and conflict. Some prominent Indigenous people, claiming that museums should do more, cite examples of overseas museums that have still not returned human remains and secret-sacred material.

The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) has for many years managed a significant contemporary Indigenous art award and associated exhibition sponsored by Telstra. The subsequent tour of this exhibition has played a role in promoting contemporary Indigenous art nationally. Meanwhile all national institutions have expanded their commitment to Indigenous culture and to the touring of significant Indigenous exhibitions abroad.

The 2007 exhibition *Culture Warriors*, featuring the work of 30 contemporary Indigenous artists, was presented at the National Gallery of Australia as the first 'National Indigenous Art Triennial'. The exhibition coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 referendum. After touring to Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane, the exhibition was shown subsequently in Washington in 2009. In 2010 a new entrance to the National Gallery gave introductory prominence to Australia's Indigenous culture for Australian and foreign visitors alike – displaying the most significant Indigenous items of the collection, including the 1988 Aboriginal Memorial. [\[1\]](#)

Simultaneous with the National Gallery's showing of *Culture Warriors*, the National Museum of Australia presented *Papunya Painting: Out of the Desert*, an exhibition drawing on an important part of the National Museum of Australia's collection – once belonging to the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council – that 'successfully melded ethnographic interpretation with the aesthetic experience of the art ...'[\[2\]](#)After a subsequent showing in Sydney at the Australian Museum, this exhibition was exhibited at the National Art Museum in Beijing in 2010. In 2008 the National Museum organised an extraordinary exhibition of paintings by the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye from Utopia in the central desert for showing in Osaka and Tokyo before being shown at the National Museum in Canberra on its return.

Chapters by Michael Pickering and Phil Gordon, Bernice Murphy, and John Stanton trace aspects of the collecting and exhibiting of Indigenous art in Australia's museums from different perspectives. Pickering and Gordon address the complexities of the repatriation of ancestral remains and secret-sacred objects. Stanton recounts the revitalisation of museums in this field, and Murphy looks at the repositioning of Indigenous creativity within museum programs and in public awareness.

Complementary developments concerning peoples of the Pacific and of Asia have occurred at a number of museums. Many major state museums have substantial collections of Melanesian cultural material and other material from the Pacific and Asia, and all state art museums hold extensive Asian collections. The Australian Museum initiated important returns of significant cultural material to Vanuatu, to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and collaborated with the National Museum of New Zealand in a special touring exhibition, *Taonga Maori*. The Queensland Art Gallery initiated (in 1993) and continues to stage a major contemporary art event, the Asia Pacific Triennial, which has also greatly enriched its collections.

In 2010 Hetti Perkins, Senior Curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, wrote and presented a three-part television series on Indigenous Australian artists, *Art + Soul*. This was but one example of museums taking an increasingly prominent role in addressing wider audiences beyond museum walls on Indigenous art and culture. The Art Gallery of New South Wales installed a new exhibition of their collection to complement the television series.

Footnotes

¹An installation of 200 painted hollow log coffins (Lorrkon) — one for every year since European settlement — created by 43 artists from different clans of the region around Ramingining in Arnhem Land and dedicated to the Indigenous Australians who have lost their lives in defence of country since 1788.

² Luke Taylor, 'Exhibiting Indigenous Art', *reCollections*, Vol 3 no 1, March 2008, http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_3_no_1/exhibition_reviews/exhibiting_indigenous_art/

Understanding Museums - Indigenous people and museums

Ethnographic museums and collections: from the past into the future

by John E Stanton

The 1978 UNESCO Regional Seminar on the Role of Museums in Preserving Indigenous Cultures, held in Adelaide, [1] marked a turning point in the relationship between Indigenous communities and the museum sector in Australia, as well as in Oceania between Pacific Island nations and the museums of Australia and New Zealand. It demanded Indigenous representation throughout the museum world – in collections, at senior management level and on boards of trustees. The UNESCO seminar spawned an immediate response from curators of Indigenous collections in the region, with representatives of communities and museums from Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia and New Zealand joining their Australian counterparts at the Conference of Museum Anthropologists held in Melbourne the following year.

The Conference of Museum Anthropologists (its acronym COMA was thought apposite at the time) met annually for over two decades but, once it had achieved its primary aims, local dynamics at the state level took over, to be played out by a new generation of museum anthropologists. COMA conferences were strongly supported by members of the Council of Australian Museum Directors (CAMD), some of whom may have – at least initially – feared the possible outcomes. Instead, museum directors listened to their museum anthropologists and, accordingly, developed policies and programs that promoted Indigenous interests within the sector, both in Australia and overseas. Museums took different approaches to these issues and sought divergent outcomes. COMA remained an informally constituted body, despite the efforts by some members at times to restructure on a more formal basis. This encouraged a wide range of participants, as well as an enthusiastic grassroots response to museum issues of the period.

The annual conference, internationalist in its positioning, was centred on fostering attendance by junior museum staff, as well as a constantly large number of Indigenous participants. Issues of recognition, representation, repatriation, and reaction were discussed from the multifaceted points of view provided by this annual gathering. The *COMA Bulletin*, published on a voluntary basis at first by institutions hosting the conference, but later by Lindy Allen at the Museum of Victoria, disseminated the issues raised at conferences to an international audience.

Many of the issues raised at COMA meetings inspired similar discussions at comparable conferences overseas, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, where museum-based anthropologists were actively promoting the central role of Indigenous communities in the custodianship and representation of institutional collections.

The vigorous role played by Indigenous curators in many of Australia's museums is indicative of the dramatic changes in museological practice that have emerged over the past 25 years, as well as the commitment of museum-based anthropologists to the restructuring of the relationships between museums and communities of origin (as the communities from which these collections derive have become known). It is not a coincidence that this period has also seen the revitalisation of state and national museums across the continent through new exhibitions, fresh engagements and additional appointments.

The past three decades, in particular, have witnessed extraordinary changes in the relationship between museologists and Indigenous (especially Australian) peoples, as well as the nature of their roles and engagement with the wider museum profession. These changes have reflected broader processes evident elsewhere, but the Australian experience has helped to influence developments at the international level. At the same time, the experience of the past three decades did not occur in a vacuum: it emerged from the economic and social vitality of postwar Australia, the affirmation of a new and unique Australian identity, and a degree of conscious self-reflection not often evident in the earlier era. Australia has only recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum that gave Aboriginal Australians formal acknowledgement by the Australian government; and in 1992 the Mabo decision gave recognition to the prior sovereignty of

Indigenous Australians. These two key events in the history of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships frame – and indeed inform, as it were – the parameters of this paper.

Ethnography means different things to different people. The diversity of museum-based departments of anthropology, their varied emphases and output, are testament to this multiplicity of perspectives. In the Australian context, ethnographic collections are firmly anchored within the discipline of anthropology, which is the study of people and society. Although elsewhere in the world collections that are made in the course of ethnographic fieldwork may be known as 'ethnology', this delimited term is not used in Australia. The strength of ethnographic collections lies, or should lie, within the depth of field documentation, and its use in understanding cultural formations in communities of origin.

Within the discipline of anthropology, one of the key attributes of conducting anthropological research that distinguishes it from other related fields is its objective of encouraging researchers to establish and maintain long-term associations with communities and individuals. In the Australian context, at least historically, anthropologists (trained or untrained, amateur and professional) working within a diversity of settings have collected an enormous quantity of research data, in the form of both recordings (notebooks, photographs, magnetic media and the like) and physical items. These tangible objects I have termed elsewhere the 'material manifestations of culture'. [2]

The origins of the European museum clearly lie with the 'cabinets of curiosities', and there are still a few museums around the world that echo this approach to the 'mysterious'. Anthropology and ethnography have moved an enormous distance from the early collecting environment, where 'crude' oddities became peculiar obsessions. There is, nevertheless, an enduring influence of perceived exoticism because many Australian museums have ethnographic collections – or least ethnographic components of their collections – that were collected in a different era, in rather different contexts to those that prevail in the twenty-first century. This, in itself, presents significant challenges to present day curators; most important among these is the question of what to do with those earlier collections. How can they be used to tell their own story? Whose story, which story? [3] Some of the early collections are well documented. Often they are the only materials extant from the period. But many of them are very poorly documented, and it lies with later researchers to induce meaning and attribution.

Museums are not just about objects; they are about the cultures that produce them, and comprise the photographs, films and other records associated with them. Deeply grained documentation remains a key achievement for ethnographically-based museums, as this documentation ensures a continued relevance in research, teaching, and in the minds of members of the communities of origin. As in the past, field collections are an intrinsic element of anthropological fieldwork, and museum collections provide an outstanding resource through which to understand a society and explain it to others.

The cabinets of curiosities speak more of earlier collectors' preoccupations and preconceptions about the world, and their place in it, than they do about the items they contain. This fascination with categorisation was not the realm of anthropologists or ethnographers alone; many others were collecting and classifying, making order where there seemed to be chaos. A curatorial urge to sort and categorise is very much a heritage of the Enlightenment, even if today it takes rather different forms, including Indigenous perspectives on classification. Contemporary classification procedures may still be founded on typologies of function, media or whatever. Nevertheless, digital technology has encouraged museum ethnographers to think of new ways of classifying items, and of creating thesauri to bridge different, but equally important, systems of classification. Classification remains a fundamental issue for today's curators, especially in considering the impact classification has had on effectively distancing one culture from another – even, indeed, creating the very notion of 'the other'. Some of the classical anthropologists, like Malinowski and others, spent lengthy periods of time in the field, yet were rarely to return to the communities. The kinds of engagement with local communities that they had in that much earlier period were very different from the kinds of engagement nurtured by museum-based anthropologists today.

In the current museum environment there is a steadily increasing engagement with communities of origin that involves a redefinition of roles and responsibilities, and the development of new processes of commitment between the key players. Collections are becoming more accessible. Former distinctions between scholars and 'the observed' are being diffused as more and more Indigenous researchers (who may also be museum staff) participate in a shared trusteeship for the continuing care and use of collections. This is nothing new: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

societies have long emphasised the continuity of knowledge and the enduring care of particular ceremonial items. It is simply that the scope of collections, and the manner in which they are obtained, managed and used, is being redefined.

Anthropology is not only typified by prolonged fieldwork: it is also characterised by extended discussions with a diversity of people, talking to a multiplicity of voices and hearing a variety of voices. What anthropologists then do with that material, and what museum curators do, is a very different matter. Indigenous anthropologists, like Indigenous curators, bring a new dimension of knowledge and comprehension to this debate. But there is an engagement with communities of origin, nevertheless. It is a close engagement; however, what we have to remember is that historical collections very quickly develop an energy and a primacy of their own. The objects contained in them start to accumulate other meanings, new interpretations and novel applications, perhaps imposed by curators or by members of the communities of origin.

Ethnographic collections in Australia are primarily Indigenous collections – or at least they have been – for historical reasons. Anthropology has in the past been concerned with discrete small-scale societies; postmodernity and the global market economy are shaping new practitioners and their research foci, just as Marshall McLuhan [4] predicted almost four decades ago. Ethnographic museums must consider the place of their earlier collections in the modern world, just as postmodern researchers, whether anthropologists or 'cultural studies' advocates, should be aware of how their own collections (multi-media or otherwise) may be used and interpreted in the future. Ethnographic collections should not belong alone to Indigenous environments: they should address the non-Indigenous and, most importantly, the interface between the two, in what James Clifford called the 'contact zone':

When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* – a power-charged set of exchanges of push and pull. [5]

This is, however, something for future (and more considered) debate.

Anthropologists and their ethnographic collections have a legacy of partnership, an enduring collaboration, with communities of origin. What is collected in one period may become iconic in another. Anthropologists have seen such momentous changes over recent decades in the lives of all Australians that the materials and associated documentation collected earlier have assumed a new importance not envisaged at the time – the ascription of new meaning, reviewed (indeed, renewed) significance, and the attribution of purpose utterly distinctive from the kinds of meanings and layers of meaning that are added across generations.

Museums Australia, with its publication *Previous Possessions, New Obligations* [6] subsequently revised as *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities*, [7] has spread the accumulated insight and experience of museum anthropologists and Indigenous staff working throughout the sector into the other parts of Australian museology. This perspective has embraced other kinds of collections and other sorts of institutions, from large institutions such as state museums for example, right down to small local community museums. Museums Australia has provided an important and useful template for professional practice in the relationship between museums and Indigenous peoples.

Ethnographic collections very often began as exotic collections of 'the other'. Today though, 'the other' is no longer 'the other' – 'the other' is part of 'us'; alternatively, 'we' are part of 'the other'. The nature of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, their methodologies, goals and aspirations, remains contentious, given that Indigenous groups in Australia still sometimes see museums as a product of European thought. But this is changing as more Aboriginal Australians work in senior positions within the sector, not only as curatorial staff but also as conservators, exhibitions staff – even directors. Enduring partnerships can only evolve in such contexts. This is not to suggest that Indigenous museologists are adequately represented – far from it. But neither are adequate numbers retained in universities to receive the advanced level of training now required for museum employment.

There has been a profound shift in the nature of the relationship between collections and people, whether these are the people who use or see the collections, or those who have principal cultural interest in the collection materials themselves. [8] Some Australian museums (and the Berndt Museum is proud to be counted among them) have set a benchmark for best practice in this respect. This, in turn, has influenced museum practice elsewhere in the world quite profoundly.

So no longer is 'the other' in the midst of our museums. As time goes by, the nature of these relationships between collections and people is becoming more and more complex. The complexity is, in part, about histories. It is also about sharing the knowledge associated with collections. It involves issues such as how to handle culturally sensitive items, and concerns such as the repatriation of skeletal and ritual materials, authorial interpretation and advocacy. A key issue remains the logistical issue of maintaining linkages with so many communities of interest. Most museums hold collections from an enormous diversity of regions, if not countries and or continents. It is, quite simply, impossible for curatorial staff in such contexts to maintain meaningful relationships between all of them, regardless of the resources at their disposal. Increasingly, museums must rely on linkages with key peak government and regional bodies, such as national and state museums in countries overseas and, in the Australian setting, Aboriginal land councils and research bodies such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. At the core, though, these complex issues are being articulated through, and between, individual staff. For Indigenous Australians, as I have been told repeatedly by those who have taught me over so many years, personal relationships are very, very important. As a result, it is sometimes very difficult in the minds of community members to differentiate the curator from the person, if only because these relationships are most often expressed through the individuals that participate in these bonds. This creates all kinds of extra responsibilities for curatorial staff where individuals have an identified custodial role that is recognised by communities, whether they are Indigenous or not.

This linkage involves special kinds of relationships and particular kinds of obligations that extend far beyond what is commonly viewed as professional curatorial practice. Consulting community leaders, attending their funerals, acting on their requests, are all part of the *mélange* of responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of any curator of ethnographic materials. Indigenous ascription of roles for women, and roles for men, command the awareness of those developing and managing staffing recruitment. These kinds of relationships are heavy responsibilities indeed: it is the duty of incumbents to maintain the relationships that have been built and elaborated, often agonisingly so, to renegotiate the kinds of histories, the kinds of voices that are involved in this process we call museology.

Another significant shift in perspective regarding the purpose and use of ethnographic collections has been the move from a preoccupation about 'preservation' to one of 'cultural maintenance', which implies a less passive role for museums and for their staff in the care and use of these physical manifestations of culture. From the 1940s to the 1960s many anthropologists (and, indeed, members of the taxpaying public) saw ethnographic collections as means of preserving culture. Even the 1978 UNESCO seminar was published under the title *Preserving Cultures*.

Of course it is not simply a matter of the Western world preserving something, putting it in a jar, leaving it there, and looking at it, because all the world's cultures have living successors. Indigenous communities are using the materials held in ethnographic collections to elaborate, reconstitute, or even reconstruct what has been broken and torn and disturbed in their lives. The Berndt Museum's experience with the *Bringing the Photographs Home* Project [9] highlights the ways in which ethnographic museums can work with communities and assist them, according to their wishes, to use historic as well as recent photographs to reconstruct broken family lives. It was a very moving experience for Museum staff to be involved in what was sometimes an emotional, but always very important, element of what museums can do in association with Indigenous communities. Photographs, like ethnographic objects, represent the quintessential materials that can be used to harness and project future understandings of social being.

Authorial voices remain very important in this debate, especially in the context of collections that are ethnographic in nature. These collections have their own histories, a vibrancy that derives from past accounts of manufacture, usage and perhaps abandonment, to new interpretations and novel sources of inspiration. These collections can have a momentum of their own, something that is rather different from the original context of collection, or even the reason for doing so. Museums have to be able to accommodate and facilitate these changing narrations, as much as they must reflect on these insights in communicating the stories within which they are embedded. These histories come not from communities of origin alone. They come from visitors, scholars and, indeed, curators. Curators have a right to tell a story too. Curators are not neutral bodies wafting in the air like ghosts. Curators are people with experiences and aspirations, and their stories should be told, too.

Together, these processes lead Australian museology towards a profound sense of community

engagement – a real practical engagement, not just a theoretical one that just sits isolated in the Museums Australia template for best practice. Routes to engagement need to be reviewed constantly, to be reflected on, and to be a topic sought out for discussion with communities of origin. Proactive may be a dreadfully overused word, but it probably describes how museum professionals should be working.

Ethnographic museums are looking toward their futures. There are many participants in the work of a museum, including many members of the communities of origin. There is also a multiplicity of users, including other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Problems emerge in those contexts, where something that is perhaps appropriate in one community is not appropriate in another. In a global world these are profound issues that have to be addressed first at a community level. They are being addressed, but the involved and time-consuming processes can make the work of curators rather complex. The context of human rights and wider awareness of the full range of cultural rights and responsibilities requires a considered response. As curators of anthropology we are already observing – and in some cases documenting – the impact of inter-generational change taking place directly in front of us. Within this setting, museums will require a flexibility of approach, and a willingness to engage beyond the predictable or readily understandable, in order to position museums and their collections for the future.

The increasingly pervasive influence of the World Wide Web, for example, and its impact on Indigenous societies, is an example of competing interests and contradictory perspectives. [10] The Web is a wonderful tool for communication in the Western world, which is predicated on the free exchange of information, but how can it best be harnessed in a culturally appropriate manner in societies that treasure secrecy and privacy? For many Indigenous people in Australia, as well as others elsewhere, their societies are not predicated on the free exchange of information. How can the Web be controlled so that those kinds of information are not unwittingly made available to people who have no right to them or who are ineligible to know about them? This is an important topic for all of those who work in the cultural sector.

The issue of authority to speak about items held in ethnographic collections is also highly contested. [11] The primary authority, of course, comes from the artists, the originators of works, and this rests on the assertion of cultural knowledge and rights to speak. Museum documentation of items represents a powerful tool for the expression and consolidation of cultural birthright. The memory and the voice of the ethnographic item are enhanced by historical recordings and present-day affirmations and interpretations.

What is an ethnographic collection today? Is it something created in the past, a part of historical and political processes? Or is it something that endures in the contemporary setting? Few if any museum staff today continue the ‘vacuum-cleaner’ approach, travelling into communities collecting everything that somebody has used to tell a story of their culture. For many museums, work is being conducted in very different social contexts. The works themselves, the artefacts, the artworks, still have embodied meanings and enduring histories. The authority of the creator is profound but, removed from its context, is still subject to interpretation. Memory is simply a glimpse; it is not a ‘fact’ that can be recorded. It is a matter of interpretation within a changing context, a selective attribution if not a discriminating account. There are many different voices for a variety of different occasions, with different explanations for different people. Museums need to facilitate this unpredictability of both memory and voice.

Ethnographic museums look at whole constellations of knowledge, knowledge that is shared, knowledge that might be segregated, knowledge that follows different paths. The objects in their collections are media for the communication of information. They convey insight in different ways: what curators of such collections have to always be aware of is the primacy of information. The pre-eminence of documentation is what both makes the meaning, and what conveys the meaning.

Museums of anthropology, then, are the public face of anthropology. They resonate with the rich data collected by anthropologists in the field, and provide a conduit for communicating these insights to the wider public. Anthropology museums provide the raw materials for research and teaching within the academic setting, but they are increasingly valued for their outward focus. They are more and more seen as ‘treasures’ by the public, highly visible and perhaps more readily appreciated than rows of taxonomic expression. Ethnographic collections are a concrete validation of the cultures they express; they are witnesses to cultural diversity and social change. Museum-based anthropologists have a critical role to play in this process; they are keys in the public-scholar interface. Ethnographic collections provide a prime means through which multiple social

expressions can achieve a public presence and, through this engagement, recruit potential supporters and advocates into the highly politicised arena of cross-cultural engagement. This is the stuff of ethnographic collections, a shared journey through which the objects speak to us in many tongues.

Footnotes

¹ R Edwards and J Stewart (editors), *Preserving indigenous cultures a new role for museums*. Papers from a UNESCO Regional Seminar, Adelaide 1978, AGPS, Canberra, 1980.

² JE Stanton, 'Snapshots on the Dreaming: photographs of the past and present' in L Peers and A Brown (eds), *Museums and source communities*, Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 136–51.

³ JE Stanton, 'Telling it right: whose story, which story?' *COMA Bulletin* No. 28, 1997, pp. 32–5.

⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *Culture Is Our Business*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1970.

⁵ J Clifford, *Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1997, p. 92.

⁶ CAMA, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: policies for museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, Council of Australian Museum Associations, Melbourne, 1993.

⁷ Museums Australia, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities*, Museums Australia, Canberra, 2005.

⁸ JE Stanton, 'At the grass-roots: collecting and the community in Aboriginal Australia', in S Toussaint and J Taylor (eds), *Applied Anthropology in Australasia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1999, pp. 282–94.

⁹ Stanton, 'Snapshots on the Dreaming', pp. 143–7.

¹⁰ B Glowczewski, L Pourchez, J Rostkowski and J Stanton (eds), *Cultural diversity and Indigenous peoples: oral, written expressions and new technologies*, UNESCO, Paris, 2004 (CD-Rom).

¹¹ M Ames, *Cannibal tours and glass boxes: the anthropology of museums*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1992.

John E Stanton is Director) of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology and has had extensive experience and involvement in Aboriginal arts.

Cite as: John E Stanton, 2011, 'Ethnographic museums and collections: from the past into the future' in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JStanton_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Indigenous people and museums

Transforming culture: Indigenous art and Australian art museums

by Bernice Murphy

Aboriginal art had a restricted presence in Australian museums in the first half of the twentieth century. On one hand it was framed by scientific study and typological displays in natural history museums that could remain unchanged for decades. [1] On the other hand, if Aboriginal art *were* presented to highlight aesthetic contents, it frequently still carried a burden derived from nineteenth-century science's interest in 'primitive' stages of society, [2] and thus was framed as 'Primitive art'. [3]

The transformational changes of the later twentieth century could not have been imagined in the 1940s, when the small bark illustrated here [4] was collected on the American-American Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land (AASEAL expedition) in 1948 led by Charles Mountford. [5]



Figure 1: 'The Man, Mik-mik', Oenpelli, Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, [American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land \(AASEAL\) collection](#), National Museum of Australia.

Four decades later, the situation was completely transformed. In the 1980s, following rising attention in metropolitan centres and the supportive work of locally based art advisers in Indigenous communities, [6] some artists from the same region and broad kinship networks as those sampled by Charles Mountford's collecting in 1948 had achieved artistic 'careers', been represented repeatedly in exhibitions, and had reached diverse audiences and collections in the wider world.

This chapter considers Indigenous art's impact in Australian art museums in the last decades of the twentieth century. It highlights how the 1970s and 1980s, in particular, witnessed a series of changes that brought about new kinds of Indigenous engagement and presentation within Australia's public galleries and museums. Such developments could not have been accomplished within previous institutional practices. Historical imagination was challenged in its interpretative tasks. New connections needed to be made, stretching beyond museums and involving near and far-distant communities. In particular, structural change in relation to cultural authority and responsibility for knowledge was required to bring Indigenous perspectives, presence and creativity into mainstream institutions. [7]

Differing museum approaches to Indigenous culture

It is remarkable how contrasting have been the approaches underlying the ethnographic

presentation of Indigenous art in Australian natural history or anthropology museums, and Indigenous exhibitions, often of the same material, in art museums. These differences delineate one of the most complex domains in Australian museography of the last half-century, and one of the least elucidated in museology.

The lack of debate about different museum approaches to Indigenous culture is reinforced by continuing divisions in institutional cultures, research and publications. For example, an important anthology of essays on 'scientific' collecting historically, *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, appeared in 2008. The editors glancingly acknowledge that there have been competing value systems shaping the conceptualisation of Indigenous 'art' – especially in the period leading up to the Australian bicentenary of 1988:

Central to the rise of Aboriginal art was the effort of many outside anthropology to wrest art from the anthropologists, and the ethnographic museum, and to relocate it in the art gallery. [8]

However, no collections located in art museums are appraised in the publication. Such divisions are maintained only at considerable cost to Indigenous cultural aspirations to be 'viewed whole': as part of a continuing cultural history and comprehensive story of adaptive evolution across a huge land and islands over centuries.

The rise of specialised exhibitions and curatorship of Indigenous art

Continued institutional segregation distorts the historical record of more than a half-century. Australia's state and national galleries have been acquiring Indigenous art purposively since the 1950s. They have established staffing structures and programs providing permanent attention to Indigenous art as a central aspect of their institutional mission; meanwhile the largest institutions have developed dedicated curatorial departments supporting specialised collections and exhibitions.

A growing number of Indigenous curators have been employed by art museums, some of whom have organised or coordinated some of the most outstanding exhibitions in the country in recent decades. Key examples are:

- Hetti Perkins at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), Sydney
- Brenda L Croft at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA), Perth, then National Gallery of Australia (NGA), Canberra – but in the interim also a guest curator of the Indigenous-focused Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art in 2000
- Margo Neale at AGNSW, Sydney, Queensland Art Gallery (QAG), Brisbane, and then the National Museum of Australia (NMA), Canberra
- Doreen Mellor at Flinders University, SA, then Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, and National Library of Australia (NLA), Canberra
- Djon Mundine at Bula'Bula Arts, Ramingining, then for AGNSW, Sydney, Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney, NMA, Canberra, QAG, Brisbane, and Campbelltown Arts Centre, New South Wales.

Indigenous exhibitions have also included the curatorial input of Indigenous artists; for example, Fiona Foley, Rea, Avril Quail, Brook Andrew, and again Brenda L Croft, as well as other practitioners – a number of artist-curators having emerged through the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists' Cooperative formed in 1987 in Sydney.

Parallel impact has been achieved by *non-Indigenous* curators who have made decisive contributions as long-experienced practitioners in the area of Indigenous arts: Judith Ryan at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Melbourne; Margie West at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT), Darwin; Wally Caruana and Susan Jenkins at NGA, Canberra; Michael O'Ferrall at AGWA, Perth; Diane Moon, when based at Maningrida Arts and Culture, NT, and for various institutions as a guest curator – and then at QAG/Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) in Brisbane; and Anne Marie Brody at NGV, Melbourne, and later for the Holmes à Court and Kerry Stokes collections in Perth. Meanwhile, a younger generation is developing new capacities, and their work will play a decisive role in future years.

Dedicated permanent displays in state and national galleries

In the 1980s and 1990s the state galleries intensified their attention to Indigenous art and took affirmative steps to increase its presence and profile in their institutional development. For example, the Art Gallery of New South Wales moved dramatically to upscale its long-standing commitment to Indigenous art with the opening of the Yiribana Gallery in 1994. Special display galleries were established in the main institutions, backed by a more active acquisitions program, dedicated staff curatorship, and attention to thematic, temporary exhibitions of new work evolving in diverse Indigenous communities and situations.

One of the most important of the dedicated permanent displays within an art museum was in fact a single work: *The Aboriginal Memorial (1987–88)*, owned by the National Gallery. Organised by Djon Mundine for the 1988 (bicentennial) Biennale of Sydney, this work memorialising Aboriginal deaths over two centuries is an installation of 200 painted hollow log coffins (*Lorrkon*) by 43 artists from around Ramingining in Arnhem Land.

Depth of collections

Collections of Indigenous art in art museums have gained dramatically in depth as well as strength since the 1980s. Many institutions now house outstanding *constellations* of works in their collections that enable in-depth coverage of Indigenous regional and urban styles, as well as intensive representation of individual artists.

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Sydney has three complete (pre-formed) collections of Arnhem Land art commissioned or negotiated by this essay's author. One was composed by Djon Mundine when he was in Ramingining, and purchased over three years in 1984–1986; a second collection was formed by Diane Moon when in Maningrida and acquired in the early 1990s, but with ownership title later transferred back to Maningrida in a unique 'cultural agreement' with the originating community. The third collection was a negotiated gift in 1993 of an important older collection formed originally in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. [9] These collections were acquired across a decade (1984–1993) in which Indigenous art became *the* most concentrated area within the MCA-Power Bequest's total international collection.

Anthropology's contribution

The contribution of anthropology to the historical documentation and understanding of Indigenous people is unquestionable. There should be no underestimation of the density of the anthropological archive, the extent of its ongoing influence in recuperative knowledge, or the interpretative richness of its resources available for diverse applications. Anthropologists have also played a key role in advocacy and technical support of many Indigenous causes – especially in providing evidence of cultural continuity and historical documentation for cultural history, repatriation issues and native title claims.

However in terms of *creative futures*, this essay takes issue with an argument that conceptually elevates anthropology's procedures over the very different vantage points of art. This disciplinary challenge dating back to the 1940s when it fuelled manoeuvres behind the academic scenes, [10] has simmered and occasionally been resolutely waged in print over more than a half-century.

The art museum's vantage point

To curators working in art museums, there was a worrying sense that the disciplinary approach of anthropology had insisted on controlling the terms by which Indigenous art was framed and made 'knowable'. Indigenous art seemed irremediably confined and estranged by authoritative interpretation in ethnographic displays. Indigenous voices were rarely admitted in museum texts or publications as more than exotic vocal fragments (in 'language') or intriguing phrases (in Kriol), glimpsed through an edifice of already translated explanation in the speech and thought patterns of the dominant culture.

Art museums come to Indigenous art from a different history and orientation in considering the complexity of visual traditions as expressive of human creativity itself. Art museums favour a *non-determined encounter* with Indigenous art. They seek to present Indigenous cultural objects as human creativity manifested directly, and thereby to some extent cross-culturally – that is, as bearing signs of art *already articulate* and capable of engaging a broader audience. The question of enlarged understanding of form and language is a separate question, dealt with through the diverse processes of inquiry by which art history composes a more detailed historical account of the

origins, context and meaning of objects – including their social connections.

It is important to note also how much art museums were themselves changing in the later decades of the twentieth century, in the expansion of the whole system of contemporary art and its increasingly diverse manifestations – a proliferation of biennales, triennales, alternative artspace, artist-run spaces, art fairs, performance festivals, multimedia events and new kinds of cultural gatherings within and beyond the main institutions. This provided an immensely fertile environment for Indigenous art's expansion in one of *the* most transformative periods for art itself, which was continually tested and redefined by the experimental temper of contemporary art in its direct engagement with a changing world.

From ethnographic representation to creative agency

Australian artspace, galleries and museums sought something different from – and *for* – Indigenous art than scientific study had tended to provide. The 'art world' was drawn towards a *contemporary* experience of Indigenous art and resisted interpretations that *historicised* or over-determined such experience.

This repositioned Indigenous creativity in the highly tuned space of speculative, open-ended viewing shaped by the art museum as a cultural form. In this space Indigenous artists were not obliged to act as stand-ins or exemplars of whole 'cultures' or 'societies', as had been the burden placed upon their forebears' appearance historically in anthropological or natural history museums. Through exhibitions and commissions, Indigenous artists at last gained the agency of shaping their own appearance and representation in mainstream institutions.

The impact of opportunities on productivity

In the 1980s, in a widening array of new works, proliferating exhibitions, and evolving typologies in the work shown in art galleries, Indigenous artists all over central, western and northern Australia dismantled stereotypes of the static tempo or authoritarian shackles of 'tradition', in the new secular works through which they moved out to distant audiences.

Through direct invitation and commissioning, Indigenous artists were facilitated to produce works of increased scale, diversity and impact. They used means that were in many respects quite different from the communicative contexts of continuing custom and social exchange; in other respects their means were extensions or reformulations of those more intimate and exclusive practices. Performance often accompanied works' installation in public galleries, indicating their referential connections and layering in religion and ritual, in kinship and country.

Indigenous artists were quick to appreciate the political potential of these new exhibition opportunities. They recognised the art museum as a potent *civic space*, where their work was in dialogue with the most highly regarded expressive achievements of artists from different cultural backgrounds. It could serve as a powerful public arena for presenting the integrity and individuality of Indigenous art forms, as well as projecting the currency of social exchange and desire for independent cultural recognition they conveyed. [11]

Rise of individual careers: John Mawurndjul, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri

Three biographies suggest the scale of transformation. From within the broad northern region where the 1948 bark was collected, a striking personal development can be followed in the case of Kuninjku artist John Mawurndjul, resident in the vicinity of Maningrida. Mawurndjul's work began to circulate in exhibitions beyond Arnhem Land after 1982. He developed a sense of museum collections and exhibitions as a cultural system in the wider world on a visit to the National Gallery in Canberra in 1983. [12] His work developed remarkably over subsequent years, gaining a more experimental momentum while still being grounded in tradition.

Mawurndjul was included in three highly significant exhibitions presented internationally in the 1980s: in the *Dreamings* exhibition shown at the Asia Society Galleries in New York in Australia's bicentennial year, 1988; in the Paris exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre (Magicians of the Earth)*, organised by Jean-Hubert Martin, Director of the National Museum of Modern Art, Centre Pompidou, in 1989; and in the important *Aratjara* exhibition [13] instigated by Swiss artist Bernhard Lüthi – an exhibition that, with support of the Aboriginal Arts Board, was shown in art museums in Düsseldorf, London and Copenhagen in 1993–1994.

In Australia meanwhile, Mawurndjul's imposing bark paintings within the multi-sited Biennale of Sydney in 2000, in company with large-scale sculptures from fellow artists around Maningrida, constituted one of the most compelling ensembles in the whole biennale.



Figure 2: Installation view of paintings (ochres on wood) by John Mawurndjul, Biennale of Sydney 2000. Photo: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

Mawurndjul won first prize three years later in the *Clemenger Contemporary Art Award* at the National Gallery of Victoria (in 2003), [14] which included a great suite of 21 works by Emily Kame Kngwarreye that were later acquired by the National Gallery of Australia. In September 2005 Mawurndjul was the subject of a large solo exhibition at the Tinguely Museum in Basel, Switzerland. [15] En route to the opening, he realised a large work as one of eight Australian Indigenous artists commissioned to produce works for the new Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. [16]

The remarkable stylistic development of the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye (who began painting in 1989 when approaching her eighties) [17] may be juxtaposed with the career of the younger Mawurndjul (born in 1952). While remaining members of Aboriginal communities with a still-active religious life in 'remote' Australia – Kngwarreye in the central desert north of Alice Springs, Mawurndjul in the tropical north, east of Darwin – each evolved directly through inherited traditions and pressed forward to depict their sites and 'country' through unheralded revolutions in imaginative perception.

Both artists eventually gained the honour of foreign retrospective exhibitions: Mawurndjul in Switzerland, and Kngwarreye in Japan. [18] In comparison with the collective anonymity and obscurity of cultural production in remote Aboriginal communities on the edge of Australian public awareness in their youth, their works had moved into potent forums of international recognition as *artists*, positioned in dialogue with the great and diverse art traditions of the world. This is an astonishing achievement within a generation!

A similarly interesting biography, beginning earlier, can be constructed for the Anmatyerre-Arrernte painter, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri. Having emerged through the Papunya Tula co-operative stimulated in the early 1970s by Geoffrey Bardon, he was powerfully represented (in two works created with Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri) in the first *Australian Perspecta* exhibition of 1981 in Sydney (AGNSW). [19] His epochal *Warlugulong* (1967), acquired from this exhibition, began the Sydney Gallery's collecting of Western Desert paintings on canvas. Clifford Possum was later represented in Australia's contribution – all Aboriginal art – to the Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (1983), [20] with a large work later acquired by the National Gallery of Australia, and eventually hung alongside German star, Anselm Kiefer, as a pivotal painting in the NGA's international survey of contemporary art in the 1990s. He was the subject of a survey exhibition in London in 1988, organised by Iwona Blazwick at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), juxtaposed with an

exhibition of Imants Tillers.

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri eventually gained monographs on his work and a four-cities touring retrospective exhibition in Australia in 2003–2004. [21] In both cases, the artist was interpreted and supported by Vivien Johnson's detailed knowledge of the Papunya movement and of his personal career within that wider context. In 2008 the National Gallery purchased posthumously at a Sotheby's auction his most majestic rendition of *Warlugulong (1977)*, for the record-breaking price for an Aboriginal work of \$2.4 million dollars. Thus within three decades a work by Clifford Possum, painted only six years after the Papunya movement began, was already prized as a 'masterwork' of twentieth-century *Australian* art.

The creation of new networks among Indigenous artists and the rise of urban art

An important aspect of the art world's support of Indigenous art in the 1980s was the establishment of new networks of cross-cultural influence *among* Indigenous artists from disparate parts of the country. This had not generally occurred in earlier periods, where political struggle rather than creativity had forged common cause across Indigenous Australians of vastly different locations and backgrounds.

Such cross-cultural changes *within* Indigenous art were fostered through urban artists travelling to the far north and forming relationships with elders and artists in communities with a still-active ritual life. Many artists – for example Lin Onus, Fiona Foley, Robert Campbell Junior, Tracey Moffatt, Gordon Bennett and Michael Riley – gained great stimulus from visits to Arnhem Land. This expanded their experience and sharpened their own sense of the complex identities contributing to Indigenous art. [22]

It could clearly be seen that an intense preoccupation with community and place, with interpersonal narratives and social history, provided shaping forces and shared sensibilities linking Indigenous art from widely disparate parts of Australia, including the Torres Strait and Tasmania.

A line of rising development in exhibitions of rural and urban Indigenous artists can be traced from a small but important exhibition organised at Sydney's Artspace in the early 1980s by Vivien Johnson and Tim Johnson, *Koori Art '84*. [23] The quickening tempo of urban art's claims in the mainstream was underscored through the formation of the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in Sydney in 1987, and the appearance of Indigenous curatorship, often through a background in art practice – as was the case for Fiona Foley, Brenda L Croft and Avril Quail, all of whom were associated with Boomalli's founding.

Many urban artists brought a stringently critical view of Australian cultural history to their work. This may be traced in Fiona Foley's reworking of the motifs of colonial dispossession in her two-dimensional works and mixed-media installations; in Destiny Deacon's photographs, acerbically charged with golliwog dolls and parodic recycling of racist, subcultural bric-a-brac; [24] in Gordon Bennett's disordering of the 'cultural machinery' of colonial painting; and in Richard Bell's painting and actions that blitz mainstream composure in rumbustious inversions of stereotype. Wearing his notorious 'White Girls Can't Hump' t-shirt in Darwin to receive the 2003 Telstra NATSIAA art award, a major national event organised annually by the Museum and Art Gallery of the NT, [25] Richard Bell also attacked the rising commodification of Indigenous art – for example in a text emblazoned across the painting (*Scientia e Metaphysica [Bell's Theorem]*) that actually won the award, stating 'Aboriginal Art it's a White Thing'.

From artists on the margins to *Culture Warriors* challenging the mainstream

Richard Bell's provocative confrontation with Australian art's history shifted strategically in a later painting (2006) entitled *Australian Art It's an Aboriginal Thing*. This work incorporated a montage of modernist stylistic devices that insurgently disordered the coherent territory of a 'national' art. The painting caught the mood of the first edition of a new project: the National Indigenous Art Triennial, which opened at the National Gallery of Australia late in 2007.

Curated by Brenda L Croft, *Culture Warriors* [26] in some respects built on earlier achievements in her *Beyond the Pale* (Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art) at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2000. However with the greater scale and impetus afforded by the National Gallery's commitment to a triennial venture, *Culture Warriors* produced the most substantial intermingling of continuing

'traditional' arts practice alongside rural, suburban and high-metropolitan forms: all marking the variety of adaptive energies across the broad horizon of contemporary Indigenous art in Australia today.

Looking back/ looking forward

The exuberant achievements of recent years have been the result of more than six decades of cumulative effort. It is little known that Australian state gallery directors were lobbying the Australian government in the early 1950s to build an Australian pavilion within the Biennale of Venice, and they urged that 'the very best of contemporary Australian works available' should be accompanied by Aboriginal bark paintings. [27] This was decades before an Australian Pavilion was actually achieved in Venice in 1988 (with an exhibition of Arthur Boyd's paintings), or before Indigenous artists represented *Australian art* in Venice in the following Biennale. In 1990 the Australian Pavilion presented Trevor Nickolls and Rover Thomas; [28] this was succeeded towards the end of the decade by a trio presentation of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Yvonne Koolmatrie and Judy Watson in 1997. [29]

Building on the rising consciousness of Aboriginal art's claims within our major institutions in the 1960s and 1970s – and all state galleries had contributed to this recognition, with Tony Tuckson's commitment in Sydney being the most outstanding – the 1980s and 1990s opened out to embrace diverse attitudes and practices in securing growing audiences for Indigenous art. Australia's art museums – and Indigenous artists themselves – meanwhile sourced ideas in a great variety of disciplines in constructing the diverse exhibitions that marked the later twentieth century, including the contributions of anthropology.

Some of the most substantial, impressive and profound exhibitions staged in recent times have occurred where art museums have committed the full resources of their own historical temperament, museography and experimental orientation to the *experience* of art, drawing on the depth of detailed ethnographical knowledge that natural history and anthropology can contribute, in order to expand the concentration on creative form itself. Outstanding examples of such integration, supported by rich layers of research, were achieved in two beautiful exhibitions co-ordinated by Hetti Perkins at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in recent years – *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* [30] presented in 2000, and *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art*, [31] presented in 2004. Meanwhile for forceful concentration on thematic and stylistic development of one artist, enriched by careful contextualisation of sources in supporting material, the exhibition of *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, even in a cut-down version at the National Museum in Canberra [32] following its expansive showing in Osaka and Tokyo, impacted on a broad public as one of the great experiences of Australian art in a generation. The Australian curator for this project in 2008, collaborating with Japan's initiating curator, Akira Tatehata, was Margo Neale (NMA).



Visitors at the exhibition at the National Museum of Art, Osaka, 26 February to 13 April 2008. Photo: Benita Tunks. Courtesy National Museum of Australia.

The challenge of language

One of the sharp issues for art museums and anthropological museums alike is raised around the issue of languages. Systematic efforts to liberate the richness of Indigenous thought and expression from its clogged rendition in various forms of Creole (or Kriol) are long overdue. It is time to commission proper translations from native-fluency thought; this has been well provided through various efforts that convey John Mawurndjul's ideas to a wider world. It is important to liberate the nuanced orality of Indigenous *speech*, so often immobilised as printed *text* controlled by the foreign *discourse* of outsiders. It would be unthinkable to interview foreign artists in a portmanteau language that prevented subtlety of thought and expression in terms of first-language fluency. Nevertheless it is still received practice to render remotely located Indigenous artists' thought in Kriol – that is, in a reductive language, acquired in addition to sometimes three or four Indigenous languages spoken already, and therefore a language that cannot convey the richness of concept that is possible only in the layered reference of first-language speech, by which thought itself is fully encoded culturally.

In retrospect

The expansive decades of activity surveyed in this essay have immeasurably enhanced the self-determining options of Indigenous artists (and curators) to pursue multiple kinds of presentation and interpretation of art across a broad spectrum of institutions, places and settings. The vigorous plurality of approaches and contexts now available to Indigenous art has directly stimulated its diversification as well as helping to maintain vital continuities with a rich past. This cumulative history has repositioned Indigenous creativity to a pivotal place in national understanding of Australia's cultural history. In the process Australian art museums have contributed to Indigenous art's rightful recognition among the world's cultural achievements at an international level of esteem.

For sheer diveristy of regional, rural and contemporary Indigenous art's voices today, no single Australian museum can now surpass the historical and stylistic panorama provided by the suite of purpose-built Indigenous galleries of the National Gallery of Australia (NGA extension, Stage 1, opened in 2010).

Footnotes

¹ Aboriginal displays were scarcely changed for 75 years in the Queensland Museum (1911–1986); 68 years in the South Australian Museum (1914–1982); and more or less 56 years in the Australian Museum (1906–1956), despite a rearrangement by culture areas in the 1930s in Sydney. (Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby (eds), *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, Melbourne University Publishing, Melbourne, 2008, 'Introduction', pp. 1–26, 3–4.)

² Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004.

³ See *Australian Aboriginal Art*, National Museum, Melbourne, 1929, which included an essay titled 'The primitive artist'; and Dr Leonhard Adam, *Primitive Art Exhibition*, 1943, shown under the joint auspices of the National Museum and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

⁴ See also Peter Sutton (ed.), *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1988, fig. 71, p. 45: *Mother, Daughter, and Snake*, 1948; artist unknown, Western Arnhem Land; ochres on bark, 47.5x 62.5 cm.

⁵ See CP Mountford (ed.), *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land. Vol.1: Art, Myth and Symbolism*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1956; CP Mountford (ed.), *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, Vol.2*, London, 1960.

⁶ See JC Altman (Chairman), *The Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry: report of the review committee*, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, AGPS, Canberra, 1989; Felicity Wright, *Art and Craft Centre Story: A survey of thirty-nine Aboriginal community art and craft centres in remote Australia, undertaken by Desart Inc*, Vol. 1, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), Canberra, 1999; Vol. 2, ATSIC, Canberra, 2000. See also Fred Myers, *Painting Culture: the making of an Aboriginal high art*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2002.

⁷ See Des Griffin, 'Previous possessions, new obligations: a commitment by Australian museums', *Curator*, vol. 39, no.1, 1996, 45–62; *Continuing Cultures: Ongoing Responsibilities* – Museums Australia's Indigenous policy for relations between Indigenous people and museums – 2nd (rev.) ed., Museums Australia, Canberra, 2005.

⁸ Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby (eds), *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, p 6.

⁹ See Susan Cochrane (ed.), *Aboriginal Art Collections: highlights from Australia's public museums and galleries*, Craftsman House, St Leonards, NSW, 2001.

¹⁰ Professor AS Elkin's attempt from his anthropology Chair at Sydney University to have Charles Mountford unseated as prospective leader of the AASEAL expedition to Arnhem-Land in 1948 was unsuccessful. However a touch of malice is evident in the archival record of Elkin's efforts to gain 'spy' reports on Mountford's progress in Arnhem Land, especially those that provided pleasure in recording the latter's vicissitudes. Some of this ill-will towards the breaching of anthropology's methodology in collecting and exhibiting Aboriginal art continued as a legacy through Elkin's then students, Ronald and Catherine Berndt. It surfaces again a generation later in Berndt's dispute with artist/AGNSW deputy director Tony Tuckson over the latter's attitudes to Aboriginal art in the all-state galleries national touring exhibition, *Australian Aboriginal Art*, of 1960–61 – and is focused on Tuckson's essay in a later in-depth monograph of the same title in 1964, edited by Berndt. Berndt takes issue with Tuckson's position in an Epilogue within the same volume. A contemporary version of this long-standing rebuke of art museums and 'art' attitudes from the vantage point of anthropology can be found in essays by Prof. Howard Morphy since 2001 ('Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery', *Humanities Research*, Australian National University, Canberra, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2001, 37–50). The 2001 essay sets out a critique that is expanded in the latter's monograph, *Becoming Art: exploring cross-cultural categories*, 2008. This critique now has a six-decade history of contest between the intellectual orientation of art museums and the claims of anthropology for primacy in the interpretation of Indigenous art in Australia.

¹¹ See Myers, *Painting Culture*, for a detailed study of the self-conscious Indigenous agency present in early Papunya painting.

¹² Luke Taylor, 'John Mawurndjul: "I've got a different idea"', catalogue essay in « rarrk » - *John Mawurndjul: journey in time in Northern Australia*, Musée Tinguely, Basel, 2005.

¹³ Bernhard Lüthi, with Gary Lee et al., *Aratjara – Art of the First Australians: traditional and contemporary works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 1993.

¹⁴ *Clemenger Contemporary Art Award*, National Gallery of Victoria, Ian Potter Centre, 2003. This was the fourth edition of the invitational award, hosted by the NGV – and the first occasion of an Indigenous artist's being awarded the prize.

¹⁵ « rarrk » – *John Mawurndjul*. This exhibition, guest curated by Bernard Lüthi (the crucial instigator previously of the *Aratjara* exhibition for Europe), was shown in Basel at the Musée Tinguely (21 September 2005 – 29 January 2006) and the Sprengel Museum, Hannover (19 February – 5 June 2006).

¹⁶ *Australian Indigenous Art Commission/Commande publique d'art aborigène: Musée du Quai Branly*, Art and Australia, Paddington, NSW, 2006; curators: Brenda L Croft and Hetti Perkins.

¹⁷ See Margo Neale and Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere: paintings from Utopia*; Margo Neale, with contributions by Roger Benjamin, et al, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, and Macmillan, 1998; curator: Margo Neale.

¹⁸ *Utopia: the genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, National Museum of Art, Osaka, 26 February – 13 April 2008; National Art Center, Tokyo, 28 May – 28 July 2008; commissioning curator: Akira Tatehata, Japan; Australian curator: Margo Neale.

¹⁹ *Australian Perspecta 1981*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 29 May – 21 June 1981; curator: Bernice Murphy.

²⁰ *XVII Bienal de São Paulo: Australia*, Sydney, Aboriginal Arts Board, 1983; exhibition, Parque Ibirapuera, São Paulo, Brazil, October – December 1983; commissioner: Thancoupie (Thanaquith people, Qld); curator: Bernice Murphy.

²¹ Vivien Johnson, *Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2003; toured Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, 2003 – 2004.

²² See Lin Onus, 'Southwest, Southeast Australia and Tasmania', in Bernhard Lüthi, Gary Lee et al., *Aratjara*, pp. 289–296, 292.

²³ *Koori Art '84*, Surry Hills, Sydney, Artspace, 1984, was curated by Vivien Johnson and Tim Johnson and presented 25 artists (including some artists from the central deserts and Arnhem Land).

²⁴ Clare Williamson and Hetti Perkins, *Blakness: Blak City Culture!*, South Yarra, Vic, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1994; Bernice Murphy, 'Passages of the Photographic Image', catalogue essay in *Zeitgenössische Fotokunst aus Australien/ Contemporary Photographic Art From Australia*, publ. German/English, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein/NBK, Berlin, September 2000, pp.167–8, 171; curator: Bernice Murphy.

²⁵ The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA) exhibitions, organised by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory since 1984, have provided an important annual invitational exhibition centred on Darwin, while also enriching the collections of that institution.

²⁶ *Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2007; curator: Brenda L Croft.

²⁷ Minutes, Australian Gallery Directors Conference, 4th annual meeting, Perth, 21–23 November 1951, pp. 4, 17.

²⁸ For the 44th Venice Biennale, separate catalogues were produced for Rover Thomas and Trevor Nickolls, the presentation in 1990 organised by the Art Gallery of Western Australia on behalf of the Australia Council; curator: Michael O'Ferrall.

²⁹ *Fluent: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Yvonne Koolmatrie, Judy Watson: XLVII esposizione internazionale d'arte/ La Biennale di Venezia*, Australia Council, Sydney, catalogue for 47th Biennale of Venice, 1997; curator: Hetti Perkins.

³⁰ *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius*, Hetti Perkins and Hannah Fink (eds), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, in association with Papunya Tula artists, 2000; coordinating curator: Hetti Perkins.

³¹ *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2004; curators: Jon C Altman and Hetti Perkins.

³² Taylor, 'John Mawurndjul: "I've got a different idea"', in « rarrk » - *John Mawurndjul: journey in time in Northern Australia*.

Bernice Murphy is the National Director, Museums Australia (Canberra) and has been the Chair of the Ethics Committee of ICOM, Paris, since 2005.

Cite as: Bernice Murphy, 2011, 'Transforming Culture: Indigenous art and Australia art museums', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/BMUrphy_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Indigenous people and museums

Repatriation: the end of the beginning

by Michael Pickering and Phil Gordon

The major federal, state and territory museums have become increasingly active in the repatriation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains and secret/sacred objects over the past 20 years. Indeed the Australian museum industry is now internationally recognised as a world leader in this area. What characterises the Australia repatriation experience is a reliance on a *philosophy* of repatriation, typically in the absence of compelling legislation.

Australian museums return remains and secret/sacred objects because intellectual debate and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has convinced the industry that this is the ethical course of action. This is in stark contrast to other countries, for example, the United States of America, where legislative controls impose repatriation on an industry that is clearly not always convinced of the merits of the practice.

However, despite Australia's pre-eminence, this reputation has not come about without dispute. Only 20 years ago there was majority opposition by heritage professionals, many of whom worked in, or were associated with Australian museums. They believed that repatriation was the wrong thing to do. Any repatriation was considered to be a surrender to Indigenous political activism. Nonetheless, increasing requests – indeed demands – by Indigenous people for the return of remains and secret/sacred objects compelled the museum industry to explain why it rejected, or was at least cautious of, the principle. In so doing the topic of repatriation was openly debated for the first time. This in turn led to a change in direction. Slowly, repatriation events occurred, not the least being the return of the remains of Mungo Woman in 1989 by Alan Thorne of the Australian National University. The Mungo statement of 1989 was a highly symbolic event.

The Australian Museum in Sydney took the lead in industry acceptance of repatriation, largely empowered by the support and direct input of its director. [1] As a result the principle was embraced by Museums Australia. [2] In recent years the principle of repatriation has been endorsed by federal, state, and territory ministers and governments. [3] This, in turn, has led to provision of improved funding support for repatriation.

While a philosophy of repatriation has been established, the practice of repatriation is still developing. Each repatriation case and event is still unique in its characteristics. Each museum's experiences continue to inform their future practice – indeed the practice of the industry. As a result of improved resourcing leading to greater activity, issues that previously emerged rarely are now becoming regular occurrences, with trends and patterns subsequently emerging.

Repatriation as a business as usual practice of museums is still new. Each museum works under its own philosophical and policy guidelines, influenced also by external political and legislative responsibilities that are imposed upon it by the nation, state, or territory to which it belongs.

Over the last 30 to 40 years many changes have occurred in Australia in the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the broader community. Both political and social rights have been given to or won by Indigenous peoples across a broad range of areas, from land rights through to the acknowledgement that Aboriginal people were and are the original owners of this land via the 1992 Mabo judgment by the Australian High Court. [4]

As museums don't stand alone from these developments in the broader community, they have had to respond to these changes and deeply question their world views and the ways they operate. These are positive outcomes that have enabled museums to grow and maintain relevance, not only with Indigenous peoples, but also to the broader Australian community.

The National Museum of Australia

The National Museum of Australia (NMA) has a divergent history compared with most other major Australian museums active in repatriation. While a 'National Museum' was proposed for decades, it

only came into existence officially in 1980 with the passing of the *National Museum of Australia Act*. This means the National Museum of Australia does not have a nineteenth-century legacy of a history of deliberate collection of human remains and secret/sacred objects that characterises other museums. The ancestral remains and secret/sacred objects in its care are derived from other collections transferred, or temporarily housed under contract. This is an advantage in that the Museum does not have to work as hard to overcome a negative perception of the Museum amongst its Indigenous clients. The Museum's own holdings of human remains and secret/sacred objects derive primarily from the old Australian Institute of Anatomy collections, transferred to the Museum in 1985. The Museum has also been the repository and repatriation point for collections of ancestral remains from overseas.

Interestingly, despite the status of the National Museum of Australia as a federal institution, it has fewer legislated powers and less authority or responsibility for repatriation than the major state and territory museums, other than a minor role as a storage facility for unprovenanced remains referred through the Minister for the Department of Environment and Water Resources under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*. State and territory museums, on the other hand, typically have roles, responsibilities, and a commensurate authority assigned to them by relevant state and territory heritage management legislation. When the Museum engages with Indigenous communities in the states and territories it is obliged to work in accordance with the legislation and protocols prevailing within the respective jurisdictions. This conflicting federal/state authority is neither useful nor required; it does however serve as a cautionary tale to external federal agencies, also engaged in repatriation, that place pre-eminence on the term 'national' in their dealings with states and territories.

The National Museum has been returning remains and secret/sacred objects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people upon request since its inception in 1980. In 2001, the Museum established a Repatriation Program Unit to manage the return of Indigenous remains and secret/sacred objects.

The National Museum's repatriation activities are guided by its policies on 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Remains' (2005), and on 'Secret/Sacred and Private Material' (2006). ^[5] The most significant characteristics of these policies are that they allow for the immediate and unconditional return of remains and secret/sacred objects to traditional owners and custodians, and that any other external access to the remains collection is permitted only with the approval of the relevant community.

Unlike many Australian state and territory museums, the Museum does not have an Indigenous committee to oversee repatriation, preferring to deal directly with the identified descendants and custodians of material to be returned.

The National Museum's repatriation process is proactive. The work begins with the identification of provenanced remains. The provenance is then located on appropriate maps. This allows consultation with relevant state and territory heritage authorities that assists in the identification of formally recognised representative organisations and/or individuals. It is expected that the Museum's activities will not conflict with the laws and protocols of the state or territory jurisdictions in which the repatriation activities occur. This responsibility encourages engagement with state and territory government Indigenous heritage management departments, and Indigenous representative bodies such as museums, land councils, native title representative bodies, and legal aid services and so on. Such bodies, established by legislation and/or supported by state, territory, or federal funding, have a responsibility to represent custodians, traditional owners, and native title applicants and/or holders. The identification of such individuals and groups based on cultural, anthropological, as well as legislative criteria is the day-to-day business of such representative bodies. Access to this information – achieved through their endorsement of a repatriation claimant, rather than by disclosure of personal and private particulars – assists the Museum in fast tracking the repatriation process to the benefit of custodians.

At the same time, such engagement provides some protection for the National Museum when it is required to describe who it has dealt with, and to explain the basis for accepting that individual or group as being the appropriate custodians for repatriated items. This occurs, for example, through the regular processes of government audit, discovery of documents for legal process (native title), and enquiries by other Indigenous representatives, Senate inquiries and so on.

Put simply, the National Museum uses the local knowledge and experience that state and territory

representatives and heritage organisations provide in order to assist with identification of prospective custodians or their representatives. The effectiveness of this method is demonstrated by the lack of formal complaint by other majority groups following a repatriation event.

Once a prospective custodian, custodial group, or representative body has been identified, they are advised in writing of the nature of the remains available for return. Correspondence often includes a statement of 'Advice to Applicants' that details how to apply for the return of remains. This asks prospective custodians for any information that may assist in supporting their application. However, the aim is not to make custodians sit an exam for the return of remains that the National Museum considers are their rightful heritage. Provision of such information is not mandatory, and in the majority of cases the Museum itself accepts the potential claimant group's rights of ownership based on information gained in the process of identifying them and, in particular, through the endorsement of state and territory museums, heritage offices and representative bodies. What the establishment of basic criteria does do, however, is discourage frivolous or vexatious claims by people who may not be acknowledged or authorised by the majority of the community to make a claim for repatriation, a critical issue when it is remembered that any repatriation is an empowering event. When a government instrumentality returns materials to a group it is effectively supporting the primacy of that group as the local representative organisation.

An officer of the Museum's repatriation unit then consults further with the applicants and other parties with potential interests. The return of the remains or objects, or alternative management, proceeds in accordance with instructions from the custodians. Except for signing a receipt, the return of remains or objects is currently unconditional. Custodians may do with the material as they see fit.

Where groups do not have the resources to take receipt of items, the Museum sometimes offers to store them temporarily on their behalf. The remains or objects are the property of the community/custodians and the Museum claims no authority over them beyond keeping them safe and secure. This service has been facilitated by the Museum's larger than usual facility to house ancestral remains.

The National Museum of Australia's Repatriation Unit is a service provider, not a research unit. It is charged with the prompt repatriation of remains to custodians. Thus, the Museum does not do 'pure' research on remains or secret/sacred objects. In-house investigations are carried out when necessary in order to facilitate provenancing, reunification of separated elements, and repatriation of remains and objects. However, such inquiry is usually focused in its aims and restricted in its circulation. Access to such reports requires the approval of the community concerned.

In order to maintain the trust and confidence of Indigenous communities, it is important to demonstrate that the unit has no vested personal research interests that might delay or otherwise compromise the prompt return of material or the right of the relevant custodial group to control, and participate in associated research. Thus, where a community requests further research beyond that required for facilitating return, the Unit attempts to put them in touch with suitable external professionals. Such an attitude is not unique to the National Museum of Australia. Research on Indigenous remains is tightly controlled by industry, institutional, and professional policies and protocols requiring community approval. The outcome is that today no Australian museum will allow access to its holdings of Indigenous remains or secret/sacred objects without the approval of the socially associated community.

Over the seven years of the National Museum of Australia Repatriation Unit's operations, the remains of over 750 individuals and over 400 secret/sacred objects have been returned to Aboriginal communities across Australia.

The Australian Museum

One of the pivotal programs that has evolved out of the growing relationship between the Australian Museum (AM) and Indigenous peoples has been in the area of repatriation of significant material as well as ancestral remains to communities of origin. The Australian Museum has been repatriating objects since the 1970s. Repatriation is defined as returning an original object or actual remains to the original owners.

The philosophy of the Australian Museum is that cultural property has ongoing significance, both to the people who created it and to their descendants. Thus the act of repatriation reflects respect for living cultures and a way of supporting Indigenous people in the control of their own cultural

outcomes. As a result of returning artefacts and human skeletal remains to Indigenous Australian communities, the Australian Museum has become an agent of social change by promoting reconciliation through its program of repatriation.

It has now been over 30 years since the Australian Museum first repatriated Aboriginal skeletal remains and a range of objects to various national museums in the Pacific. These events were brought about due to emerging international Indigenous rights, including land rights; the policies of self-determination within the broader Indigenous communities; and the need for museums to address the ongoing changes in the relationships between Indigenous people and the broader society.

This new dialogue has required a dramatic re-evaluation by major museums and the development of a dialogue between museums and other cultural bodies and Indigenous peoples. The Australian Museum is no exception. However, this is still a work in progress. Because the relationship is growing and evolving, the various frameworks of interaction are constantly changing. As Des Griffin, former Director of the Australian Museum, has argued, museums can no longer function on the basis that they alone may determine what use is made of cultural material or what access is allowed to Indigenous people. The continuing responsibility of museums to respond to the concerns of Indigenous people is a moral imperative. [6]

For both the Australian Museum and Indigenous communities the successful initiation of proactive repatriation policies, protocols and practices is not the end of the issue. In many cases it is just the beginning. Marking the initiation and development of relationships can take many forms. For instance, the Museum has been asked to assist in the return of material from private collectors or other institutions to the appropriate Aboriginal custodians or communities. In cases where community facilities are not available, the Museum has been asked to be a custodian on behalf of the communities. The Museum receives this material from Aboriginal custodians or communities on the basis that it is considered a safekeeping place, a place that can be trusted.

Consultation

One of the major factors in the developing relationship is the involvement of Indigenous people in the decision-making process. The Australian Museum has, over a number of years, developed a framework for consultations undertaken to gain their opinion and advice about the current and future protection and management of items of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and culture in the Museum's care.

The cornerstone principles of this framework are:

- . Communities will be provided with sufficient information on their cultural material stored at the Australian Museum and offered every opportunity to give their opinion or advice on the management of these collections.
- . Consultation is an ongoing process. It is the Museum's responsibility to provide resources so that the right level of consultation can take place. The intensity of consultation varies due to a number of factors and this usually relates to the outcome required. For instance, if the repatriation of an item of a secret or sacred nature is planned, extensive consultation over a number of years would usually be required. If the material under consideration is less problematic with regard to cultural attributes, or is of a less sensitive nature, then consultation may only need more limited time.

The act of consultation in itself can come in many forms, reflecting the requirements of a great variety of Aboriginal community structures that exist. Responses to this continuing dialogue are constantly changing, and include continual evaluation of the various programs offered to Indigenous people, which are then modified and developed to meet their changing needs.

The future will hold new challenges for all museums in the area of repatriation. One of these will be in the way that museums use Indigenous knowledge in all its many forms. Indigenous intellectual property, how it is used, who owns it, and how traditional owners are going to access and control this material, are significant questions.

Aboriginal Museums Program

Access to collections in a digital form can empower community engagement with collections when it is combined with social media to explore issues of identity. Social media can be a powerful medium

through which communities determine access to digital collections.

One of the more obvious responses by Indigenous people to control of not only their material culture but the associated stories has been through the setting up of their own museums or keeping places. The Australian Museum views the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander museums, cultural centres, and keeping places (community museums) as important cultural institutions where local Indigenous people can house cultural material, host exhibitions, conduct research and become centres of cultural revitalisation. In this way the Australian Museum recognises the importance of Indigenous people maintaining and preserving their culture. Cultural centres range from large multifunctional tourist facilities, through to small facilities with little more than a few display cases. However, what they all represent is the manifestation of legitimate responses by Indigenous peoples to the preservation of their own culture, using their own voice.

The Australian Museum has developed the Aboriginal Museums Outreach Program to assist Indigenous people in the achievement of their cultural objectives. This program provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with access to professional museum training and advice in the planning and management of their own cultural centres and keeping places. The Australian Museum has a unique resource of talented professionals who are able to provide a range of community-focused training from intensive through to short familiarisation visits. Some of the areas in which the Australian Museum offers training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait people are archive and collection management, materials conservation techniques, and public program development.

Limited resources restrict the program in its capacity to offer this service adequately to all Aboriginal communities within New South Wales. The use of new technologies, especially in the initial stages of identifying needs and objectives, partly addresses this problem, without replacing the preferred face-to-face discussions that had continuously proved so successful.

The Australian Museums' 'Keeping Culture' project allows the user to gain first-hand experiences through four case studies of different styles of Aboriginal cultural centres and keeping places. The user is able to explore the experiences of these communities through audiovisual interviews and backgrounds to each of the centre's objectives and histories. [7]

The Museum's Aboriginal Heritage Unit (AHU) worked closely in the production of 'Keeping Culture' with people from four well-established cultural centres and keeping places. These representatives shared their own experiences of setting up and running a centre. This provided insights not only into some of the challenges and opportunities but also the important role these places play in preserving and maintaining culture within Aboriginal communities.

Throughout the development of the CDROM, an extensive consultation and review process was undertaken to obtain continual feedback on the project. A prototype of the CDROM was tested at a meeting of NSW Aboriginal cultural centre and keeping place workers, with feedback given on issues such as design, content, and ease of use.

The wide variety of collaborative projects undertaken by the AHU have resulted in a range of positive outcomes over a number of years. These have come about because museums have been responsive to the changing and evolving wishes of their Indigenous stakeholders, leading museums to engage them as equal partners in a truly win-win situation.

Swapping experiences

What have the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Museum learned over the past seven years of intensive repatriation? One generic outcome, reflected in the experiences of all Australian state and territory museums with which the National Museum and the Australian Museum have engaged, is that experiences, issues, problems and considerations that might once have only arisen rarely, now arise regularly. Similarly, some of the problems that museums may have thought unique to their situation are now seen to be common to all participating institutions. It should however, be noted that all museum repatriation practitioners are not necessarily in agreement, either over the priority of the issues or the means to their resolution. However, all are in agreement that they are topics requiring continued open debate and discussion. Some significant issues have emerged in recent years.

Firstly, the term 'repatriation' needs better definition if it is not to be trivialised. The term 'repatriation' means the return of the original. Several agencies engaging with repatriation assert

that return of copies of documentation, films or photographs constitutes repatriation. While this certainly constitutes restitution of cultural knowledge, it cannot be defined as repatriation. By analogy, the return of casts or photographs of remains or sacred objects, while retaining the originals, could in no way constitute repatriation.

Secondly, the success of museum repatriation programs, and their exposure in the media, seem to have invited greater interference from non-museum agencies seeking to capitalise on the 'good news' aspect of repatriation. As a result museums are encountering more interference in their activities, with increased, and more onerous, reporting requirements. Other non-museum agencies are also attempting to run independent repatriation projects that bypass state and territory museum procedures and legislative processes. As a result of inconsistent methodologies, Indigenous communities are receiving contradictory information; there is inconsistency in who or what organisations are being approached; and the subsequent potential for community conflict over repatriation is exacerbated. Australian museums take care to ensure that state and territory protocols and policies are observed — other agencies are not so cautious. Hearsay evidence suggests that instructions have been given to avoid some state and territory agencies with legislated authority for the care of secret/sacred objects, heritage, and ancestral remains. This interference may lead to museums withdrawing from participation with other agencies.

In addition, little consideration seems to have been given by funding agencies to supporting the post-return management by custodians of remains and secret/sacred objects. Communities need the resources to receive, house and/or finally inter repatriated material. The repatriation process is slowed considerably when communities simply cannot receive items or remains due to a lack of resources. Museums are funded to provide limited support for the actual receipt of the remains or objects, but the longer-term management falls upon the shoulder of the recipient communities, who rarely have the infrastructure or resources to care for the returns in a way they feel is culturally appropriate. In effect only half of the process is being funded.

A number of people are involved in the repatriation process. Each brings to the process, and to their methods of consultation, latent personal and professional biases. It is not surprising that the results of consultations by some professionals often reflect the pre-expressed opinions of the professionals themselves. Over time stronger methodologies and consultative models are being developed, and shared, that will increase the impartiality of consultations.

One particularly interesting concern for museums is the potential for conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous policies and philosophies of rights in heritage. Australian museums, amongst other heritage institutions, generally recognise that the rights in cultural heritage exist independently of a detailed knowledge of that cultural heritage. Australian museums recognise that other cultures have a right to be identified as moral, if not yet legal, owners of items of their culture. However, this philosophy may at times be at odds with Indigenous custom. For example, under western heritage philosophies, remains and/or sacred objects could be returned to groups or persons of the correct corporate identity – as with a duly authorised representative of a language group – but of an inappropriate social grouping, sex, or age. This person might have legitimate authority and a commensurate claim to remains or objects under a western legally defined heritage authority code, but a less important status under a customary authority code. It would be easy to artificially empower someone who has a legitimate right to an object under a western heritage policy structure, but less of a right under a customary structure.

Many remains and secret/sacred objects were acquired without the free and informed consent of the original custodians, and in violation of tradition or custom – they were stolen, or traded without authority. However, it must be recognised that some objects, both secret/sacred objects and human remains, were acquired legitimately in accordance with the cultural protocols of both giver and receiver, particularly those acquired over the past 60 years. Records and personal accounts clearly show that some researchers, both male and female, were occasionally given remains and secret/sacred objects with the free and informed consent of the giver and not in violation of tradition.

And finally, as a result of increased community engagement in the activities of museums over the past 20 years, relationships based on mutual respect and trust have increased. Many communities now trust some museums to care for remains and secret/sacred objects on their behalf until such time as resources for their receipt become available. Australian museums are increasingly offering to store remains on behalf of discrete communities or, in the case of unprovenanced remains and objects, on behalf of the Indigenous people of their jurisdictions. The future will thus see increased

transfers of collections to state and territory repositories authorised by state and territory Indigenous spokespeople. Unfortunately it is clear that for some of these institutions, in particular in the Northern Territory, their existing facilities are inadequate to house the number of remains and objects they will be requested to hold. Nonetheless, while finance is being provided on a per capita (object) basis for museums to return remains to the Northern Territory, no support is available for the Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery or similar authorised heritage agency to improve and maintain its storage facilities. Similar smaller museums are in the same situation.

Conclusion

The underlying theme for the future is the need for improved coordination and allocation of resources based on assessment of future outcomes, not just on short term assessments of numbers of remains or objects returned.

Nonetheless, along with successful repatriations, the identification of problems is also a successful outcome. It is evidence of the debate and retrospective analysis that currently characterises participating museums in Australia. We look to continuing improvements in philosophy, process, and recognition of Indigenous rights in their heritage.

References

- Australian Museum Audience Research Centre, Aboriginal Heritage Unit 2003 Workshop Evaluation, unpublished report, Australian Museum, Sydney, 2003.
- R Edwards and J Stewart (eds), *Preserving Indigenous Cultures: a new role for museums*, AGPS, Canberra, 1980.
- P Gordon, 'Museums, Indigenous Peoples and the 21st Century; or is there a place for museums in this brave new world?' in *Community Museums in Asia: report on a training workshop*, pp. 34–41, the Japan Foundation Asia Centre, Tokyo, 1998.
- L Kelly, P Gordon and T Sullivan, *Evaluation of Previous Possessions, New Obligations: policies for museums and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, unpublished Green Paper prepared for Museums Australia National Office, November, 2000.
- L Kelly, A Bartlett and P Gordon, *Indigenous Youth and Museums*, Australian Museum, Sydney, 2002.
- L Kelly and P Gordon, 'Developing a Community of Practice: museums and reconciliation in Australia', in R Sandell (ed.), *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 153–174.
- National Museum of Australia, Policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Remains, 2005 <www.nma.gov.au/about_us/nma_corporate_documents/policies/> Accessed 13 June 2006.
- R Sandell, 'Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1998, pp. 401–418.
- R Sandell (ed.), *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Routledge, London, 2002.
- L Silverman and M O'Neill, 'Change and Complexity in the 21st-Century Museum', *Museum News*, November/December 2004, pp. 37–42.
- J Specht and C MacLulich, 'Changes and Challenges: the Australian Museum and Indigenous communities', in P McManus (ed.), *Archaeological Displays and the Public: museology and interpretation*, Institute of Archaeology, London, 1996, pp. 27–49.
- T Sullivan, L Kelly and P Gordon, 'Museums and Indigenous People in Australia: a review of *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*', *Curator: The Museums Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2003, pp. 208–227.

Footnotes

- ¹Thorne Alan, *The Mungo Statement: towards a reconciliation*, Pamphlet 1991;
Robert Edwards, Andrew Reeves and Des Griffin, in Donald F McMichael (ed.), *Australian museums – collecting and presenting Australia*, Proceedings of the Council of Australian Museum Associations Conference, Canberra,

1990, Melbourne, CAMA, 1991; Des Griffin, 'Previous Possessions, New Obligations: a commitment by Australian museums', Curator, *The Museums Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 1996, 45–62; Museums Australia, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage*, Museums Australia Inc. Canberra, ACT, 2005. <http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/dbdoc/ccor_final_feb_05.pdf> Accessed 9 June 2006.

² Museums Australia, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: a plain English summary of policies for museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, Museums Australia Inc, Canberra, 1993; Museums Australia, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities*.

³ See for example Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, 'Press release, 'Joint Statement with Tony Blair on Aboriginal remains' <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/media_releases/2000/Aboriginal_4-7.htm> accessed 9 June 2006; and Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, 'Press release, 'Indigenous remains UK report November 2003' <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/10052/20031121-0000/www.pm.gov.au/news/media_releases/media_Release557.html> accessed 24 July 2008; Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Senator Amanda Vanstone 30 July 2004, Press release, '[Australian Government Welcomes Latest Milestone for the Repatriation of Indigenous Human Remains from the United Kingdom](#)'; Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs', Mal Brough, 31 January 2007; Press release <http://www.eniar.org/news/rep46.html> accessed 24 July 2008; Minister for the Arts and Sport Senator George Brandis, 'Return of Indigenous Cultural Property programme to continue 8 May 2007', <http://www.minister.dcita.gov.au/brandis/media/media_releases/2007/return_of_indigenous_cultural_property_programme_to_continue>

⁴ Issues surrounding the issues of Native Title and other associated subjects can be found at the National Native Title Tribunal website <www.nntt.gov.au>.

⁵ National Museum of Australia, *Policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Remains* <http://www.nma.gov.au/about_us/nma_corporate_documents/policies/> Accessed 13 June 2006.

⁶ Museums Australia, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*.

⁷ Policy and Procedures for the Aboriginal Heritage Unit and related issues 2000, Australian Museum unpublished.

Michael Pickering is the Manager of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program, National Museum of Australia.

Phil Gordon has worked at the Australian Museum since 1980. He advises Aboriginal communities on a range of museum-related issues.

Cite as: Michael Pickering and Phil Gordon, 2011, 'Repatriation: the end of the beginning', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/MPickering_PGordon_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums:

Australian museums and museology

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



Museums and history

In the years following World War II, history in Australian schools, universities and museums generally continued a long-standing focus on the country's British heritage and on Australia's involvement in war. However, by the 1970s Australia's history and cultural development had begun to take a more important place in literature, in school curricula, and in universities, where specialised courses were providing training for future historians and museum curators.

The essays in this section recount the way museums in Australia have dealt with crucial issues of the formation of national memory and identity.

Contents

- Museums and history: Introduction, Leon Paroissien and Des Griffin
- War and Australia's museums, Peter Stanley
- History in the new millennium or problems with history?, Tim Sullivan
- Museums, history and the creation of memory, 1970–2008, Margaret Anderson
- Redeveloping ports, rejuvenating heritage: Australian maritime museums, Kevin Jones
- Museums and multiculturalism: too vague to understand, too important to ignore, Viv Szekeres

Online version: http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Museums_history.html

Image credit: Ludwig Leichhardt nameplate, discovered attached to a partly burnt firearm in a bottle tree (boab) near Sturt Creek, between the Tanami and Great Sandy Deserts in Western Australia.

Photo: Dragi Markovic. <http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/highlights/the-leichhardt-nameplate>

Understanding Museums - Introduction: Museums and history

Introduction

by Leon Paroissien and Des Griffin

In the years following World War II, history in Australian schools, universities and museums generally continued a long-standing focus on the country's British heritage and on Australia's involvement in war. However, by the 1970s Australia's history and cultural development had begun to take a more important place in literature, in school curricula, and in universities, where specialised courses were providing training for future historians and museum curators.

The essays in this section recount the way museums in Australia have dealt with crucial issues of the formation of national memory and identity. Peter Stanley argues that the treatment of war in Australian museums is disproportionate to its place in the country's history, overshadowing many other important events and themes. He argues for more inclusive and diverse approaches in the way Australia's museums address war - highlighting, for example, the civilian experiences of war, the consequences of war, and frontier conflict involving Australia's Indigenous peoples.

Tim Sullivan reviews recent debates about the teaching of history and outlines the work that Sovereign Hill, a significant 'open air' regional museum in Ballarat, Victoria, is doing with teachers in order to present history through directly meaningful, first-hand experiences, while avoiding fragmentation or repetition.

Margaret Anderson points to 'history' being one of the primary terms of reference of the 1975 Pigott Report on museums in Australia. The Report recommended that museums be places where the daily life of past generations can be experienced at first hand. Anderson subsequently traces the development of social history programs and related issues and controversies in major museums throughout Australia in the later twentieth century.

Kevin Jones reviews maritime history in Australian museums, including the role of community-based initiatives shaped by volunteers in championing and preserving particular boats – and the positive agency this offers in preserving, developing and ensuring enriched interpretation of collections in the future.

Meanwhile Viv Szekeres, writing on immigration museums, reveals how the profound shifts in the composition of Australian society brought about by migration and the diversity of immigrants who came to this country are reflected in a comparable richness of social experience to be mined in new museum programs and dedicated institutions and collections. These younger types of museum, with their ever-growing oral archives and other forms of first-hand records, provide enduring and eloquent testimony to migrants' roles in our nation-building.

In facilitating contact with actual objects as both primary evidence and irreplaceable vehicles of first-hand experience, and in their ability to mediate a range of different engagements with collections and the rich interpretations they may arouse, museums are agents of both human record and 'presence' in the portrayal of history. In unique and irreplaceable ways through the collections and resources they house, museums provide vital evidence of lived experience and encounters in the world. They thereby complement the literature, documentary evidence and other kinds of educational experiences of history prepared for students in the classroom.

History in museums inevitably becomes the focus of special interest groups. As some parts of the national story continue to evolve, be told differently and even arouse sharp contestation at times, museums have recently become far more experienced and resourceful in anticipating how to support and sustain a multiplicity of views about our past or present, promoting inquiry but without retreating into sectarian division or alienation.

In their ever more skilful handling of the volatility of responses that may be aroused by particular collections or exhibitions that interpret our social history, museums not only nourish a more lively interest in the complex texture of storytelling and first-person witness to history, they demonstrate one of the most important roles that museums play today in the fostering of democratic exchange of researched knowledge and respectful opinion, thereby making a valuable contribution to civil society.

Understanding Museums - Museums and history

War and Australia's museums

by Peter Stanley

The Anzac legend would have us believe that the Australian nation is a war-baby. Not only did the Australian colonies federate during the 1899–1902 war in South Africa, but more importantly, it is widely believed that on the cliffs of Gallipoli a consciousness of Australia as a nation was born. Its military past continues to impinge upon modern Australia. One of its two national days, Anzac Day, commemorates Australia's losses (and increasingly its achievements) in war. Local war memorials are visible in towns and suburbs (though arguably less apparent as the capital cities grow and as highways bypass country towns) and its federally-funded national war museum is among the country's leading tourist attractions. Many old Australian families maintain a strong interest in the war service of their forebears: the National Archives is currently receiving over 30,000 requests for copies of military service files each month. Military history remains a staple of popular publishing, and reading military history seems to be a more popular pastime in Australia than in comparable nations.

War's impact in shaping the composition, politics, and ideology of Australian society can be over-rated. Environment, economy, demography and culture may in the long term come to impose more profound changes. Still, war was undeniably one of the shaping forces of twentieth-century Australia, particularly in terms of individual and family experience. The importance and impact of, say, Gallipoli, Pozières, Kokoda, Changi and Vietnam in individual and communal life and memory must be accepted as fundamental to the lives and memories of many individuals and groups. Whether and how Australian museums have reflected this importance forms one part of the substance of this chapter. The question of how museums can or should document and interpret military experience forms another.

As this enterprise recognises, *Museums in Australia 1975* – the Pigott Report – became the catalyst for the single most wide-ranging and long-lasting change in Australia's museums. While not all of its recommendations were accepted (notably the formation of an Australian Museums Commission), the report stimulated the creation of a strong museum sector, with professional management and trained staff, leading to the development of better documented, stored and conserved collections and galleries that helped visitors to explore and understand museums' collections and themes. The growth to maturity of the Australian museum sector in the 30 years following is the Pigott committee's greatest legacy. Many contributors to this venture owe their careers to the changes that the report produced or assisted. How have Australian museums in their most dynamic decades reflected the changing place of war in our historical consciousness?

However we may strive to escape its influence, war occupies a privileged place in our thinking about the past, presumably not just because of its impact, but because it is the trauma most closely connected to the nation state and indeed, in Australia, to the creation of the nation. However – paradoxically – the striking feature about Australia's treatment of war in its museums is not that there is so much of it, but that it is so absent. If war is of such importance in Australian history (and it seems to be), why is that importance not reflected commensurately in its place in the nation's museums?

Though the Pigott Report referred only in passing to war or military historical collections – reflecting the greater interests among the committee in natural and cultural collections – Australia's museums broadly seem to reflect that impact. Every local museum has a display case of campaign medals; of kit brought back from one of the world wars; of posters, leaflets, ration cards or the ephemera of conflict. War's artefacts are rightly inescapable in the collections that document the historical experience of the Australian people. But museums don't merely collect and document historical experience: they interpret it too. And it is in the interpretation of Australia's conflicts that the characteristics of Australia's military museums become interesting.

War has clearly been an important part of Australia's historical experience, though our appreciation of its role has changed over time. Indeed, one of the major changes in Australian history that has occurred over the past 30 years is that we have come to recognise that 'war' now encompasses more than it did at the time of the Pigott Report. All but the most obdurate neo-revisionist now

accept that an intermittent war of conquest accompanied the European settlement of the continent. Museums recognise and explain this fact, though not as fully as the magnitude or extent of conflict might suggest. The only major institution to devote a substantial area to frontier conflict is the National Museum, through a section of its Gallery of First Australians, opened in 2001. This display attracted heated criticism and controversy, not least from Keith Windschuttle, author of *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One: Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847*. [1] The fact of the existence of this display - and that it remains substantially intact - is a reflection both of the degree to which the existence of frontier conflict is recognised, and the strength of the research on which the National Museum's presentation was based.

All the same, this conflict, though profoundly disruptive for Aboriginal society, was not primarily military. Rather cultural, biological, ideological or economic impacts led to what Charles Rowley called *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*; more Aboriginal people died from germs than guns. [2] Curiously, the largest single treatment of the fact and impact of frontier conflict can be found in the National Gallery of Australia's powerful installation, *The Aboriginal Memorial*, comprising 200 hollow log coffins from central Arnhem Land. *The Aboriginal Memorial*, the Gallery explains, 'commemorates all the indigenous people who, since 1788, have lost their lives defending their land'. [3] State museums variously acknowledge or document the dispossession of the continent's original inhabitants. To anticipate one of the themes of this discussion, one of the least consequential presentations of frontier conflict can be found in the 'colonial' gallery of the national war museum, the Australian War Memorial. This seeming failure to recognise one of the most widespread and portentous military experiences in Australian history in its museums deserves more detailed analysis. [4]

Several kinds of museums deal with the Australian experience of war: private military museums; local or regional museums; the major state museums; Defence Force museums, notably those of the Australian Army; and national museums, notably the Australian War Memorial.

Private museums

No one knows how many private military museums exist in Australia, and the number fluctuates over time. They vary in size and quality, but tend to concentrate on simple displays of kit, guns and uniforms, and adopt an uncritical stance towards the Anzac legend. Perhaps the clearest manifestation of the style of the private museum is the East Point Military Museum, Darwin. The creation of a group of devoted retired army officers, the museum is housed in a former battery site on Darwin harbour and displays a range of military artefacts with a natural bias toward artillery and the defence of the north. The effort of collecting and preserving this material in the face of Darwin's climate is commendable. The display, however, is eclectic and – it must be said – amateurish, reflecting its creators' enthusiasms and interests: a display of Nazi memorabilia and hand-guns sits beside a room of naval artefacts. Technical descriptions prevail over interpretation, in the classic manner of the hobbyist. The East Point Museum reflects the best and the worst of the amateur tradition in Australian military collecting. Their work, and that of their counterparts, is worthy of more detailed study, and deserves the support of the professional museum sector created by the Pigott Report.

Local or regional museums

Here we encounter a paradox. Almost all local or regional museums display the material culture of war, but almost none use this material to interpret war in any sustained way. The items displayed in local museums differ from those seen in museums like the East Point Military Museum. They will typically hold relics of military service – medals and commemorative items – rather than larger weapons. They tend to be strong in the artefacts of groups generally under-represented in military collections – citizen soldiers and servicewomen, and civilians through items such as ration cards. Because Australian military experience and war service invariably occurred far from home, those responsible for local and regional collections find difficulty in incorporating this material into rooms or galleries devoted to pioneers, settlement, occupations and professions and the life of a town or district. They are often relegated to a display reminding visitors of the world wars, often accompanied by reminders of recent celebratory ventures – Australia Remembers certificates from 1995 or Veterans' Affairs posters, or merely Australian flags.

While local historical museums' collections might be disparate and their presentation artless, it may be that in the aggregate they reflect a genuine popular attitude to the importance of war. Much like local (as opposed to formal state and national) Anzac Day services, they express popular attitudes toward military experience, to what it is and is seen as, to how it affected particular communities,

and to its significance in comparison to other aspects of a community's existence and identity. This too deserves greater scrutiny and support.

State museums

Arising largely from a sense of wonder at Australia's (or the world's) natural history, an interest in Australia's Indigenous culture or an interest in its productive geology, Australia's great state museums have tended to come late to the history of European Australia, and still less to conflict as a part of that historical experience. As a result, state museums collect war-related material with discrimination. Some state museums (such as the South Australian Museum and the Western Australian Museum) do not interpret overseas war history at all. Others (such as the Melbourne Museum) present war within a spectrum of broader social history. While individual items might relate to war – and the most striking example must surely be the German A7V tank, 'Mephisto', displayed at the Queensland Museum – the Australian experience of overseas wars is largely absent from the state museums.

Defence Force museums

The armed services' museums await a formal history, though various internal reviews have documented the growth of collections of historical material collected for various purposes – as 'training aids' or the means of enhancing *esprit de corps*, for instance. Both the Royal Australian Navy and Royal Australian Air Force maintain large museum collections, including in the case of the RAAF Museum at Point Cook some 20 aircraft. [5] The Royal Australian Navy maintains historical collections at several shore establishments, and in 2005 opened the RAN Heritage Centre at Garden Island. While the RAN's service in war and especially its losses are treated in the galleries of the Australian War Memorial, the Navy's history is also displayed and interpreted through the major *Navy* gallery in the Australian National Maritime Museum. [6]

The largest distributed collection is that of the Army Museums network, managed by the Army History Unit (AHU). Formerly the product of the devotion of individuals, enthusiasts and particular units, Army museums for many years remained a very mixed bag. Often their facilities and management did not match the size or historical worth of their collections, and they were often unseen by the general public. This uneven management and support changed in the 1990s. The Army now maintains seven regional and 10 corps museums. [7] The regional museums occupy historic buildings, some of outstanding significance, and all care for large, diverse collections of artefacts and other historical sources ranging from the colonial period to the present. The corps museums range in size from the large collection of technology at the Army Museum, Bandiana (home to most of the Army's logistic corps collections), to the small Royal Australian Army Pay Corps Historical Collection. In addition, many Army units maintain 'Unit History Rooms', necessarily smaller and lacking professional support, but often including items of great significance. All the Army's museums have developed in all areas, of management, documentation, conservation, display and interpretation, in the decade since the AHU became responsible for them.

Obviously, military museums deal fundamentally with military experience. They are the product of a military organisation, whose history and heritage they document in abundance (the Army museums network collectively holds material equal in magnitude to the Australian War Memorial's). It would not be surprising to find that they concentrate upon the history of formal military units, mainly in times of conflict, mainly in action. These after all, are high points of drama, and conflict engenders collections – trophies, souvenirs, bullet-pocked helmets documenting violent death; medals testifying to heroism. But how do they interpret war as a human experience? Given their diverse origins, their evolution from essentially private collections, the relatively limited resources available to them (even under AHU's vastly more supportive regime) and the number of museums and their respective curators, it is not surprising that they treat the experience of war in very different ways.

Each of the Army's regional museums also includes displays that illuminate the reality of war experience. The Army Museum of Western Australia, for example, devotes a large room to the experience of prisoners of war held by the Japanese. Realistic tableaux depict aspects of the ordeal of the Burma-Thailand railway – such as the excision of tropical ulcers - that leave little to the imagination. These life-size, realistic mannequins depicting the reality of starvation and brutality without any concession to good taste are far in style and gravity from the showcases of militaria that dominate many military museums. [8] Likewise, the Army Museum of South Australia, though hampered by a severe contrast between a shortage of space and a large collection, includes in its busy galleries displays dealing with the place of women in the predominantly male military history

of the state. Its displays include not only treatments of servicewomen, but also of civilian volunteers. This area includes a recognition of the voluntary Cheer-Up Hut, the centrepiece of which is a piano from the Cheer-Up Hut's Adelaide 'rooms', bearing the signatures of hundreds of service personnel (all of which have been transcribed). [9] Most impressive of all is the cell in the Military Museum of Tasmania, housed in a magnificently preserved 1840s garrison prison, devoted to conflict between Aboriginal people and settlers in Van Diemen's Land. [10]

Hampered by geographical dispersion, a relative lack of funding and an understandably parochial focus (whether on the state or the corps), the Army's museums comprise a museological resource whose potential has yet to be realised.

National museums

Australia has few national museums, arguably only four: in order of opening, the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery of Australia, the Australian National Maritime Museum and the National Museum of Australia. These major museums observe a genteel demarcation from their significant state counterparts. High art generally goes to the national or state galleries; 'natural history' is the province of major state museums; only Indigenous culture is reflected more widely. They dine at separate tables, and always have. 'War' remains almost the exclusive preserve of the War Memorial, whose subject remit enables it to collect and display art as well as artefacts. It is not only the oldest national museum, pre-dating its counterparts by 60 years, but also holds arguably the broadest and most diverse collection. The collection (at the heart of the interpretation offered) encompasses traditional museum artefacts – 'relics' in the Memorial's jargon - but also vast and varied collections of art, photographs, sound, film and multimedia, as well a huge library and an archive of private and official records, ephemera and maps. Inevitably uneven in some aspects across the range of its collection, it documents Australia's experience of war abundantly – rightly the envy of less fortunate nations.

Beginning in 1917 with Charles Bean's vision that a museum would become a fitting memorial to the men he had seen die on Gallipoli and the Western Front, collecting began with the creation of official records, official photographs and soon after works of art (apparently inspired by a Canadian innovation). Bean and his lieutenant, John Treloar, urged Australian troops to gather souvenirs and trophies. By the war's end the basis of a collection existed, to be displayed in temporary exhibitions and by 1941, a permanent home in Canberra. In the meantime, Treloar began to collect the private records – letters, diaries and personal papers – often donated explicitly in memory of the war dead, that have become such a jewel in the Memorial's diadem. With a second world war official collecting began again, though with a greater emphasis on photographs and art than on relics. At first a memorial to the dead of the Great War, the Memorial's ambit broadened between 1948 and 1980 to encompass Australian military history from 1788 as a whole. [11] Despite this broad scope, the Memorial consistently focused on war rather than military history in peacetime, except for a significant recent interest in peacekeeping deployments. With the increasing involvement in peacekeeping operations following the first Gulf War of 1990–91, the Memorial formed close links with the Defence Force to gather records, photographs and artefacts in the field, and has revived commissions to artists and photographers and cinematographers to document and record commitments overseas. This collaboration has strengthened in recent years following the commitment of Australian forces to Afghanistan and Iraq.

While almost all conflicts have been documented thoroughly in art, photographs and official archival records, the gathering of private records and – surprisingly – artefacts has generally lagged behind. With notable exceptions such as prisoners of war, especially of the Japanese, collecting during and after the Second World War garnered a fraction of the material relating to the Great War. Negligent collecting in some conflicts compelled retrospective acquisition long after by energetic curators. The most notable examples were Peter Burness's single-handed creation of a large and impressive Boer War collection between about 1975 and 1990. The collection has grown since then, sporadically, through curatorial pushes, serendipity and increasingly by the recognition within the national community that the Memorial is a fitting repository for war records and artefacts. This tendency to donate is tempered to an extent by state parochialism – a potential donor from Toowoomba might ask why precious family papers should go to Canberra rather than, say, Brisbane – and by the understandable doubt that with such a large collection much must inevitably remain in storage. Despite some attention to civilian organisations and experience, the collection remains heavily biased toward the uniformed services and combat; a reflection of its origins and purpose in commemorating those who died at the hands of the enemy.

This predilection would not matter if Australia's experience of war were addressed by other

museums of comparable standing (by major state museums, say). But it is not. This places more of a premium on the need for a treatment of war that encompasses a range of attitudes, values and interpretations. For example, the history of opposition to war or military service has always been almost entirely disregarded by the Memorial because it has been assumed that displaying objects opposing war at all – some wars in particular or military service in general – somehow constitutes either an endorsement of the cause, or is somehow insulting the memory of those who died in war. Likewise, some groups continue to be largely excluded from the Memorial's record of Australian experience of war, such as industrial workers and merchant seamen. While some galleries (such as the gallery *Echoes of the Guns*, opened in 1993) explicitly recognise the cost of war and the duration of its impact, other galleries focus narrowly on the battle front. Indeed, the history of the Defence Force in peacetime has never been treated, despite its inclusion in the Memorial's mandate. This partly reflects the Memorial's traditional concentration on those who fought and died, rather than those who merely supported the war effort. But for merchant sailors, who died directly in combat at the hands of the enemy in Australian waters, it seems to be an absurd continuation of wartime politics.

Still, whatever qualifications are made about its use, the Memorial's collection constitutes a vast treasure. Its magnitude gives it a versatility and value available to few other institutions, at least in Australia. And while the future will inevitably broaden and liberalise the scope of the interpretation it offers, the collection will sustain that growing recognition of diversity, provided the institution embraces opportunities to do so.

While war has been of significance to the history of Australia in the twentieth century – especially the world wars fought by citizen servicemen and servicewomen – it has been documented unevenly by Australia's museums. The largest single share of the national collection is held by one institution and then by specialist Defence Force museums, while it is ignored by other significant sectors (the state museums), or is treated variably at the local level.

The consequence of this concentration has been to allow one interpretation – essentially the classic statement of the Anzac legend, one valorising white males in combat – to prevail over a broader, more inclusive interpretation. In its concentration of ownership the War Memorial has become the Rupert Murdoch of the Australian museum world. This lack of diversity is perhaps inescapable given the intention and history of the Defence Force museums, but in relation to the major public war museum a more generous or liberal attitude would seem to be merited. The challenges of the future will be to recognise frontier conflict, the civilian experience of war, the consequences of war and the different attitudes Australians have expressed toward it, while not diminishing the strong empathy it has traditionally conveyed toward those who have served in war and in uniform. A more inclusive ethos would not, it would seem, be impossible to achieve. Such an approach would strengthen the value of museums interpreting war and connect them more securely to the broader national stories that museums can tell.

Footnotes

¹ Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One: Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847*, Macleay Press, Sydney, 2002.

² CD Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980.

³ <http://www.nga.gov.au/memorial/index.html>

⁴ Since writing this chapter (in 2007) I have presented a paper, "All of this Frontier War stuff": interpreting frontier conflict in Australia - from ignorance to denial', at the conference Tutu te Pueho: New Zealand's nineteenth-century wars, Massey University, Wellington, February 2011.

⁵ For RAAF Museum, Point Cook see <http://www.airforce.gov.au/raafmuseum/>

⁶ For the Australian National Maritime Museum's Navy Gallery see <http://www.anmm.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1338>

⁷ Royal Australian Armoured Corps Memorial & Army Tank Museum; North Fort & Royal Australian Artillery National Museum; Army Engineer Museum; Royal Australian Army Corps of Signals Museum; Royal Australian Infantry Corps Museum; Museum of Australian Army Flying; Museum of Australian Military Intelligence; Army Museum, Bandiana; Royal Australian Army Pay Corps Historical Collection; Royal Australian Corps of Military Police Historical Collection. The Army History Unit website, <http://www.army.gov.au/ahu/Museums.asp> gives details of and links to the various museums under its stewardship.

⁸ Army Museum of Western Australia, <http://www.armymuseumwa.com.au/>

⁹ Army Museum of South Australia, <http://www.amosa.org.au/>

¹⁰ Military Museum of Tasmania, <http://militarymuseumtasmania.org.au/main/>

¹¹ For a history of the Memorial see Michael McKernan, *Here is Their Spirit: a history of the Australian War Memorial, 1917–1990*, UQP and AWM, Brisbane, 1991.

Peter Stanley is the Head of the Centre for Historical Research, National Museum of Australia.

Cite as: Peter Stanley, 2011, 'War and Australia's museums', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/PStanley_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums and history

History in the new millennium or problems with history?

by Tim Sullivan

At the beginning of the new millennium, Australian history was experiencing its most important hour on the public stage since the 1988 Bicentenary. Debate on the study and uses of the subject were characterised by what is now known as the 'History Wars', by a review of the interpretation of Australia's story in the National Museum of Australia's exhibitions, and by a process to revise and reinvigorate the history curriculum in schools.

The History Wars

On Australia Day 2006 the prime minister, John Howard, announced his intention to renew the teaching of Australian history in schools, saying:

I believe the time has also come for root and branch renewal of the teaching of Australian history in our schools ... Too often, it is taught without any sense of structured narrative, replaced by a fragmented stew of 'themes' and 'issues'. And too often, history, along with other subjects in the humanities, has succumbed to a post-modern culture of relativism where any objective record of achievement is questioned or repudiated.

The announcement was met with a mixture of excitement and scepticism. It was exciting to have history in a national discussion which might lead to a much-needed transformation of Australian history teaching, and greater public awareness of the uniqueness of our history. [1] The scepticism was a product of the milieu from which the prime minister's statement had emerged.

Prime Minister Howard viewed the history curriculum as it was being taught as having been corrupted by academic fads and fashions and politically-driven revisionism for their own sakes, and that this was distorting the ways in which a generation of Australians viewed their history. He also saw history as a parable-like narrative of human progress. For him, history existed as a singular, truthful narrative which could be translated into a nationally mandated curriculum, and which would be equally relevant for all students in every corner of our nation continent.

The announcement was inevitably seen as a continuation of combat in what has become known as the 'History Wars' that raged between 2002 and 2004. Similar arguments took place in the United States in the 1990s when Lynn Chaney, then Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, attacked the emerging draft of the national history curriculum. The result was abandonment of national curricula, which were left to the individual states. Historian and education writer Diane Ravitch observes that:

History should be as exciting to young people as anything on television, but their textbooks turn it into a listless parade of names, themes, wars, and nations. Among all the subjects tested by the federal government, U.S. history is the one in which American students register the worst performance, even though almost all students are required to study it. [2]

In Australia the debate emerged earlier in the context of the 1988 Bicentenary and the focus it generated on understanding the consequences of colonisation on Australia's Indigenous people. [3] The most recent 'History Wars' were fought on two fronts: firstly, a renewed focus on the methodology of some historians in interpreting colonial massacres of Indigenous people; and secondly, in the 2003 review of the National Museum of Australia's exhibitions designed to identify political and revisionist bias in the interpretation of Australia's history, and propose an outline of content appropriate for a national museum for Australia.

In another time the review could have presented an exciting opportunity to re-imagine the intersections between the general public's engagement with Australian history, the state of play in teaching history in our schools, and the role of museums in supporting learning about our heritage. Whilst the review of the National Museum [4] was important in revisiting the role of a national museum for Australia, the wars themselves were an ugly, personalised, and futile period of infighting within the history profession. They created an unproductive climate of cynicism in which

the motivations for the review of history teaching were considered.

Starting points

The most important activities in sustaining an interest in the past are those which are personally relevant and meaningful, where there are opportunities for interaction with others, where there is the possibility of new discoveries and knowledge, where skills can be learned and applied, where there are tangible artefacts of the research, and where there is freedom to set the agenda. Personal narratives are pathways to exploring larger historical narratives.

Historians Roy Rosenzweig of George Mason University and David Thelen of Indiana University, in their important study of the ways in which Americans use history in their lives, [5] found that people most often make sense of history through a very personally relevant framework – that is, through their own experiences and memories, or through stories they have been told by others they trust (typically family or extended family members). Visits to museums and historic places, movies and programs on historical subjects, books, and heritage events were recognised as much more relevant and important in sustaining an interest in history than what was taught in school. They found that those who are most strongly connected to the past are engaged in a variety of activities that interest them and others in their networks, particularly sharing photographs and memorabilia.

Australians also achieve the deepest long-term connection with the past through experiences other than their schooling. [6] Narratives relating to their families and themselves are the most powerful pathways for connecting strongly with the past. The most important areas of content for Australians are Australian history and family history, both mentioned by more than 50 per cent of respondents to an important survey by the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). The most commonly used media for connecting with those narratives are objects or artefacts that are meaningful in telling those stories; visiting places that are important in connecting to those narratives is also significant.

The experiences that are most important in creating a connectedness with the past are family gatherings (43 per cent); museum and historic sites visits are less important, as are public commemorations which were significant for around a quarter of respondents. School studies were most important for just 12 per cent of respondents.

More generally, taking and sharing photos was the most frequent activity in engaging with the past for more than 80 per cent of respondents to the study, followed by a range of research and collecting activities (photographs, heirlooms, family history) which were considered as 'making history', followed by attending reunions and visits to museums and historic sites for more than 50 per cent of respondents.

The UTS survey [7] found that museums were the most trusted sources of history for 56 per cent of respondents. In second place were academic historians (33 per cent). Politicians scored the highest ranking for untrustworthy sources at 39 per cent! However, high school teachers rated seventh out of 11 as trustworthy sources: it was concluded that this could relate to whether teachers had kept-up-to-date in their knowledge and teaching practice.

Graeme Davison, now Sir John Monash Distinguished Professor at Monash University, also considered family history to be an important engagement in lifelong learning and the development of historical literacy in the community. [8] Museums intersect with this popular interest in history because of the richness of artefacts available and the contextualising narratives offered in museum interpretive programs.

The distinguished American museologist Lois Silverman, who has conducted extensive research on museum visitors, connects this understanding of how people engage with the past to the skills used by museum visitors to make sense of the history presented in museums: the use of others as sources of information; the use of life stories to connect and understand experiences; the use of objects and artefacts as evidence; the use of museum-like skills in organising the artefacts and stories of our lives; and the value of first-hand experience. [9]

This knowledge of how people develop and sustain an engagement with the past – with their uses of historical knowledge and skills – over their lifetimes is an important context in which to consider the place of learning history in schools. It is intriguing that, with so much voluntary effort in the community to sustain interest in Australian history, the linkage with what is learned in school is so

weak in nurturing that interest.

The 2007 History Summit held as a result of Prime Minister Howard's Australia Day announcement was a curious mix of the predictable and the unexpected. Predictably, there was a focus on defining the essential content for understanding Australia's history by identifying significant events and milestones, important people and ideas that students must study. The selection or non-selection of those elements was predictably and endlessly arguable.

The surprises lay in the consensus that history is best learned through open questions – big questions that engage students and teachers in exploring multiple perspectives and debating the consequences of decisions made in the past. Narrative was identified as important in helping learners make sense of it all.

One of the key participants in the Summit, Professor Tony Taylor of Monash University, demonstrated the wide gap between the ideal and the real capability of schools to deliver on curriculum change. [10] Taylor identified the systemic causes of the poor state of history teaching in schools – particularly the impact of the subject having been buried in the wilderness of SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment) – with normative disciplines such as Social Studies and Geography. Those history-trained teachers who had survived were fighting to justify their existence, living in intellectual isolation, and lacking a community of peers to enrich their development. History was too often being taught by teachers not trained in the subject and lacking an adequate domain of historical knowledge, poor understanding of historical method, and little awareness of resources to support innovative teaching practices. The outcome for students in the classroom was predictable – boredom and disengagement.

Students are not anti-Australian history – most of them have typically never been challenged by it in their classrooms. [11] They are frustrated by the repetition of content through their school lives, and the lack of pizzazz in teaching it. They are frustrated by the passivity with which it is taught, by the lack of argument and contest, by the often narrowly parochial content, and bored with text-based approaches. They are desperate for richer experiences in the use of media, in visiting the places where history has been made to engage with the artefacts of that history, to meet people with stories to tell of their experiences in the historical events being studied, and to have memorable experiences in encountering history.

It was disappointing that the History Summit communiqué did not include museums (and other cultural institutions) as resources to support teachers and students in learning about our history. Given the extent to which people develop museum-like skills in pursuing their interests in Australian history, and the way in which constructivist learning principles have influenced the design of museum programs to connect people with larger, contextualising narratives, it is a regrettable omission. Museums are replete with the tools of engagement that students crave in learning about our history.

After the Summit there were further panels engaged to develop a narrative outline of the content in a national history curriculum, but the distance identified by Tony Taylor – between the hoped-for outcomes and the capacity of the school system to deliver them – remained as wide as ever.

Sovereign Hill

In 2001 Sovereign Hill began consultations with teachers to follow up on Professor Taylor's report. We found his assessment of the circumstances in which history-trained teachers found themselves was accurate. The history teaching environment is far from being manhandled by relativists, post-modernists, post-structuralists, Maoists, Bolsheviks or Jacobins – it is inherently conservative! If there is an unsatisfactory stew of 'themes' and 'issues', it relates more to the capability of teachers and the resources available to them than to a politically driven subversive agenda.

We began by seeking discussion on ways to support teachers as fellow history professionals within a community of practice. The teachers told us to focus on outcomes for the students who have a passion for the subject – to help them sustain and extend their interest.

As a result, we have run programs with teams of students and their teachers researching exhibitions on local history themes, using our collections, discussing ideas, and producing exhibitions which are a part of our public program. Student ownership and involvement has been high and the exhibitions have been excellent.

But we have also learned that we were talking initially with teachers trained in history and for whom it is a passion. Over time, we have seen the desperate need of teachers beginning their history teaching careers – newly-graduated teachers and those shoehorned into history from a range of other disciplines – who need help in developing imaginative teaching strategies, and in building awareness of ways to use museums, galleries, libraries and archives as a part of their teaching.

It's an important linkage with the visit. Museums can do so much to enrich the learning of Australia's history by telling stories well – using the arts of theatre and film, sound and music, images and texts and artefacts to tell powerful stories with drama that engages the mind and emotions as well as the hands.

We have a wonderful chapter of Australia's national story to interpret for our visitors at Sovereign Hill. [12] We focus our interpretation on aspects of life on the Ballarat goldfields between 1851–61 – the high tide of Ballarat's heyday as the boisterous, energetic expression of that first gold rush generation's aspirations to make something of themselves. Every dimension of our colonial life – social, cultural, political, economic, technological – was utterly changed by the wealth generated by gold mining.

There are patterns of change in that tumultuous period that resonate today. Driven by a tenfold increase in the population in the decade after the discovery of gold in 1851, Melbourne grew from a small town to become 'Marvellous Melbourne' – one of the great cities of the British Empire. Ballarat itself developed almost incredibly from a rude goldfields encampment of bark and canvas and bush poles into something that rivalled Melbourne's claim to marvels.

It was a time when the fabric of a pastorally-based colonial life was unravelled and rewoven into something new and exciting. An intriguing liberal-conservative tradition of political and social reform emerged: the secret ballot, a form of universal male suffrage, the 8-Hour Day, a new Constitution, a new Legislative Assembly – all were achieved in that first golden decade.

The mass migration to Victoria was an immense human drama fuelled by expectation and hope of life-changing discoveries. There was bloodshed: the Eureka Uprising in Ballarat in the summer of 1854 shocked everyone. The changes that flowed from the inquiry that followed created a fairer and more efficient regulation of mining and gave mining communities a voice in the running of their affairs.

It also planted the seeds of governmental restrictions on Chinese migration and racially discriminatory taxation. A review of the historiography of the Chinese experience has informed the redevelopment of our Chinese Camp. The government sought to herd thousands of migrating Chinese miners into camps where their interactions with the European mining community could be managed.

It was a period in which the Indigenous people of the goldfields were dispossessed of their traditional lands. New work is showing that some Indigenous people sought ways to participate in aspects of the exotic new life around them, others left their country for good, others took up jobs on pastoral stations abandoned by gold seekers, many were left with nothing and nowhere to go. [13]

Bringing these new research perspectives to our interpretation in the Outdoor Museum has required the model of 'authentic' recreation to shift incrementally. Thematic interpretation, issues-based interpretive theatre techniques, and a wider portfolio of storytelling are powerful tools for us because they are built on an understanding of the nature of learning in good interpretation [14] – they are an 'ideal strategy for realising the "constructivist museum", an environment where visitors of all ages and backgrounds are encouraged to ... find the place, the intersection, between the familiar and the unknown, where genuine learning occurs'. [15]

In recent years, our interpretive theatre program has become more issue-based rather than re-enactments of known events. Technology has enabled us to tell the story of the Eureka Uprising using the entire Outdoor Museum by night in *Blood on the Southern Cross*; of the protests by Chinese miners in one of the Protectorate camps in Ballarat against the racially-based taxation imposed on them; of one of Ballarat's unique deep lead mines – the Red Hill Mine – where the massive Welcome Stranger nugget was discovered and changed the lives of 22 hard-working and determined Cornish miners. In the Quartz Mine, video technology has enabled mine guides to show visitors otherwise inaccessible historic underground workings created by nineteenth-century

miners. Two chambers are used to tell stories of the Chinese experience of gold mining and are delivered in Cantonese, Mandarin and English. One, *Woah Hawp Canton Gold*, tells the story of a quartz mine in Ballarat owned and operated by Chinese entrepreneurs and miners, an unusual scenario when the conventional historiography of the Chinese experience is focused on their involvement in alluvial mining (also interpreted in *The Secret Chamber*). [16]

The Outdoor Museum is an immersive stage upon which stories can be told and shared. [17] It includes the Red Hill Gully Diggings; businesses (shops, trades, manufactories present in Ballarat in the period); domestic dwellings interpreting the diversity of economic success of their inhabitants from small weatherboard cottages to elegant brick bungalows; kitchen and ornamental gardens and orchards; an extensive horse-drawn vehicle collection and carriages built in our on-site coachbuilding manufactory operating in the streets; and one of the largest operating heritage steam plants in the world.

The use of primary source materials from our collections is writ large in building the Outdoor Museum. The illustrations of ST Gill, François Cogné, Thomas Ham, David Tulloch, Samuel Huyghue, Thomas Strutt, Eugene von Guérard and technical drawings and town planning documents, commercial directories and business archives and more have been invaluable resources on which much of the built form of the Outdoor Museum is based. They enrich the diversity of private accounts, journals, and books about gold rush experiences which have informed our interpretive strategies.

The work of many academic historians, [18] and the specialised expertise and experience of local historians and others with deep knowledge of the heritage of our region, have been invaluable in developing programs to interpret the significance of the gold rushes and the profound impact they have had on our national development.

In 2004 the University of Melbourne held a symposium to discuss the significance of Eureka 150 years after the event. The University of Ballarat likewise held an international symposium to discuss perspectives on Eureka and its relevance in Australia's history, its democracy, and international perspectives on protest. New perspectives on the development of mining unions are particularly interesting in understanding the emergence of the Labor Party. The complexity of the Chinese experience on the goldfields is emerging through new scholarship that will reinterpret the role and significance of the Chinese as miners, not simply as artefacts of the development of White Australia.

This new work has promoted what Melbourne University historian David Goodman has described as 'edgy' interpretations of goldfields history – a 'need to recover a sense of the gold rushes as dangerous, edgy events with unpredictable outcomes'. [19]

The first decade on the Victorian goldfields was a ferment of political ideas, of new opportunities. It is so interesting because there was so much change in so many dimensions simultaneously. It was dangerous, edgy and unpredictable. But so are the times in which we live now. Democracy still cannot be taken for granted.

These new perspectives fill in some of the gaps in our understanding, they flesh out what has been poorly understood, and they enrich the field for interpreting this dramatic period in our history. Museums around Australia are engaged in thoughtful processes of researching our heritage and communicating its significance for contemporary audiences. They are engaged in looking outward to relate events in our national development with what is happening elsewhere in the world – engaged in the flow of ideas and issues and the exchange of knowledge that is characteristic of the best in civic institutions.

Concluding comments

It is the peculiar task of museums to bring scholarship together with material artefacts and strategies for communication in our interpretation that will engage the senses, the mind and the soul. The deepest learning moments are achieved when the head and the heart are moved together, when our visitors can see something of themselves and their story in the larger narratives we tell.

In November 2003, the *Contest and Contemporary Society* symposium at Sydney University explored the ways in which museum visitors react to controversial topics. The research work for the project reinforced the trust visitors have in museums as sources of information and knowledge.

Visitors are not afraid of controversial material, but are sceptical of attempts to court publicity through contrived controversy, and dislike a polemical style. They expect that museums will provide authoritative scholarship and a variety of perspectives or voices in their interpretation.

A root and branch renewal of the teaching of Australian history in schools could well begin with an awareness of the journey a citizen will take over a lifetime, of the ways in which an interest is sustained beyond the school years, and the importance of museums as resources in lifelong learning about our history. A national curriculum in schools may help to overcome the issues that so frustrate students, but only if that curriculum responds to the stages of learning for young people over their school lives, respects the diversity of learning styles and stages in their intellectual development as learners, and provides them with the skills to be thinking, thoughtful citizens.

Museums sit at a unique intersection of interests in the study of Australia's history. The public is engaged with Australia's history when it takes forms that are useful to them in their diversity of learning styles and knowledge. Like any good storytelling, interpretation of history is best when the audience can see something of themselves in the story. That's our constant task, that's the continuing challenge of relevance in our work with a contemporary and changing audience.

Footnotes

¹ T Sullivan, 'Breaking Ground: evolving Australian socio/political values on the Victorian goldfields', plenary session, Proceedings of the Museums Australia Inc. Conference, Canberra, May 2007.

² Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System – how testing and choice are undermining education*, Basic Books, New York, 2010.

³ Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003; I Clendinnen, 'The History Question: who owns the past?' *Quarterly Essay*, 23, 2006.

⁴ *Review of the National Museum of Australia Its Exhibitions and Public Programs: report to the Council of the National Museum of Australia*, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra, 2003.

⁵ R Rosenzweig and D Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000.

⁶ P Hamilton and P Nash, 'At home with the past: initial findings from the survey', *Australian Cultural History*, Vol. 22, 2003.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ G Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2000.

⁹ Lois Silverman, 'Personalising the past: a review of literature with implications for historical interpretation', *Journal of Interpretation Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1997, pp. 1–12.

¹⁰ Tony Taylor, *The Future of the Past: final report of the national inquiry into school history*, Monash University, Melbourne, 2000.

¹¹ Anna Clark, *History's Children: history wars in the classroom*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2008; 'History's Children', Perspective, ABC Radio National, 18 March 2008.

¹² T Sullivan, 'Breaking Ground: evolving Australian socio/political values on the Victorian goldfields', Plenary Session, Proceedings of the Museums Australia Inc. Conference, Canberra, May 2007; T Sullivan, 'Sovereign Hill, Blood on the Southern Cross and telling the story of Eureka', in A Mayne (ed.), *Eureka: reappraising an Australian legend*, Network Books, Perth, 2006.

¹³ F Cahir, 'Black Gold', PhD dissertation, University of Ballarat, Ballarat, 2007.

¹⁴ C Hughes, *Museum Theatre: communicating with visitors through drama*, Heinemann, Portsmouth, 1998; C Hughes, 'Theatre and controversy in museums', in *Too Hot to Handle: museums and controversy*, HA Hess and M McConnell (eds), *Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2000; C Hughes and L Maloney, *Case Studies in Museum, Zoos and Aquarium Theatre*, AAM, Washington, DC, 1999; C Hughes, 'Raising the curtain on museum theatre', keynote address, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2002; C Cameron and J Gatewood, 'Excursions into the un-remembered past: what people want from visits to historic sites', *The Public Historian*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2000; M Csikszentmihalyi and K Hermanson, 'Intrinsic motivation in

museums: why does one want to learn?', in J Falk and L Dierking (eds), *Public Institutions for Personal Learning*, AAM, Washington, DC, 1995; D Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam, New York, 1998; D Schaller, S Allison-Brunnell, M. Borun and M Chambers, 'How do you like to learn?', *Visitor Studies Today*, Vol. 11, 2002.

¹⁵ L Bedford, 'Storytelling: the real work of museums', *Curator, The Museum Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2001, p. 33.

¹⁶ A Kyi, 'Unravelling the Mystery of the Woah Hawp Canton Quartz Mining Company, Ballarat', *Journal of Australian Colonial History: Active voices, hidden histories – the Chinese in colonial history*, special issue, 6, 2004; A Kyi, 'Changing Perceptions of Democracy on the Goldfields', *Proceedings of the Museums Australia Inc. Conference*, Canberra, May 2007.

¹⁷ M Hollick and T Sullivan, 'Browsers and seekers: understanding the nature of free-choice learning in outdoor museums', ICOM Triennial Meeting, Vienna, October 2007 (ms in preparation).

¹⁸ Particularly the work of G Serle, *The Golden Age*, Melbourne University Press, 1963, and *The Rush to be Rich*, Melbourne University Press, 1971; and W Bate, *Lucky City*, Melbourne University Press, 1978.

¹⁹ David Goodman, 'Making an Edgier History of Gold', in Iain McCalman and Andrew Reeves (eds), *Tailings: forgotten histories and lost artefacts of Australian gold*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 23–36.

Tim Sullivan is the Deputy CEO and Museums Director at the Sovereign Hill Museums Association, Ballarat, Victoria. In that role, he is responsible for the development of Sovereign Hill Outdoor Museum, the Gold Museum and the delivery of environmental education programs at Narmbool. He graduated from the University of Sydney where he studied history, English literature and education, and has qualifications in geological cartography and in management with a focus on museum development from the University of Technology, Sydney. His career has encompassed technical and managerial roles in the Geological Survey of New South Wales, the New South Wales Department of Mineral Resources, the Australian Museum, and Sovereign Hill. In 1999–2000, he was a Visiting Fellow with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. He is a member of Ballarat City Council's Heritage Advisory Committee, a Senior Visiting Fellow of the University of Ballarat and a member of the Museums Board of Victoria. He has served on a diverse range of committees promoting regional research and development, commemorative projects, education initiatives and museum development.

Cite as: T Sullivan, 2011, 'History in the new millennium or problems with history?', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/TSullivan_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums and history

Museums, history and the creation of memory: 1970–2008

by Margaret Anderson

The first decade of this century has been a turbulent time for history in museums. Exhibitions have been scrutinised by press, parliament and public in an unprecedented dissection of public culture, as the 'history wars', [1] let loose by John Howard's Liberal government, engulfed museums. The stories museums told about the past, and the way they told them, suddenly mattered profoundly. Our 'national identity' was at stake. I have wondered from time to time what the authors of the Pigott Report would have made of this new-found political fascination with the nation's past? Would they have been delighted or dismayed? Ironically, at least one of the members of that committee of inquiry, historian Geoffrey Blainey, was also a protagonist in this new debate – on the conservative side. It was not always so.

Within museums the Pigott inquiry has been associated for so long with advocacy for a Museums Commission and the preservation of collections that it is easy to forget that one of its primary terms of reference concerned the place of history in museums. It was charged both to advise on 'the functions of an Australian Institute to develop, co-ordinate, and foster collections, research and displays of *historical*, cultural and scientific material of national significance', and to 'institute new developments and institutions, with particular reference to the establishment of a national museum of history in Canberra'. [2] Committee members projected a clear view of the kind of new museums they envisaged – not mere storehouses of 'ancient objects', but

vital places of education, entertainment and research where facets of the daily life of past generations of Australians can be seen and where our heritage of old trades, crafts and skills can be displayed and practised. [3]

The preoccupations that later bore fruit in Blainey's engaging study of some of the 'lost' aspects of daily life [4] are already evident in the concepts underpinning the Pigott inquiry. In its final report the committee argued strongly that the major museums in Australia had failed to satisfy what they identified as the 'quickenning public interest in Australia's recent history'. 'It is fair to say', they concluded, 'that so far no museum in Australia has attempted, even on a modest scale, to depict the history of Australia since the coming of the British'. [5]

This was not strictly true. By the mid-1970s a number of what we now call public historians had formed tentative beachheads amidst the battalions of natural scientists in the major state museums. Both the Western Australian Museum and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery had appointed curators of history (Western Australia in 1970, the Tasmanian Museum in 1973) and in 1975, as the Pigott inquiry collected its evidence, the Western Australians were already embarked on their second major display program. The first broadly interpretive history exhibitions opened in the Fremantle branch of the Western Australian Museum in 1970, and indeed these exhibitions attracted some praise in the Pigott Report, although more for their bold use of large photographic images [6] than for their interpretive content, it must be said. A second series of exhibitions opened in the Perth Museum in early 1976. Although inaugural Curator of History David Hutchison was appointed too late to influence the Fremantle displays to any extent (these were prepared by the museum's design department on the then common premise that history was an amateur pastime), he oversaw the redevelopment of the Old Gaol in Perth and conceived its extensive series of exhibitions. Hutchison was an admirable inaugural curator, who brought a unique combination of skills and experience to his pioneering position. His first degree was in engineering, his second in history, and he had taught for many years in a prominent boys' school in Perth. He was therefore able to bridge the gap with the scientists rather more successfully than most, and he had a genuine affinity with the extensive technology collection already accumulated in the museum. Moreover he understood the importance of communication through exhibitions and taught all of us who were fortunate enough to work with him about the discipline of constructing exhibition labels. Hutchison also conceived and developed the first classification system for use in cataloguing history collections, a system which in its variously modified forms still informs collection management today. [7]

The collections Hutchison and others (including the author from 1976) had to work with at that

time had not been collected by systematic fieldwork in the manner of the science collections, or in the way that the Pigott Report recommended. Most of the major museums had accumulated collections of history and technology almost incidentally, although the museums of applied science in Sydney and Melbourne had initially sought technological innovation quite specifically. [8] These technology collections were leavened by items of domestic life, often associated with prominent families who claimed 'pioneer' associations. There were small collections reflecting the various states' war histories, but little else associated with broader social or political movements of the twentieth century, as the Pigott Report rightly observed. Perhaps unconsciously, this tendency was reflected in Western Australia in the division of the history collection, for cataloguing purposes, into two halves – technology and 'colonial history'. It was a notional division: in the later 1970s and early 1980s collecting priorities certainly expanded well beyond the colonial period, but it did reflect the 'first principles' from which the collection grew.

In many respects the vision for history reflected in the Pigott Report was refreshingly original. Although the gendered language now jars, the concept of exhibitions reflecting on 'European man' in the Australian environment – and even more radically for museums at that time, the *history of 'Aboriginal man'* [9] – suggested a very different approach to museum history. In 1975 no museum in Australia, or elsewhere for that matter, had attempted to present environmental history, not surprisingly, since there was no secondary literature to speak of at that point. Aboriginal *history* was also a novel concept. Throughout the 1970s a fairly rigid apartheid system was maintained in museum collections and displays. Historians researched and exhibited white history: Indigenous culture was the preserve of anthropologists and archaeologists. This was still (mostly) the case 16 years later when Gaye Sculthorpe, the first Indigenous curator in any Australian museum (at the then Museum of Victoria), advocated an interdisciplinary approach to Indigenous history and culture. [10] In the meantime, with one notable exception, exhibitions about Indigenous society and culture studiously ignored contact history.

The fate of the Pigott Report is well known. Tabled on 11 November 1975, just as the Whitlam government fell, its principal recommendations languished. An embryonic Museum of Australia was certainly established, but without proper facilities it could realise little of the Pigott vision for museum history. Elsewhere however museum history flourished. In South Australia three new history museums were established within seven years [11] – an unprecedented investment in that normally parsimonious state – and a new historical organisation, the History Trust of South Australia, was created to manage them. The History Trust remains unique in Australia, with a brief to research, interpret and exhibit the state's history. Its closest cousin is the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, now a far larger organisation, but with a focus more aligned with heritage conservation and site interpretation than the general history of the state. However, both organisations probably grew out of the increasing public interest in history observed by the Pigott committee. By the mid to late 1980s departments of history had also been created in most of the major state museums. [12]

These newcomers were not always welcomed. Scientists in some of the older state museums resented what they saw as a diversion of scant resources to new research and collecting areas, and were openly sceptical about the research credentials and research methodology of these interlopers from the humanities. There was probably a gendered dimension to this response too, especially in the 1970s: from the beginning the vast majority of the new history curators were women – and young women at that. Moreover they showed a distinct predilection for presenting exhibitions, rather than a 'proper' focus on research. All in all there was a sense that history represented the thin end of the museum wedge!

There was probably more than a grain of truth in this assumption, because arguably it was the history exhibitions that ushered in many of the new trends in museums that are now common practice. Most of these new curators were graduates of history programs that had been heavily influenced by what was known in the 1970s as the 'new social history'. Also known as 'history from below', it followed the lead of the group who founded the History Workshop in Britain [13] – to shift the focus of historical enquiry from the 'great men and events' approach of the past, to the texture of everyday life and the lives of ordinary people. It was in every sense an approach in tune with the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and indeed drew some of its energy and passion from them. Although Geoffrey Blainey was never overtly associated with this approach, elements of 'history from below' inform the Pigott vision, along with support for studies of material life, probably inspired by the exciting work of historians of the *Annales* school in France at that time. [14]

But in the final event it was to be museums in Adelaide, Hobart and Sydney, rather than Canberra, that first tried to present 'new' social history exhibitions. In Sydney the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) opened its first displays in the newly restored Hyde Park Barracks. [15] Curator Margaret Betteridge oversaw the development of a series of evocative displays about the convict system and conditions for convicts that have stood the test of time. Amongst early temporary exhibitions shown in the Barracks was a splendid exhibition of trade union banners, curated by Ann Stephen and Andrew Reeves. It was the first attempt to document these extraordinary expressions of labour iconography; the resulting catalogue is still the only study of union banners in Australia. [16] Reeves, in association with Maryanne McCubbin, later presented several labour history exhibitions at the Museum of Victoria and instigated an active collecting policy in the area in both Canberra and Melbourne. [17] Some years later, Ann Delroy at the Western Australian Museum directed an extensive collection, documentation and oral history program as one iconic business in the West, the Arnott, Mills and Ware Cake and Biscuit Factory, closed its doors in Fremantle after a century of operation. An evocative exhibition about life on the factory floor followed in the Fremantle branch of the museum. [18]

At about the same time – the late 1980s – historians formed a special interest group of the Museums Association to promote discussion and research in new approaches to history collecting and exhibiting. [19] It promoted much lively discussion at conferences and continues to this day. The Historians' SIG, as it was abbreviated, did much to promote new social history approaches to museum history and instigated some of the first discussions about the research potential of material culture. This impact of new social history approaches to museums in Australia was noted by Tony Bennett in his 1988 study of global trends in museums. [20]

An attempt at a new form of historical museum – or perhaps exhibition centre is a more appropriate term – opened in the historic Legislative Council building on Adelaide's North Terrace in 1979. Burdened with the name 'Constitutional Museum' for the first years of its life, before sense prevailed and it was re-named Old Parliament House, this museum eschewed collections, to base its displays on an immersive, audiovisual 'experience' presenting highlights of the state's political history. It was immensely successful for some years, before the program palled (it was quite long) and visitors began to prefer to avoid the expense of a ticket to the main show in favour of free entry to the temporary exhibitions the museum began to offer. Perhaps to counter this delinquent visitor behaviour, Old Parliament House introduced an overall entry fee in 1987. It was a disastrous decision. In the following year visitor numbers plummeted from 89,000 to 39,000, where they remained, making it much easier for the state Liberal government to justify resuming the building for use by Parliament in 1995. This marked the end of a bold experiment. Despite considerable political furor and many passionate speeches on both sides of the House at the time, neither side of politics has shown any interest in relinquishing the building since then. [21]

However, the Constitutional Museum introduced another novelty that has stood the test of time, to be adopted with considerable success by other museums – a community access exhibition space called 'Speakers' Corner'. Inspired by the informal forum in Hyde Park in London, Speakers' Corner provided a small space for political groups to present their own temporary displays about topical issues. The museum imposed few rules, insisting only that exhibitors be *bona fide* political groups and that they observe the laws of libel and obscenity. Speakers' Corner also carried a prominent statement disassociating the museum from the views expressed by any group, for what this was worth. It did work well for some time: Speakers' Corner was a very successful experiment in direct community engagement with the museum, until one fateful exhibition tested the limits of community tolerance too far.

In April 1983 the museum allowed the extreme right-wing political group, the Australian League of Rights, to exhibit in Speakers' Corner. If not openly fascist, the League of Rights certainly shared elements of fascist ideology with other neo-Nazi organisations, including denial of the Holocaust. Although the Holocaust was not the primary focus of the exhibition, display texts included reference to the classic neo-Nazi proposition that the Holocaust was a vastly exaggerated historical invention of worldwide Jewry. There was immediate outrage and almost universal condemnation of the museum. Jewish organisations picketed the museum and demanded that the government intervene, while protestors jammed North Terrace outside. This was one occasion on which the museum's position, cheek by jowl with the current Parliament, was a decided disadvantage. In vain the director of the History Trust, Peter Cahalan, a former director of the Constitutional Museum, tried to argue that the League of Rights, as a legal political organisation, was entitled to present its views in the museum like any other political group. The intellectual niceties of the argument were lost entirely in the general outrage and media frenzy. The museum was roundly condemned,

including by its previous supporters in the academies, who deserted their former colleague in droves. [22] An offer to allow Jewish organisations to present an exhibition in rebuttal immediately afterwards did not restore its tarnished reputation.

The League of Rights exhibition presents an interesting early case study of the degrees of political tolerance that museums can assume when they test the limits of public debate. It was not the first controversial exhibition presented in Speakers' Corner. A display presented by a gay rights group in July 1982 had similarly outraged some more conservative elements in the community, who had also demanded government intervention to direct exhibition content. In terms uncannily similar to those employed in the 'history wars' 20 years later, critics condemned the capture of a public facility by a so-called 'vocal minority' at the expense of 'the decent majority'. [23] But on this occasion the museum's liberal supporters defended it strongly, insisting that the expression of pluralist views was an important component of modern democracy. These same supporters were amongst the most vocal of opponents of the museum's decision to allow access to the League of Rights. The result for the Constitutional Museum, and for a time for the History Trust, was a far more cautious approach to Speakers' Corner [24] and to exhibitions in general. Peter Cahalan watched the early development of the Migration Museum with some trepidation, scrutiny that I found irksome at the time, but have come to understand rather better since. To his credit, he did not intervene directly in the construction of texts that presented, by the standard of the time, a fairly radical reassessment of the South Australian settler narrative.

Controversies like this underline the fact that historians in museums take risks that those in the academies seldom face, or at least, seldom faced. The legacy of the Howard years probably prompts revision of that first observation. And while commentators reflecting on the bitter controversy over content at the National Museum of Australia in the years after its much-delayed opening in 2001 tend to assume that *national* museums bear a particular burden in constructing public memory, [25] there were many other examples of exhibitions exciting public controversy even before the determined neo-conservative campaign of the recent past. Julia Clark courted public censure in Hobart on many occasions during her highly creative period at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in the 1980s and, but for timely political support, might well have shared the fate of those at the National Museum. Clark was the first to present Aboriginal history in any Australian museum. An archaeologist by training, she showed a unique interest in presenting accounts of the more recent past in exhibitions and was the first both to use the term 'invasion' to describe the advent of Europeans in an exhibition, and to refer to frontier conflict as a 'war' of invasion that provoked systematic 'resistance'. [26]

Some years later she curated a photographic exhibition presented by the Corporation of the City of Hobart as its bicentennial gift to the people of Hobart. The exhibition set out deliberately to challenge the generally celebratory approach of many bicentennial events, emphasising the hitherto 'hidden' history of Hobart through images that revealed the divisions in Hobart's social, economic and political life. Clark admitted candidly:

We may have overstated the case in our determination to act as an emetic to the genteel antiquarianism of the 'Georgian splendour' school of history. We probably did, but the public loved it anyway. Or most of them did. [27]

The exhibition provoked passionate debate and widely diverging responses, from those who dismissed it as 'socialist muck', to others who welcomed the chance to see 'the truth at last.' Of course the adherents of the 'socialist muck' school wielded far more public influence than 'the truth at last' faction and, but for the steadfast support of the mayor, the exhibition would have been removed summarily from the Town Hall. As it was, the sheer weight of visitor numbers determined that it was exhibited on three more occasions, while the resulting book was the third best selling title in Tasmania that year. [28] A sequel followed some years later. Strategic political support was the key here, just as the lack of it was the nemesis of the National Museum just over a decade later. The Pigott Report may well have recommended that the 'museum, where appropriate, should display controversial issues'. 'In our view', the committee observed, 'too many museums concentrate on certainty and dogma, thereby forsaking the function of stimulating legitimate doubt and thoughtful discussion'. [29] But when is it 'appropriate' to explore controversial issues and what constitutes 'legitimate' doubt and *thoughtful* discussion? These have proven to be highly volatile concepts over the years.

Progressive as some of the Pigott committee's recommendations were in 1975, the report contained no hint of other new directions in scholarship that were beginning to influence historians

in museums and prompt them to review their approaches to collecting and exhibiting. The first was awareness of cultural diversity, often more narrowly interpreted to mean ethnicity, but capable of a far more expansive definition, as Viv Szekeres suggests. The second was gender. Nineteen seventy-five was a pivotal year in many respects in Australia, not least because it saw the publication of the first of many texts that were to redefine approaches to history making over the next few decades. [30] These first avowedly feminist history texts inspired a generation to question the gendered hierarchies of representation in all aspects of Australian cultural life, including museums. Once again this new approach to history drew its initial impetus from the wider feminist and women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. [31] In museums it fell on fertile soil, since the vast majority of history curators were women and many, perhaps most, were also feminists.

A steady stream of exhibitions designed to redress the balance of existing history displays followed. They included both 'permanent' and temporary exhibitions [32] and represented an important attempt to document, and exhibit, women's lives in the past. In Adelaide both the Constitutional Museum and the Migration Museum included an identifiable thread of women's history through displays. One of the first temporary exhibitions in the Constitutional Museum celebrated the women's suffrage movement and South Australia's pioneering (in Australia) extension of the suffrage to women in 1894. At the Migration Museum we were committed to incorporating women's history in all displays, but were certainly assisted by the fact that the museum was housed in the former women's section of a Destitute Asylum. The temporary exhibition galleries were once wards in a lying-in hospital. This was a perfect setting for displays exploring gendered economic and political structures, as well as the rigours of nineteenth-century motherhood. Julia Clark in Tasmania included significant sections of women's history in two long-term galleries – those on Aboriginal Tasmanians and the convict system [33] – while in Sydney the newly opened Powerhouse Museum included an extensive exhibition on women's work in the home in its opening galleries. Entitled *Never Done*, it drew extensively on that museum's large collection of 'domestic technology'. Another attempt to document aspects of women's working lives through the material culture of domesticity was undertaken by Liza Dale at the Museum of Victoria, [34] while in Queensland Judith McKay presented a series of exhibitions during the 1980s and 1990s. [35] Also in Queensland, Brian Crozier curated a major temporary exhibition on the *Women of the West* in the late 1990s; these are only a few of the projects undertaken. An indication of the extent of the work underway in 1990 is found in the first issue of the new *Museums Australia Journal*. Entitled *Out of the Box*, it was described as a 'special issue on women in museums'. [36]

Women working in museums also drew together to discuss issues of representation and to mentor each other. A women's 'special interest group' of the museum professional association formed in the late 1980s, with Julia Clark as its first convener. There was considerable cross-over in membership with the historians' group, and both groups promoted some very lively discussions at conferences. More controversial was the decision to hold a women's only dinner at the annual museum conference. This excited some resentment amongst male members of the profession (including an attempt to gatecrash it on one occasion), but the dinner was gradually accepted, and then, just as abruptly, ceased. Perhaps by this time women working in museums did not feel the same need for support from other women. The validity of women's history was also more securely established, while the numbers of women in senior management positions in museums steadily increased. There are now six women directing major museums in Australia and those appointments no longer excite comment. [37]

Exhibitions exploring environmental history took much longer to appear, partly because there was initially little secondary literature to underpin them, and partly because the complexity of working in multidisciplinary teams that combined the humanities and natural sciences was an enormous challenge. It is also fair to suggest that, had the National Museum proceeded earlier, such exhibitions would have appeared sooner. As it was, one of the earliest attempts at a broadly based survey of environmental change in Australia was presented by the natural historians of the Australian Museum. *From Dawn to Dust* presented a graphic overview of what we would now probably call 'climate change' from deep time to the present, and drew stark conclusions about the impact of Europeans on the fragile Australian environment. It had no sequels until the Western Australian Museum opened its interdisciplinary gallery *Western Australia – Land and People* and the National Museum simultaneously opened *Australia – Land and People* in 2001. *Western Australia – Land and People* was a complex project, managed by historians Ann Delroy and Sue Graham-Taylor, with a team drawn from most of the specialist areas of the museum. It was probably the first exhibition that brought together curators from the humanities, social and natural sciences in a single project.

Although some elements of these new environmental history exhibitions induced disquiet amongst conservative commentators, it was the new approaches to exhibiting Indigenous history that eventually provoked the most heated public debate. The National Museum endured intense political pressure to recast its displays, both before and after opening, while at Museum Victoria elements of the tabloid press conducted a 'trial by media' of the new Indigenous gallery, *Bunjilaka*. Once again, the political context of the time was critical. Initially however, exhibitions exploring Indigenous issues seemed to enjoy public support. At the Museum of Victoria Gaye Sculthorpe presented several very successful temporary exhibitions, at least two of which documented aspects of women's Indigenous history to great effect. [38] The Australian War Memorial highlighted the role of Indigenous soldiers in the Great War in *Too Dark for the Light Horse*, an exhibition that finally acknowledged the extent of postwar discrimination against Aboriginal returned servicemen. [39] It was, however, a touring exhibition presented by the Australian Archives that perhaps excited the greatest emotional response. Displayed before the inquiry into Indigenous child removal had presented its report, Rowena MacDonald's *Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth Government and the Removal of Aboriginal Children of Part Descent in the Northern Territory* [40] engaged and shocked visitors wherever it was shown. It was a powerful exhibition, linking documentary evidence with oral testimony to great effect, and it moved many visitors to tears.

One year later the Howard government was elected and almost immediately announced that it would build the long-delayed National Museum of Australia. In the following year the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on child removal practices was published and all Australians learned about the 'Stolen Generations'. [41] For some, the knowledge was unwelcome. It was the National Museum of Australia's profound misfortune that its eventual debut coincided with the most concerted attempt since the 1950s to shift political and cultural debate significantly to the right. The contours of this debate have been explored extensively in recent publications and I will not rehash them here. [42] Suffice to say that one of the most public casualties of the 'history wars' was the interpretation of Indigenous history – both Indigenous history in general [43] and Indigenous history in museums. It remains to be seen what the long-term effects of this episode will be.

The exhibitions that provoked this furore had been a long time coming. Arguably, the Pigott Report first laid the groundwork for the research-based, multidisciplinary exhibitions finally presented in partnership with Indigenous communities around the turn of the new century. In the three years between 1999 and 2001 four Australian museums opened major long-term galleries interpreting Indigenous culture and history. Those in Sydney, Perth, Melbourne and Canberra, [44] opened in that order, shared much in common. All documented Indigenous dispossession, all explored the issue of frontier violence and all presented something of the history of the 'Stolen Generations', despite the challenges involved in presenting these emotional and difficult histories in a museum context. [45] There is little material evidence for much of this history, and yet its significance to all Australians demands that it be told in museums. I well remember the insistence of Aboriginal Advisory Committee members in Perth that we reserve a section of the new gallery for the stories of child removals in that state, despite the fact that the collection base was sparse. Although there had been issues in the past between Indigenous communities and the museum, [46] the committee recognised the institution's public authority and sought a place for their history within its walls. Working with this committee was one of the great privileges of my professional life.

Visitors to these galleries almost always emerged profoundly moved by them. And yet there was a minority – it is impossible to say how sizeable it was – who found these histories unpalatable. The established settler narrative in Australia posited peaceful settlement, not violent invasion, and found imputations of genocide, argued particularly in the context of the stolen children, insulting to their forebears. As prime minister, John Howard famously refused to apologise for the wrongs of past generations, despite the fact that most state premiers had already done so, and this accorded political legitimacy to those who opposed the new historiography. From the mid-1990s those alienated by the new histories found a political voice in the trans-Pacific, neo-conservative backlash against 'postmodernism' and 'political correctness' that consumed sections of the media in Australia and the United States [47] for more than a decade. Ironically, if there was any truly postmodern museum in Australia at this time, it was probably the Museum of Sydney. This museum had also attracted its critics over the years, but nothing on the scale of the concerted media and political campaign that greeted the new Indigenous galleries.

I have argued elsewhere that most of us in museums were unprepared for the ferocity and determination of this assault on our scholarship, and on our commitment to presenting pluralist views in exhibitions. [48] Although John Howard had made no secret of his views, [49] we were

slow in museums to realise the extent of his determination. We clung to the fiction of intellectual independence as its very foundations were being bulldozed beneath us. In a paper presented to the Museums Australia conference in 1997 I expressed concern about the Howard view of history and about what it might mean for the future of history exhibitions, but still concluded optimistically that the new historical knowledge would prevail over conservative ideology. [50] I was wrong. First in Melbourne in response to Gaye Sculthorpe and others' exhibition, *Bunjilaka*, and then in Canberra, neo-conservative critics led a chorus of complaint, citing left-wing bias, 'political correctness', inadequate scholarship and tarnished sources – the latter a particular attempt to discredit research based on oral sources. In Canberra this followed concerted attempts – over the several years before the National Museum opened – by conservative members of the Museum's council, who sought to direct interpretation in accordance with their views. Eventually Director Dawn Casey was forced to refer all texts for review by independent historian Graeme Davison, selected on the recommendation of Geoffrey Blainey (who apparently thought it unwise to attempt it himself). Both Casey and Davison have written accounts of this period and they make salient reading. [51] Ultimately, the government appointed a formal review panel, headed by conservative sociologist John Carroll, who recommended a range of changes to some of the exhibitions but stopped short of suggesting wholesale revision of the Indigenous exhibitions. [52]

Assessing the direct impact of this uncomfortable period on the histories presented in other museums is not easy. Few curators were prepared to reflect publicly on their interpretive decision making, although in private conversations many were more open, acknowledging a new climate of timidity and self-censorship in exhibition planning. Curators at the Smithsonian have identified a similar response in that institution. [53] As I argued earlier, both community and official tolerance of controversial exhibition content has varied in the past 30 years, reflecting the landscape of specific local memories and the balance of local politics, but the concerted ferocity of the Howard-led assault on pluralist interpretation was without precedent. It exposed the fragility of Australians' commitment to intellectual freedom of inquiry and expression and profoundly undermined widely held assumptions about the independent authority of museum scholarship. It remains to be seen whether museums can reclaim a central role in both critiquing and celebrating the nation's memory. To do this well will require courage from both directors and curators. Not to do so courts irrelevance.

Footnotes

¹ Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, 2003.

² Commonwealth Government, *Museums in Australia 1975. Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections* (Pigott Report), Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra, 1975, para. 1.2. My emphasis.

³ Pigott Report, para. 1.2.

⁴ Geoffrey Blainey, *Black Kettle and Full moon: Daily Life in a Vanished Australia*, Penguin, Melbourne, 2003.

⁵ Pigott Report, para. 12.9.

⁶ Pigott Report, para. 12.16

⁷ It was further developed and eventually published by Patricia Summerfield. It is generally known as the Summerfield classification system.

⁸ In Sydney the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (although it had various names over the years) and in Melbourne the Science Museum. See Graeme Davison and Kimberley Webber (eds), *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and its Precursors 1880–2005*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 2005, for the Sydney story.

⁹ Pigott Report, recommendation 2.11 and paras 12.2–12.

¹⁰ In an article published in the (short lived) *Museums Australia Journal* in 1992. Gaye Sculthorpe, 'Interpreting Aboriginal History in a Museum Context', *Museums Australia Journal*, vols 2–3, 1991–2, pp. 49–56. The other exception was Julia Clark.

¹¹ They were, in order, the Constitutional Museum (later Old Parliament House, 1979–1995), the Migration Museum (1986) and the South Australian Maritime Museum (1986). A Motor Museum (later the National Motor Museum) was acquired by the South Australian government from its private operators and added to the

History Trust stable in 1981.

¹² The exceptions were the South Australian Museum (the History Trust was created to fill this gap) and the Australian Museum. In Sydney the Powerhouse also embraced history.

¹³ Exemplified by the pioneering work of Raphael Samuel, EP Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm and others in Britain. The group created the *History Workshop Journal*, published continuously from 1979.

¹⁴ Following in particular Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1973.

¹⁵ Now in the stable of the Historic Houses Trust but at that point managed by the MAAS.

¹⁶ Andrew Reeves and Ann Stephen, *Badges of Labour, Banners of Pride: Aspects of Working Class Celebration*, Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences with George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985.

¹⁷ Andrew Reeves, *Another Day Another Dollar: Working Lives in Australian History*, Carlton, McCulloch, 1988.

¹⁸ The exhibition opened in 1996.

¹⁹ I first initiated an informal discussion group which grew into the Special Interest Group.

²⁰ Tony Bennett, 'Museums and "the people"', in Robert Lumley (ed.), *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, Routledge, London, 1988.

²¹ The visitor figures are recorded on History Trust file CR/1999/0039, document 2008/00809.

²² See for example 'How to Abuse Free Speech', *Sunday Mail*, 3 April 1983, p. 6.

²³ See History Trust file CR/2000/0001, vol. 1, note dated 2 June 1982.

²⁴ The terms of reference for Speakers' Corner were reviewed, but the intention to reflect broad political debate was retained. History Trust of South Australia, Minutes of the Board, 26 July 1983.

²⁵ Graeme Davison has presented this argument on several occasions. See 'Conflict in the Museum', in Bain Attwood and SG Foster (eds), *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2003, pp. 201–14, and 'What Should a National Museum Do? Learning from the World', in Marilyn Lake (ed.), *Memory, Monuments and Museums: the past in the present*, Melbourne University Press, 2006, pp. 91–2.

²⁶ The exhibition was *Aboriginal People of Tasmania* and it opened in 1982.

²⁷ Julia Clark, "'Socialist Muck or the Truth at Last": The Bicentennial Exhibition of the Corporation of the City of Hobart', *Museums Australia Journal*, vols. 2–3, 1991–2, p. 108.

²⁸ Julia Clark, *This Southern Outpost: Hobart 1846–1914*, Corporation of the City of Hobart, 1989.

²⁹ Pigott Report, para. 12.16.

³⁰ Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1788–1975*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975; Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1975; Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1975.

³¹ For an overview of these movements in Australia see Barbara Caine (ed.), *Australian Feminism: A Companion*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998.

³² There is not space to discuss these exhibitions in any detail here, but I did review some of them in a number of articles in the 1990s. See for example Margaret Anderson, 'Engendering public culture: women and museums in Australia', *Images of Women Conference Papers*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 1994, pp. 116–133. See also Margaret Anderson, Julia Clark and Andrew Reeves, *When Australia was a Woman: Images of a Nation*, Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1997.

³³ The convict exhibition opened in 1992.

³⁴ See the published catalogue, Liza Dale, *Work in the Home*, Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, 1989.

³⁵ One example was her wonderful exhibition of the flower paintings of Ellis Rowan, with its accompanying catalogue. Judith McKay, *Ellis Rowan: A Flower-Hunter in Queensland*, Queensland Museum, Brisbane, 1990.

³⁶ Volume 1, 1990. The volume included a useful select bibliography of published work on women in museums.

³⁷ That said, around the table of the Council of Australasian Museum Directors there were only six women amongst 21 members in 2008.

³⁸ They were *Daughters of a Dreaming*, an exhibition based on Koori family photographs (c. 1990–91) and *Keeping Culture Strong: Aboriginal Women and Work* (1992).

³⁹ It was presented in c. 1988 and toured nationally.

⁴⁰ There was an accompanying catalogue: Rowena MacDonald, *Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth Government and the Removal of Aboriginal Children of Part Descent in the Northern Territory*, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 1995.

⁴¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Sydney, 1997.

⁴² Notably in Macintyre and Clark, *The History Wars*.

⁴³ For an overview of this debate see Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told?: a personal search for the truth about our history*, Viking, Melbourne, 1999, and Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2005.

⁴⁴ The galleries were: *Indigenous Australians* (Australian Museum), *Katta Djinoong* (WA Museum), *Bunjilaka* (Melbourne Museum, Museum Victoria) and *Gallery of Aboriginal Australia* (National Museum).

⁴⁵ A fifth gallery, opened at the South Australian Museum, preferred a more traditional ethnographic approach and is not discussed here.

⁴⁶ One of the most difficult episodes had concerned the Museum approving, under fierce ministerial pressure, mining on sacred land at Noonkanbah in the 1970s. This was still remembered with pain by many Aboriginal people in Western Australia in the 1990s.

⁴⁷ There is an extensive literature on this phenomenon in the US, but for a sense of its impact on museums see Roger D Launius, 'American Memory, Culture Wars and the Challenge of Presenting Science and Technology in a National Museum', *The Public Historian*, Vol. 29, No. 1, Winter 2007, pp. 13–30; James B Gardner, 'Contested Terrain: History, Museums and the Public', *The Public Historian*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Fall 2004, pp. 11–21.

⁴⁸ Margaret Anderson, 'Contested memory and history museums in Australia', in Marie-Paule Jungblut and Rosmarie Beier-De-Haan (eds), *Museums and Universal Heritage: History in the Area of Conflict between Interpretation and Manipulation*, International Committee for Museums of archaeology and History, Luxembourg, 2008, pp. 70–79.

⁴⁹ He indicated his determination both to make Australian history a political issue in opposition to what he called the left-wing revisionism of the academies in league with the Keating Labor government, and to direct the re-writing of history along the lines he preferred. See, for example, Hon John Howard, MP, *The Liberal Tradition: The Beliefs and Values Which Guide the Federal Government*, Sir Robert Menzies Lecture, 1996.

⁵⁰ Margaret Anderson, 'The Changing Museum – Rhetoric or Reality? Exhibiting History in a Post-Politically Correct World', *Unlocking Museums*, Museums Australia, Darwin, 1997.

⁵¹ Davison, 'Conflict in the Museum'; Dawn Casey, 'Reflections of a National Museum Director', in Lake, *Memory, Monuments and Museums*, pp. 110–23.

⁵² John Carroll, Richard Longes, Philip Jones and Patricia Rich, 'Review of the National Museum of Australia, its exhibitions and public programs: a report to the Council of the National Museum of Australia', Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra, 2003.

⁵³ See Gardiner and Launius above.

Margaret Anderson is the Director of the History Trust of South Australia.

Cite as: Margaret Anderson, 2011, 'Museums, history and the creation of memory: 1970-2008', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/MAnderson_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums and history

Redeveloping ports, rejuvenating heritage: Australian maritime museums

by Kevin Jones

Introduction

Many proposals were put to the Australian government's Committee of Inquiry into Museums and National Collections in 1975 (the Pigott Report). The Committee, however, decided that only three themes deserved special attention. They recommended that 'priority be given to a national maritime museum in Sydney, and to a national aviation museum at a growth centre such as Albury-Wodonga, and that later consideration be given to locating a Gallery or Museum of Australian Biography, within the Parliamentary Triangle in Canberra'. [1]

In the event the Australian National Maritime Museum opened in 1991, years before a generalist national museum or a national portrait gallery, and an aviation museum has had scant mention since.

The priority given to the Australian National Maritime Museum may be an acknowledgement the central role of maritime history in the European exploration and settlement of Australia. It was built as a project marking the Bicentenary of the First Fleet arriving in Sydney Harbour. It was also built as an Australian government contribution to the rejuvenation of Sydney's disused shipping terminal, Darling Harbour.

Today, more than 30 years after the Australian government's Inquiry, Sydney Heritage Fleet's website holds a list of maritime museums and collections in Australia. It names 71 specifically designated maritime museums including 20 in New South Wales and 15 each in Victoria and Queensland, plus another 106 museums with substantial maritime collections. It also lists 232 sites and associations dedicated to preserving maritime heritage, be it a lighthouse, an archive or sailing a class of timber boats. The numbers are compelling.

From the Queensland Maritime Museum to the Maritime Museum of Tasmania and the Australian National Maritime Museum, there is almost universal agreement on what such organisations should be called. Beyond their titles, however, the museums have different organisational histories, different resources, priorities and different audiences. Some were established by enthusiasts wanting to save historic vessels; others to save shipwrecks or archaeological collections; and still others to bring audiences to disused ports to promote tourism, sustain a community or find a use for a historic precinct.

Biting off more than you can chew and chewing like hell

Most maritime museums, such as the Sydney Maritime Museum, the Melbourne Maritime Museum (*Polly Woodside*) and the Queensland Maritime Museum, were begun by dedicated volunteers whose efforts were crystallised in the goal of saving a single important vessel.

Sydney Heritage Fleet records its origins in its journal, *Australian Sea Heritage*, in an article entitled 'Biting off more than you can chew and chewing like hell'. It is proud of its audacity in taking on enormous projects and succeeding against the odds. It can certainly cite a proud list of acquired vessels, including the Edwardian steam launch *Lady Hopetoun*, the steam tug *Waratah* and the coastal steamer *John Oxley*, all restored in the late 1960s.

The major turning point in the museum's growth came in 1971 when it decided to retrieve the hull of the sailing ship *James Craig*. The *James Craig*, built in 1874, traded to Europe, Australia and America. It had rounded Cape Horn many times, climbing to the highest peak of nautical mythology.

There was a great deal of debate within the organisation about the project; about the realities of resources and the values of conservation and restoration. Some believed their resources were already stretched and such a large project could break them. They also argued that there was so little remaining of the original vessel that the project would end up building a replica on an original

keel. Others believed the restoration of a large sailing ship would balance the Fleet's strength in steam.

Sydney Maritime Museum began retrieving the *James Craig* in 1972. It became a 30-year project that took the ship to Sydney in 1981 and finally to its recommissioning in 2005. There were technical challenges to be overcome in reviving extinct trades such as hot-riveting, but the biggest challenge was undoubtedly resources. The museum raised over three million dollars by raffling Porsches and received a bicentennial grant of \$1.5 million from the NSW government, but it lost badly on predictions that visitors to the newly developed Darling Harbour would pay to see the *James Craig* being restored. However, the vessel also won the support of the Albert family, who provided the funding needed for the project to go ahead. It was a 20-year project but, once the funding was assured, 80 per cent of the work was completed in two years.

The Queensland Maritime Museum was formed as a branch of the World Ship Society in 1969. Two years later it acquired its first vessel, purchasing the steam tug *Forceful* for one dollar from the Queensland Tug Company. The state government provided the disused South Brisbane Dock and the Brisbane City Council offered support. Radio promotions attracted 50 members and the museum continued to grow from the dreams of enthusiasts. One of its largest achievements was acquiring the Second World War frigate HMAS *Diamantina* to fill its dock in 1981.

For Melbourne Maritime Museum the founding inspiration was the *Polly Woodside*, a three-masted barque built in Belfast in 1885. It had rounded Cape Horn 16 times and by 1968 was the last square-rigged ocean-going ship in Australasia. The National Trust of Victoria bought the *Polly Woodside* from Howard Smith for one cent. It restored it from 1962 to 1968, planning to keep the vessel afloat in a dry dock and open it to visitors. The Victorian government provided the use of a historic dock. In 1988 the project was awarded the World Ship Trust Medal for supreme achievement in conservation. In 2006 *Polly Woodside* was added to the State Heritage Register and the Victorian government provided a grant of \$100,000 for a condition survey.

Both the Queensland Maritime Museum and the Melbourne Maritime Museum have exploited opportunities presented by the redevelopment of disused waterfronts. Queensland Maritime Museum won funding from Brisbane City Council as part of a plan to lift tourism to South Bank. In 2000 Melbourne Maritime Museum began a redevelopment program to broaden its collections and focus on the Port of Melbourne. A new exhibition building was provided as part of the billion-dollar construction of an exhibition and convention centre and opened in December 2010.

Maritime archaeology and the Western Australian Maritime Museum

There are clear parallels between those museums that were inspired by the urgency of preserving historic vessels and the origins of the Western Australian Maritime Museum. Myra Stanbury, curator, observed that 'The Western Australian Maritime Museum is essentially the product of maritime archaeology. At the root of its conception, initiation, development and culmination is a wealth of archaeological material recovered from historical shipwrecks.' [2]

The process began in 1963 when two extraordinarily significant shipwrecks were discovered. They were both Dutch East Indiamen, the *Batavia*, built in 1629, and the *Vergulde Draeck*, built in 1653. The wrecks extended the European history of Australia centuries beyond the popular understanding that it began with James Cook charting the east coast in 1770. The wrecks also captured the public imagination with tales of sunken bullion and stories of murder and mutiny. [3]

In 1965 Fremantle City Council, with support from the Western Australian Museum, developed a proposal to convert Fremantle's convict-built asylum into a maritime museum and sought state government funding for the project. The museum opened in 1970 and maritime archaeological material formed the basis of the first displays. Myra Stanbury recalled that the development of the new museum:

provided display staff with a stepping stone into a new era of design concepts and interpretive philosophy. The displays represented a radical move away from cabinets of inanimate stuffed birds and animals to more contextual displays related to the discovery of the Great Southland; early Dutch voyages; the trading activities of the Dutch East India Company; and social and cultural life in the Netherlands. [4]

The exhibitions also portrayed the role, methods and recovery techniques of the new field of maritime archaeology. While today that may involve opening the process to question, in 1970 it

was simply intended to 'give a balanced view of the objectives of maritime archaeology'. [5]

The exhibitions were part of a broader museum program. Lobbying from divers persuaded the Western Australian Museum to employ a maritime archaeologist in 1971 and the work was supported by the voluntary labour of amateur divers. Together they raised an enormous amount of significant material, including 27 tonnes of sandstone building blocks, and timber from the stern section of the *Batavia*.

The material was too large to be included in existing museums and demanded an imaginative solution to bring it to life. In 1977 the historic Commissariat Store in Fremantle became available and funding was provided to transform it into a museum. The Western Australian Maritime Museum opened to the public in September 1979 in time to celebrate the state's 150th anniversary. Today, the display of a large section of the *Batavia* and the stone arch carried by the same ship is one of the richest, most evocative exhibitions in Australia.

The maritime archaeology program developed by the museum became known worldwide for its achievements, and the team of archaeologists worked with several countries on underwater sites in the Indian Ocean.

While the histories of other maritime museums are accounts of enthusiasts establishing museums as incorporated associations, in the case of maritime archaeology in Western Australia enthusiasts lobbied the Western Australian Museum and the state and Australian governments to take responsibility. Along with the development of the Western Australian Maritime Museum, laws were passed by the Western Australian government in 1973 (the *Maritime Archaeology Act*) and the Australian government in 1976 (the *Historic Shipwrecks Act*) to protect wrecks by preventing divers from retrieving objects from the sites.

From the periphery to the mainstream

Professor Frank Broeze was rare among historians in describing himself as a maritime historian. Most of his contemporaries who wrote about maritime history saw themselves as generalists who simply happened to be working on maritime history at the time. In 1989, two years before the Australian National Maritime Museum opened, Frank Broeze wrote an article, 'From the Periphery to the Mainstream', in which he argued that maritime history needed to claim its place in the mainstream historiography of Australia. He pointed to examples where maritime affairs were clearly part of the main history.

He observed that many maritime historians and archaeologists focused on the technical detail because of their passionate fascination with the vessels and the artefacts, rather than on the people who used them. Professor Broeze's arguments were very much in line with those arguing for social history in museums. Such ideas were expressed in the South Australian Maritime Museum that opened in 1986, the Australian National Maritime Museum that opened in 1991, and the Western Australian Maritime Museum's new exhibition galleries that opened in 2002.

All three museums were led by urban renewal projects and were intended to help revive disused ports. The stimulus for those museums came from the aim of building an audience, be they tourists or local communities. It did not come from the collections. Indeed, in the case of the Australian National Maritime Museum, to begin with there was no collection at all.

South Australian Maritime Museum

Port Adelaide's Inner Harbor had been the focus of trade since the colony was proclaimed in 1836. However, in trends that have been seen in ports around the world, technology changed. Accelerating in the decades after the Second World War, shipping was rebuilt and new bulk handling and container terminals were established. These new facilities were built downstream rather than on existing sites. This meant that there was a disused port left intact that became South Australia's first historic precinct.

A maritime museum was seen as part of the answer to revive the community and lead the redevelopment of the port. It would attract tourists, build on the ambience of the historic port and demonstrate commitment to reinforcing community values.

Like Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool and South Street Seaport Museum in New York, the South Australian Maritime Museum aimed to colour its precinct. It was spread over several sites that included a wharf shed, a lighthouse, a stone-built bond store and a timber sailmaker's loft.

The museum built a collection of vessels that included an 1883 coastal trader (*Nelcebee*), a 1949 steam tug (*Yelta*) and a 40-foot naval launch (*Archie Badenoch*).

The museum presented a series of innovative thematic exhibitions with the aim of taking maritime heritage to a broad audience. Exhibitions explored the experiences of immigrants and related them to the local community through a database that enabled South Australians to find the ships that brought their immigrant ancestors to the state. They emphasised the experiences of those who crewed the ships, and expanded maritime history to include areas that might seem trivial to a specialist but might more easily relate to visitors who rarely go to sea. Much was made of nostalgia for the gulf trips that gave South Australians cheap cruise holidays in their local waters and of recreational fishing, surfing, swimming and seaside entertainment.

At the same time, the museum was not a total break from the past. It presented displays that appealed to specialists and enthusiasts. Its largest floor space was a cargo shed that provided berths for its vessels and a hall to exhibit a collection of large objects that included a teak cabin from a coastal steamer, the hull of an 1870s trading ketch, wharf cranes and sail craft.

The museum also presented the oldest nautical collection in Australia, that of the former Port Adelaide Nautical Institute. Part of the nineteenth-century movement for self improvement, the Institute began in 1851 as a subscription library and began a museum collection with an honorary curator in 1872. When it became part of the new maritime museum in 1986, it was presented as a museum within a museum, exhibiting the charm and the mystery of a collection of the past. Designer Quentin Mitchell said the aim was to present the Nautical Collection as if it had been picked up by an egg slide and placed in the new building.

Australian National Maritime Museum

Amongst those who lobbied so effectively for the establishment of a national maritime museum were the nautical enthusiasts of the Sydney Maritime Museum.

One of the foundation documents for the National Maritime Museum was based on an alliance between academic history and amateur nautical history. A draft collections and exhibitions policy was produced in October 1985 by Peter Spearritt and Vaughan Evans. Professor Spearritt was head of the School of Social and Political Enquiry at Monash University and had published in Australian history. Vaughan Evans was a founder of the Australian Association for Maritime History and a long-time editor of its newsletter. In that role he bridged the gap by founding an organisation with a majority of amateur historians but producing a journal edited and refereed by academics.

It was a partnership that crossed the constituents of maritime museums. Within the report they deftly summed up the ideal relationship between amateurs and professional historians:

Unlike many thematic museums the National Maritime Museum starts with the enormous advantage of having a ready-made body of enthusiasts and experts to draw on, from the Royal Australian Navy, the Australian Association for Maritime History and the Sydney Maritime Museum ... The National Maritime Museum must capitalise on the knowledge and goodwill of the enthusiasts and experts, but it must not become captive to them. The great majority of visitors to the Museum will know little of our maritime heritage and even less about maritime technology or what working on a ship was really like, for officers or crew. [6]

They sketched out themes around which the collection should be based: 'Given the fact that the NMM does not yet have a major collection of maritime items and that it has to open in 1988 we recommend that collecting, in the first instance, should be based around particular themes'. [7]

The concept of arranging collections as well as exhibitions around themes was seen as a contemporary approach. Some saw it as a sound rejection of traditional practice that focused on object types and technology rather than ideas. Others saw it as a temporary expedient that was necessary to produce the opening exhibitions. They believed that, once the museum opened, curatorial work should be arranged around the objective of developing the collection, and that should be done by giving curators responsibility for categories of objects such as paintings or models or boats, rather than themes such as navy or sport.

The museum's opening exhibitions were originally founded around the five themes of naval history, commercial history, sport and leisure, exploration, and immigration. A sixth theme, of Australian and American maritime relations, was added as the result of a gift of \$7 million from the United

States Government to mark Australia's Bicentenary.

Immigration perhaps held together most clearly as a theme. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century immigration presented accounts of convicts and free settlers. In a few short years a credible collection was assembled that included shipboard newspapers, logs, the bower anchor from the *Sirius*, the flagship of the First Fleet, and a rare painting of the *Borrowdale*, a store ship from the same fleet. Exhibitions on twentieth-century immigration were based on material donated or lent by postwar migrants, displaced persons, refugees and 'ten pound Poms'. It also included accounts from the *Hong Hai*, a ship on which Vietnamese refugees fled their war-torn homeland in the 1970s.

Exhibitions on Australia's commercial maritime history included the history of whaling with a focus on Western Australia, accounts of fishing for tuna in South Australia and rock lobsters in Tasmania, and presented a history of the Adelaide Steamship Company as representative of coastal shipping. There was also an exhibition on trade unions, which forged a continuing association between the museum and maritime unions.

The exhibition, *Discovery: Finding Australia*, focused on European exploration and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activities. It was the first core exhibition to be changed after opening. The name was clearly erroneous and the concept of a single theme encompassing Indigenous and European history was questioned. The area was reconfigured to present two discrete, if related, exhibitions. The European section was named *Navigators*.

The Indigenous exhibition was named *Merana Eora Nora – First Australians*. It presented contemporary stories from the Torres Strait, the Kimberley Coast and the Northern Territory, and emphasised living cultures and continuing connections with heritage and place.

A second gallery included two themes, leisure and naval history. Leisure was seen to be especially Australian, stretching definitions of maritime heritage to include surf lifesaving and beach culture. Alongside a flotilla of suspended yachts and a naval helicopter were displayed the biggest and the brightest and the fastest boat in the world – *Spirit of Australia* and the 1983 America's Cup-winning yacht, *Australia II*. The exhibition was rich in personal stories, from Enid Nunn who almost won a water speed record on Kogarah Bay in the 1950s to the rough and ready crew of Wee Georgie Robinson's 18-foot skiff.

The Navy exhibition drew on the repositories of the Royal Australian Navy, including material from naval brigades that steamed off to the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in China, through both World Wars and the war in Vietnam. The destroyer *Vampire*, the patrol boat *Advance*, the espionage boat *Krait* and the launch *Epic Lass* were all berthed at the museum's wharves and a submarine was later added to the fleet. The dominance of the Navy in the collection could be weighed in shiploads.

The Australian National Maritime Museum's exhibitions were developed by staff who broadly shared the goals of social history that were articulated by Professor Broeze. Many of the exhibits sought to focus on the people – ordinary seafarers, wharfies and surf bathers – as well as the artefacts and the vessels.

That had been one of the goals of Vaughan Evans and Peter Spearritt in developing the original themes. The exhibitions on exploration and immigration, in particular, were able to build on large bodies of research. Curators also looked to the work of amateur historians, particularly in areas such as sailing and surfing, which had not been addressed by mainstream history.

History in a tourism development

I have discussed how maritime museums interpreted history by looking through the observations of historians and curators and the vision of enthusiasts who saved heritage that was under threat. There were other dimensions to the position of maritime museums in Australia. They were based on government expectations of what a cultural attraction such as the Australian National Maritime Museum should be doing in the new tourism development of Darling Harbour. In an issue of the maritime history journal, *The Great Circle*, marking the opening of the Australian National Maritime Museum, its Director Kevin Fewster wrote:

While not denying the wider trend in museums towards social history, I would contend that the pursuit of this approach at ANMM and Port Adelaide is, at least in part, a result of the museums being developed within major urban renewal programs. The pressures and

opportunities associated with being located within a tourist precinct have required the museums to maintain a strong focus on their visitor appeal. While not ignoring traditional curatorial responsibilities, these maritime museums readily accept as part of their mission the need to attract a broadly based audience. [8]

He went on to say that the government has stated that the Maritime Museum would be different to other collecting institutions. It would be an 'exhibitions oriented institution'. The term was widely debated in the early development of the museum.

There were genuine debates within the museum profession about the need to focus on audiences and public programs. However, the term came from a report produced by the Department of Finance titled *What Price Heritage* and was essentially a cost-saving measure. Its intention was to limit the growth of the museum's collection to save the costs of collecting and preserving and to limit the number of staff.

Within the museum the concept of an exhibitions-oriented institution was widely debated. It was a debate about whether the museum had a broader research role or whether research should be confined to exhibition production. It was also a debate about the size of the museum's collection: to meet government expectations, the museum's objective was articulated as developing a 'small core collection' rather than aiming to collect representative examples of all object types.

Emphasis was placed on an active and popular exhibitions program and on presenting education programs and public events. International blockbuster exhibitions became a staple of its programming: the American exhibition *Whales: Giants of the Deep* and the British show *Mary Rose – Life on a Tudor Warship* were instrumental in raising the museum's visitor numbers after opening. That emphasis was broadly consistent with the public programs of both the Powerhouse Museum and the Australian Museum.

It was only in 2007 that the Australian National Maritime Museum launched a major research project that was not related to exhibitions. That project was the launch of a national register of historic vessels that has all the credentials to build a comprehensive catalogue on the provenance and significance of vessels, as well as recording their technology.

Redeveloping ports, rejuvenating heritage

The principal engine in providing the funding for the development of maritime museums has been the redevelopment of disused ports. The energy and the ideas have come from nautical enthusiasts and amateur historians who have rescued, researched and restored historic vessels. They have come from social historians who were part of those generations who aimed to find broader views of history and broader audiences for maritime history. They have also come from maritime archaeologists who extended the reach of European history. And some of the best projects presenting aspects of Australia's maritime history and heritage have built alliances across these interests.

Footnotes

¹ PH Pigott et al, *Museums in Australia 1975 – Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975, p. 4.

² Myra Stanbury, 'Maritime Archaeological Material: a catalyst in the development of the Western Australian Maritime Museum', in LM Akveld (ed.), *Vlth International Congress of Maritime Museums Proceedings*, Amsterdam 1987, p. 104.

³ Stanbury, 'Maritime Archaeological Material', p. 105

⁴ Stanbury, 'Maritime Archaeological Material', p. 107.

⁵ Stanbury, 'Maritime Archaeological Material', p. 107.

⁶ Vaughan Evans and Peter Spearritt, 'A Draft Collections Policy for the National Maritime Museum', October 1985, unpublished, Vaughan Evans Library, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney, pp. 1–2.

⁷ Evans and Spearritt, 'Draft Collections Policy for the National Maritime Museum', p. 8.

⁸ Kevin Fewster, 'Down to the Sea in Monorails: Urban Renewal and Recent Maritime Museum Developments',

The Great Circle, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1991, pp. 76–7.

References

Frank Broeze, 'Periphery to the Mainstream: The Challenge of Australia's Maritime History', in *The Great Circle*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1989.

Vaughan Evans and Peter Spearritt, 'A Draft Collections Policy for the National Maritime Museum', October 1985, unpublished, Vaughan Evans Library, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney.

Kevin Fewster, 'Down to the Sea in Monorails: Urban Renewal and Recent Maritime Museum Developments', in *The Great Circle*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1991.

Harlan Hall, 'The Sydney Maritime Museum: A Working, People's Museum Interprets One of the World's Most Beautiful Harbours', in LM Akveld (ed.), *Vlth International Congress of Maritime Museums Proceedings*, Amsterdam, 1987.

Graeme Henderson, 'Our Seafaring History on Display', in *Australian Sea Heritage*, Autumn 1985.

PH Pigott *et al*, *Museums in Australia 1975: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975.

Myra Stanbury, 'Maritime Archaeological Material: A Catalyst in the Development of the Western Australian Maritime Museum', in LM Akveld (ed.), *Vlth International Congress of Maritime Museums Proceedings*, Amsterdam, 1987.

Warwick Turner, 'Bite Off More Than We Can Chew and Chew Like Hell', in *Australian Sea Heritage*, Winter 1985.

Kevin Jones is Director of the South Australian Maritime Museum.

Cite as: Kevin Jones, 2011, 'Redeveloping ports, rejuvenating heritage: Australian maritime museums', in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/KJones_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums and history

Museums and multiculturalism: too vague to understand, too important to ignore

by Viv Szekeres

How interesting to be thinking about museums and multiculturalism at a moment when the idea of Australia being importantly and centrally multicultural is fast disappearing. When I first joined the Migration Museum in 1984 there was an incredible sense of optimism and energy in my field of interest which was, and still is, the history of immigration and settlement. This energy came from an understanding that the demographic changes that followed Australia's mass migration program after the Second World War had created a society for which 'multicultural' was a true descriptor. However, 'culturally diverse' became a more commonly used term to refer to the many different 'ethnic' cultural identities that had joined Australia's predominantly Anglo-Celtic society. There was nothing subtle about the analysis. In the public mind multiculturalism was synonymous with immigration. [1] Anglo-Celts were the 'mainstream' and 'ethnic' minorities were the 'other'. I am also ashamed to say that the cultural identities and histories of Indigenous Australians, the first peoples of Australia, hardly featured at all.

We (a small group of museum workers) were fairly intoxicated with the possibilities of collecting stories and objects from an ever-increasing pool of people who now felt confident enough to claim, even proclaim, their cultural origins, and who knew they didn't need to be stuffed to be in a museum. It is always difficult to pinpoint the origins of change in a society as complex as ours, but there were two reports commissioned by the Australian government in the 1970s that were seminal. They not only captured and described a prevailing reality but also had a long-term effect on the museum industry and on the wider society. The Pigott Report, *Museums in Australia*, was published in 1975 [2] and the Galbally Report on *Migrant Programs and Services* was published in 1978. [3] They were totally unrelated to each other. Pigott articulated ideas about a grassroots history and community museum movement; Galbally highlighted the existence of communities of shared interests and pasts and raised awareness of issues about cultural identity. Viewed in retrospect and together, these reports have influenced and changed the way many, perhaps even most, museums operate across Australia today.

The Pigott Report identified that the majority of museums in this country were local and had been founded in the 1960s. In brief, it reported that this was the result of a quickening interest in Australian history and identified this interest as a 'movement' whose influence lay outside the capital cities.

At the 1998 the International Council of Museums (ICOM) conference in Melbourne I was asked to give a paper about regional museums in a multicultural society [4] and took my audience on a brief, imaginary excursion to visit a 'typical' local museum in a regional centre. It was housed in an old courthouse and run by a local historical society. My 'fictitious' museum was not entirely serious, though it was based on conversations that I had enjoyed with Geoff Speirs, who was at the time the Museums Officer for the former History Trust of South Australia's Museums Accreditation and Grants program. [5] I described the membership of the management committee of my local museum as predominantly Anglo-Celtic. Neither was it fiction when I also described this group as being like hundreds around the nation who cared passionately about history, which was why they had been prepared to work as volunteers for long hours over many years. I concluded that, on the whole, the version of history that they presented was a pioneering and settler story that excluded both the 'ethnic' and Indigenous stories of their region. To reinforce my point I added that, even though women often outnumbered men on the management committees, the history being told was from the perspective of white, Anglo-Celtic, Protestant men who also tended to be middle-aged and middle class.

Even by the late 1990s my description was probably not far off the mark for the majority of local museums staffed by volunteers. One notable exception was the Pioneer Women's Hut in Tumberumba (NSW). However, there were two museums in the Barossa Valley and Adelaide Hills in South Australia that might be seen as exceptions in terms of reflecting more culturally diverse regions. The museums in Tanunda and Lobethal were developed in the early 1960s by local

historical societies whose memberships were either descendants of the early German settlers who had retained their Lutheran, East Prussian origins, or those who strongly identified with the region and took an interest in its history. [6]

The Barossa community especially had a sense of pride in its German origins. This was in spite of periods of persecution as enemy aliens during both World Wars, but particularly the 1914–18 war. Their consciousness of the past meant that the material culture of everyday life had been valued and kept by individuals and families and often ended up in museum displays. The Lobethal and Tanunda museums certainly had strong connections with the East Prussian 'ethnic' origins of the regions, but I am not sure that we can call them 'ethnic-specific' museums, as they seem more connected to the 'local history museum movement' of the early 1960s described by Pigott.

It would be some years before the next group of community museums emerged on the museum scene in Australia. The Lithuanian Museum opened officially in 1967 and the Latvian Museum in 1972, both in Adelaide. These museums were established by two groups of Displaced Persons (DPs), who were refugees from the Second World War. They had formed the Lithuanian and Latvian associations in 1949 to continue their cultural heritage and traditions. As Galbally was later to report of many similar groups, especially from Eastern Europe, they had an active choir, folk and dancing group, arts and sports group and language school. Mara Kolomitsev, the current curator of the Latvian Museum, says 'the establishment of the museum emerged in the 1970s as the next step'. [7] But even for communities that already had other cultural activities, establishing a museum was a huge commitment.

The Latvian and Lithuanian DPs in Australia, however, had a strong sense of cultural and national identity, which flourished especially during a brief period of national independence between the two World Wars, an independence which ended under Soviet and German occupation during the Second World War, and USSR annexation over the following five decades.

Probably the Latvian and Lithuanian DPs, together with others from Eastern Europe, believed that Soviet occupation would be short lived. While they waited to return to their homeland they kept their patriotism and nationalism alive with folk dancing, singing and other arts and crafts. As the years passed, the Baltic States' diaspora clung to its conviction that independence must surely return to their countries. In Adelaide, the establishment of these museums can be seen both as a symbol of the pursuit of cultural continuity and as a means of keeping alive and in the public arena the injustice of Soviet occupation. By the time Lithuania regained its independence in 1990 and Latvia in 1991, Lithuanian and Latvian DPs and their descendants were well established in Australia.

The Ukrainian Museum opened also in Adelaide in the late 1970s to 'mark 30 years of settlement' of Ukrainian DPs. [8] It was the responsibility of the Ukrainian Women's Association, who bought a small property near the Ukrainian Community Hall to house their artefacts and archives for the 'benefit of the wider Australian community'. [9] Lydia Rostek, one of the volunteer curators, said 'the symbolic and creative aspects of culture, such as ethnographic material that includes costume and embroidery has always been the domain of women'.

According to Margy Burn, [10] the Estonian community developed its own historical archives in Sydney as early as 1952, but did not open a museum. People from South Australia's Polish community also had a strong sense of their history and cultural identity and formed an historical society in the early 1980s. It was not until the late 1990s, though, that they opened a small social history museum at Polish Hill River in the Clare Valley, where Poles, who had arrived in the colony as early as 1838, had settled.

According to Professor James Jupp in his book *Immigration*, [11] the public declaration of Australia as a multicultural nation was made by Al Grassby, the Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam government. It was a term taken from Canada where it had been in use since 1968. By the mid-1970s Ethnic Communities Councils had formed in most Australian states. Both Liberal and Labor politicians began to recognise that there was an increasing electoral force amongst immigrant communities. Jupp suggests that Fraser's most important initiative was to implement the Galbally Report of 1978. [12] Amongst Galbally's recommendations was official support for community languages and media, the establishment of migrant resource centres, and SBS as the ethnic radio and television broadcaster, and the establishment of an Institute of Multicultural Affairs.

The previous government policies of assimilation and integration of new migrants into mainstream Anglo-Celtic culture were seen to have failed. It was clear that by the early 1980s there was

widespread consensus, particularly amongst communities of non-Anglo background, that Australia was a multicultural nation. It was now acceptable to have an 'ethnic' cultural identity in addition to being Australian, without fear of ostracism or racism. This shift is reflected in the opening of two museums by the Chinese and Jewish communities.

Chinese and Jewish immigrants had begun to arrive along with the British in 1788. A small number of Chinese men arrived as indentured labourers, convicts and free settlers, and were followed by much larger numbers after the discovery of gold in Victoria in the 1850s. The first Jews to arrive were a handful amongst 750 convicts who were transported from Britain on the First Fleet.

Nearly 200 years later in 1977 Rabbi Ronald Lubovsky suggested the establishment of a Jewish Museum of Australia. It opened in Melbourne in 1982 and was followed two years later by the opening of the Holocaust Museum, also in Melbourne. That two museums dedicated to Jewish history should open in Melbourne is hardly surprising, for it has the largest number of settlers of Jewish origin in Australia and, outside of Israel and the USA, probably the largest number of Holocaust survivors. The other community with a long history of settlement in Victoria was the Chinese. They opened a museum of Chinese history, also in Melbourne, in 1985. In a very real sense, all of these museums were community initiatives. However, the Chinese Museum did receive development funding from the state government as part of Victoria's sesquicentenary, whereas both Jewish museums were funded from their own constituencies.

I would suggest that this flowering of community-initiated museums, begun in 1967 by the Lithuanians, was a direct consequence of a new public and community consciousness about the future identity of the nation. The communities involved in developing these museums had a number of factors in common. Their members had been settled in Australia for at least 30 years; certainly long enough to produce new generations who would probably not have been aware of the histories of persecution and oppression that their families had experienced in varying degrees of awfulness. As Carol Duncan said, 'Museums can be powerful identity defining machines'. [13] The main function of a museum is to preserve the material evidence of the past, but in the process it also legitimates that past. I would argue that the arrival of a 'clutch' of new ethnic-specific community museums came from an increased confidence of belonging. Their previously tenuous hold on membership of the wider society was more secure and could be celebrated, promoted and enjoyed.

Like the Chinese Museum in Melbourne, the Migration Museum in Adelaide was another sesquicentenary project, but this time a South Australian celebration. The idea for the museum in Adelaide was the result of recommendations made to the state government by the Edwards Report. It said that 'given 25% of the State's population had been born overseas ... there had been little attempt to preserve and display items with migrant history, little or no research into ethnic cultures' and 'a failure to inform the public about them'. [14] Edwards also added that 'there was a need to recognize the tremendous contribution immigrants have given to South Australia in its social, economic and cultural life'. [15] The Migration Museum opened to the public in 1986 under the auspices of the former History Trust of South Australia, a statutory authority established in 1981 to 'accumulate and care for objects of historical interest' and 'to manage and administer museums'. [16]

In the history of the development of museums that presented immigration and settlement history and reflected multiculturalism, the arrival of the Migration Museum was a significant event. It heralded a change in the agenda nationally for museums and multiculturalism. Firstly, it was an acknowledgement by a state government, through an ongoing financial commitment, that the history and culture of immigrants was worth collecting and keeping. Secondly, it gave control to an independent organisation without a vested interest in a specific ethnic culture. The Migration Museum might involve ethnic groups but they would not run it. Whilst there was local and community support for the idea of a migration museum, there was probably also a certain amount of scepticism amongst local ethnic communities as to whether it would work and what political line it might take. But the social and cultural capital that came from government support and the fact that the government bureaucracy maintained a 'hands off approach' has enabled the museum to weave its way through the complexities of ethnic politics, enlarge its audience, and maintain its independence and momentum.

In 1988 'a landmark conference' [17] was organised by the Victorian Branch of Museums Australia and the Library Council of Victoria for 'museums, libraries, archives and historical collections towards a national agenda for a Multicultural Australia'. As the conference convener, Morag Loh,

said in her welcoming address to *New Responsibilities – Documenting Multicultural Australia*, ‘we are gathered here from all over Australia and represent a diverse range of institutions and community groups. Our concerns are of national significance’. [18] It was the first time that national and state institutions and community groups had come together to present papers about the importance of documenting and collecting the history of immigrants and ‘ethnic’ cultures. By the time the conference papers were published six months later, the organising committee was able to inform readers that ‘they may like to note that the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, released the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia on 26 July 1989’, and that the National Agenda ‘has taken up recommendations put forward by the Conference’. [19]

This was heady stuff, especially as it was followed by the establishment of the Federal Consultative Committee on Cultural Heritage in a Multicultural Australia. The Committee’s long title might have been a bit convoluted but its task was simpler: to assess whether or not the collections and public programs of collecting institutions reflected the nation’s cultural diversity and the contribution made by immigrants. The committee met between 1990 and 1991, but it was hard to make much headway. It was clear that collecting the material which might reflect Australia’s cultural diversity was definitely outside the current practices and policies of most collecting institutions.

But during one quite intense discussion on this committee, I came to realise that up until now cultural diversity had been defined as being exclusively the domain of ‘ethnic minorities’. When the definition was expanded to include class, gender, age, religion, region and sexuality as well as ethnicity, there was a seismic shift away from the folkloric and anthropological approach which equates ‘cultural difference’ with the exotic and quaint. The wider definition was much more suited to a social history approach, which focused on individual and collective stories and interrogated the idea of tradition and nationalism in an historical context, rather than accepting it as an unchanging reality of ethnic culture.

I have argued elsewhere that social history is one of the more democratic disciplines in that it has opened the academic door for historians to study the history of ‘ordinary people’. [20] For museums in the 1980s interested in Australia’s post-Second World War immigration history there were virtually no academics who were interested in this aspect of Australia’s past, with the exceptions of Professors James Jupp, Jerzy Zubryzcki and Mary Kalantzis. The dearth of secondary sources meant that curators interested in telling the stories of non-English-speaking migrants had to go out into communities to search for this history themselves. One of the positive outcomes of this practice was that the process of engaging with individuals and community groups also brought people into the museums to participate and take ownership of the way their story would be told. It also influenced policy in some museums, which provided an exhibition space for communities to tell their own stories in their own way, in some cases without it being filtered through the curator’s interpretation. [21]

From the late 1980s until the late 1990s there was a veritable explosion of exhibitions about immigration and settlement history in museums large and small across Australia. When the Powerhouse Museum opened in 1988, funded by the state government of New South Wales and the federally funded Australian National Maritime Museum opened in 1991, both included important exhibitions about the contribution to society made by immigrants and their cultures. In the museum industry multiculturalism was an accepted part of Australia’s cultural history. At museum conferences there was now an identifiable group of museum curators and directors with an interest in the history of immigrants. Ironically, it was also a period during which the concept of multiculturalism came increasingly under attack, especially from conservatives in government as well as in some academic circles.

There was definitely some nervousness from the Department of Arts, Sport, Environment, Tourism and Territories (DASETT), the Australian government department then responsible for museums, and at the Council of Australian Museums Association conference in 1990, I was asked to address the issue of ‘whether or not culture-specific museums promoted separatism and the creation of a ghetto mentality’. [22] I was not entirely surprised by this request, given that criticism of the Labor government’s policy of multiculturalism was regularly making headline news in the media. The attack was being led by Professor Geoffrey Blainey, who had accused Hawke in 1988 of ‘turning Australia into a nation of tribes’. [23]

Those who agreed with Blainey must have been horrified when two more ‘culture specific museums’ opened. In Bendigo in 1991 the Golden Dragon Museum presented the local history of the Chinese, and in 1992 the Holocaust and Australian Jewish History Museum opened in Sydney.

This was followed in the same year by a groundbreaking collaborative exhibition project developed between the Jewish Museum of Australia, the Italian Historical Society Co.As.It, and the Museum of Victoria at its Swanston Street building in Melbourne. *Bridging Two Worlds: the Jews and Italians of Carlton* captured the way two communities had developed. Carlton reflected the unique aspects of both Jewish and Italian culture, but had grown its own Australian-Jewish-Italian identity which was inclusive and multicultural in the truest sense of the word.

In 1996 a public review at the Western Australian Museum supported the installation of a major exhibition called *A New Australia: Post War Immigration to WA*, and in Darwin another state-funded museum opened *Sweet and Sour*, an exhibition about the Chinese at the Museum and Gallery of the Northern Territory. But at the same time there was a new assault on the concept of multiculturalism. John Howard won the federal election and promptly closed the Office for Multicultural Affairs and the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research. Pauline Hanson, the new Member for the seat of Oxley, repeatedly called for 'multiculturalism to be abolished'. [24] In Adelaide *A Twist of Fate*, an exhibition about refugees and racism, opened as a direct critique of the broader political agenda of the Australian government and a reminder that 'anyone, anywhere and at any time can become a refugee'. [25]

Ignoring the new federal political agenda regarding multiculturalism, the NSW and Victorian state governments supported new museum initiatives in 1998 dealing with immigrants and refugees. A 'virtual museum' at the Migration Heritage Centre opened in Sydney 'to research and promote the contribution made by immigrants to the State and the nation'. [26] In Melbourne, the Immigration Museum opened in the splendid Old Customs House. The project was strongly supported by Jeff Kennett, who was then Premier of Victoria and who also enthusiastically supported the establishment of a Hellenic Archaeological Museum in the same building. One could call this political opportunism, depending on your level of cynicism, but since Melbourne almost certainly had the largest population of immigrants from Greece it probably made good common sense.

It is significant that, for all the growing recognition of the contribution made by immigrants to Australia, the only other museum in Australia entirely devoted to immigrants and their culture, other than the Migration Museum in Adelaide, was the Immigration Museum. There was one notable difference between the two. In Adelaide, the Migration Museum as a division of the History Trust had complete intellectual freedom and independence to plan, research, develop and mount its own programs; whereas the Immigration Museum in Melbourne became a venue managed by the Museum of Victoria. Historical research, curatorial control and exhibition planning remained firmly with the parent body. But with two museums of immigration history in Australia this was clearly not just a 'politically correct fad' that would go away.

Ian Galloway, the Director of the Queensland Museum, summed up one of the reasons why immigration history might have become such a popular theme for so many museums when he said that, 'Developing diverse audiences is one of the key priorities of the Queensland Museum'. [27] For museums trying to meet performance targets and constantly increase visitor numbers, attracting new audiences became essential to long-term survival. Exhibitions about immigrants seemed to be popular, particularly with visitors from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

One important issue, which had an impact on museums, was the growing awareness of the Reconciliation movement and Indigenous history. The public conscience and consciousness was almost certainly raised by the boycott by Indigenous people of the celebration of Australia's Bicentenary in 1988. Invasion, it was said, was nothing to celebrate. Whilst there had been Aboriginal membership of ethnic Advisory Councils from 1989, multiculturalism was often criticised because it did not seem genuinely concerned with Aboriginal issues. [28] In terms of museums that presented programs about immigration history and cultural diversity, there was a certain amount of confusion as to how to represent Indigenous issues. On the whole museums solved the problem by sidestepping it. They mounted exhibitions about Indigenous people and separate exhibitions about immigrants.

By early 2000 it was clear that former Prime Minister Keating's vision of Reconciliation as the way forward for the recognition of Indigenous people had ground to a halt. But some of us working in the museum industry had become committed to this vision, and began to explore ways in which immigration history might address Reconciliation as part of a wider historical perspective. If immigration and settlement history was analysed as an 'outcome' of British colonisation, then this could allow the story to include not only the impact that settlement had on Indigenous people, but also the reality of Aboriginal survival and the role of Indigenous people in the nation's history and

the current debate about national identity.

These were certainly some of the issues that faced the National Museum in Canberra when it began to develop its exhibitions. Jerzy Zubryzcki, one of the leading architects of Australia's multicultural policy, was employed in the 1980s to provide the framework for the National Museum's multicultural collecting which he had 'focused around the experiences of specific ethnic groups'. [29] But when the National Museum officially opened in 2001 as part of the Centenary of Federation celebrations, there was some disappointment that the 'migration section' was 'small, constrained and sometimes misleading and inaccurate'. [30] Perhaps it was harder on a national scale to build meaningful and ongoing relationships with community groups and individuals that formed the heart of exhibitions on cultural diversity in other locally based museums.

How far have we come since the Lobethal or Lithuanian museums opened in the 1960s? I believe there would be few Australian museums of history today that would produce programs that completely ignore the role of immigrants in the development of Australia since the Second World War. Some museums have curatorial units where the level of scholarship and experience rivals any Australian university history department. Many museums now have collecting policies that represent the culturally diverse nature of society, and research practices that are more inclusive of the constituencies they represent.

But on the whole the celebratory aspects of immigration history and multiculturalism have been easier to present than some of the more difficult and complex issues. In spite of programs such as *Getting In* at the Immigration Museum, and exhibitions that explore the origins and consequences of racism at the Jewish and Chinese museums, there have been few museum programs that have dared to go beyond the superficial and the safe. Yes, there are obvious constraints. Individuals and community groups trust us with their stories and often their secrets. There are limits to how much we can reveal to the visiting public. The internal divisions within communities and the centuries-old antagonisms that still survive here are hidden and silent. Even the generational differences that can be found in most cultures are tucked away out of sight.

However, if we were to do an audit on museums that present programs about immigrants, refugees and multiculturalism, I believe that the majority have weathered and survived the attack on history which has been dubbed 'the history wars'. [31] Most museums have avoided a return to interpretations which are exclusively from 'the white Anglo-male position'. We have mostly ignored an exhortation [32] to stick to 'the 'happy migrant story' which is now firmly in a category labelled 'the construction of myth'. With some exceptions, the majority of museums have been immune to changes in policy and attitudes that since 1996 have undermined the multicultural reality of Australian society. We may not use the word 'multiculturalism', but exhibitions are still being developed that explore the concept. [33] The history that is presented in most of these exhibitions is an inclusive history. It has the power to touch people on an intellectual as well as an emotional level. It gives voice to people who have previously been silent. Above all, it has made, and continues to make, a significant contribution to the debate about who is Australian.

Footnotes

¹ The Fitzgerald Committee was appointed to review immigration policy under the Hawke government. Quoted in James Jupp, *Immigration in Australian Retrospectives*, Sydney University Press in association with Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 109–10.

² *Museums in Australia 1975. Report of the Planning Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, chaired by PH Pigott.

³ Galbally chaired the report on *Migrant Programs and Services*, 1978

⁴ Viv Szekeres, 'Regional Museums in a Polycultural Society', ICOM Conference, Melbourne 1998.

⁵ The History Trust of South Australia is now called History SA.

⁶ One of the enthusiastic local historians who helped start the Lobethal museum was a Lithuanian refugee, (DP) Mr JK Vanagas who later moved to Adelaide and developed the Lithuanian Museum.

⁷ Mara Kolomitsev, conversation /email with the author.

- ⁸ Lydia Rostek, conversation with the author 4 July 2007.
- ⁹ Rostek, 4 July 2007.
- ¹⁰ Margy Burn, Assistant Director-General, Australian Collections and Reader Services, National Library of Australia, 'Melting Pot or Monoculture: archives and cultural diversity in Australia', paper presented at the Australian Society of Archivists Annual Conference 2002, Past Caring? – what does society expect of archivists?
- ¹¹ Jupp, *Immigration in Australian Retrospectives*, p. 101.
- ¹² Jupp, *Immigration in Australian Retrospectives*, p. 101.
- ¹³ Carol Duncan, 'Interpreting Objects and Collections', in Susan Pearce (ed.) *Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship*, Routledge, London, 1994.
- ¹⁴ Robert Edwards, 'Museum Policy and Development in South Australia', Final Report. 1981
- ¹⁵ Edwards, 'Museum Policy and Development in South Australia'.
- ¹⁶ *History Trust of South Australia Act 1981*.
- ¹⁷ Margaret Birtley and Patricia McQueen (eds), *New Responsibilities – Documenting Multicultural Australia*, a record of the conference for Museums, Libraries, Archives and Historical Collections, 'Towards a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia', 11–13 November, Melbourne, 1988.
- ¹⁸ Birtley and McQueen (eds), *New Responsibilities – Documenting Multicultural Australia*.
- ¹⁹ Birtley and McQueen (eds), *New Responsibilities – Documenting Multicultural Australia*.
- ²⁰ Viv Szekeres, 'The Importance of Museums in the Development of Changes in Social Thinking', lecture given to the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre, Adelaide, 2005.
- ²¹ Dr Peter Cahalan, the Director of the Constitution Museum, first introduced community access spaces in Australia in 1978. They were introduced in the Migration Museum in 1986, in the Powerhouse Museum in 1988 and in the Immigration Museum in 1998.
- ²² Viv Szekeres, 'The Role of Culture Specific Museums', CAMA Conference of Australian Museums: Collecting and Presenting Australia, Canberra ACT, 21–24 November 1990.
- ²³ Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2007, p. 107.
- ²⁴ Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, p. 115.
- ²⁵ *A Twist of Fate: An Experience of War, Pain, Torture and Survival* was opened in 1998 by the Migration Museum in Adelaide.
- ²⁶ Migration Heritage Centre.
- ²⁷ Ian Galloway, correspondence with the author.
- ²⁸ Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, p. 91.
- ²⁹ Louise Douglas, Rachael Coghlan and Mat Trinca, 'An Australian Journey: building a National Museum in a Multicultural Society', The National Museum of Australia presented at the Large/National Museums in A Global World Conference, Copenhagen, 2007.
- ³⁰ Jupp, email correspondence with the author.
- ³¹ The 'History Wars', as it was known by the media, was a debate between academics about interpretations of history and whether there was a 'single national narrative' about Australian history that should be told.
- ³² In 1995 a federal politician from the Liberal Party representing a South Australian electorate, after being taken around the Museum, wrote to the Premier of South Australia complaining that the Migration Museum was a 'museum of misery' and 'should tell the happy migrant story'.

³³ The most recent was the South Australian Museum that opened its exhibition about Afghan Cameleers.

Viv Szekeres worked at the Migration Museum in Adelaide first as a curator (1983–1986) and then as Director (1987–2008).

Cite as: Viv Szekeres, 2011, 'Museums and multiculturalism: too vague to understand, too important to ignore', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/VSzekeres_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

**Understanding Museums:
Australian museums and museology**

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



Art museums

During the last three decades Australia has witnessed an unprecedented development in the visual arts. Art museums have both responded to and been agents of change in this period through their collections, exhibitions and public programs. Their role in contemporary art, including Indigenous art, has been especially significant. Australian art museums have also contributed to Australian artists being represented in exhibitions and collections throughout the world. The papers in this section provide an overview of Australian art museums and the role of 'blockbuster' exhibitions from overseas.

Contents

- Introduction, Leon Paroissien
- Art museums in Australia: a personal account, Daniel Thomas
- International exhibitions, Caroline Turner
- Collecting works on paper: specialisation at risk?, Anne Kirker

Online version: http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Art_museums.html

Image credit: Visitors at Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye exhibition at the National Museum of Art, Osaka, 2008. Photo: Benita Tunks. http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/utopia_the_genius_of_emily_kame_kngwarreye/photos_from_osaka/

Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology

Art museums: introduction

by Leon Paroissien

During recent decades Australia has witnessed an unprecedented development in the visual arts. Art museums have both responded to and been agents of change in this period through their collections, exhibitions and public programs. Their role in contemporary art, including Indigenous art, has been especially significant, and Australian art museums have contributed to Australian artists being represented in exhibitions and collections throughout the world.

In 1968, when the relocated National Gallery of Victoria opened its doors, it was Australia's first purpose-built art museum to house an established collection. It also included a dedicated space for temporary exhibitions. The 1975 Pigott Report observed, 'in the last quarter century art museums in Australia have been more favoured by governments; and the two great building programs for museums both centre on art museums – Melbourne and Canberra'. The Report does not mention the Art Gallery of New South Wales's major extensions of the Captain Cook Wing completed in 1972. Before the long-planned National Gallery eventually opened in Canberra in 1982, the state gallery in Perth had opened a new building in 1979, and Brisbane saw the opening of a new state gallery building shortly after the National Gallery itself opened. In subsequent decades other state gallery buildings, and composite museums that included art collections, were restored or extended – in some cases a number of times.

Improving a museum in stages – as funding becomes available – became the most typical model of development for Australian museums, enabling them to respond through revision as well as improvement to changing needs. Such incremental growth has the great advantage not only of conserving heritage buildings that might otherwise have been torn down as fashionable standards changed, but also of displaying art of earlier periods in the architectural contexts to which they originally related. The National Gallery of Victoria and the Queensland Art Gallery, both having built new buildings in the earlier phases of their museum development, subsequently established second campuses for aspects of their collections and related exhibitions. In Australia there are now approximately 200 public art museums and exhibition galleries in addition to the six state galleries, the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and the National Gallery of Australia.

Australia's art museums had long sought to complement their collections by organising exhibitions of Australian and foreign art – becoming in the 1970s a participant in a worldwide movement in the initiation of major exhibitions, and at the very time that such programs were being developed in Europe and the United States. Australia's Government Indemnity Scheme – unique in the generosity of its application – facilitated an ambitious program of exhibitions in Australian museums.

The great increase in temporary exhibitions and the expansion of building programs were closely interrelated, as states and cities sought to match facilities and programs elsewhere, and museums interspersed their own exhibitions with those initiated in other museums. Gradually an increased number of exhibitions were researched in-house, and museums appointed people with diverse skills in exhibition organisation, installation, marketing, merchandising and sponsorship management.

In 1950 there were only some seven regional art museums in the whole of Australia, most of these in Victoria. Stimulated by later population growth, as well as by civic pride and the rise of tourism, the development of further art museums spread gradually north along east-coast states: first to New South Wales in the 1970s, and subsequently to Queensland in the 1980s and 1990s.

Some of the many smaller museums have commissioned entirely new buildings; others are accommodated in recycled buildings such as former town halls or council chambers; meanwhile others have added new wings to nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century buildings.

Regional, city and university art museums often remain substantially under-funded and under-staffed. New initiatives generally depend on special project grants from government or private

sources. Nevertheless this may not be evident behind the museums' high aspirations, professional standards, and dynamic programs.

Substantial private collections have been rare in Australia's history. However, in recent years this situation has begun to change markedly and there are now important private collections that museums would greatly value – some having already found their way into public museums. In 2003 Tarrawarra, Australia's first small art museum initiated and endowed wholly by private funding, opened in the heart of the vineyards of the Yarra Valley, some 60 kilometres from Melbourne.

During some four decades of critical transformation, the whole Australian art museum profession has established a richer museology and has nurtured multiple publics that better appreciate the incremental and productive nature of heritage itself. A more thoughtful and discriminating population now has a sense of collective ownership of cultural heritage and places complex expectations on Australia's art museums.

Essays in this volume address a selection of themes in the burgeoning of art museums in Australia. The collecting of prints and drawings, and the appointment of specialist curators in the field, lay close to the foundations of the country's major art museums. Anne Kirker looks at recent changes in the organisation of museums that have challenged the well-established roles of specialist curators. Temporary exhibitions have played a major role in art museums, introducing works and themes not represented in local collections. Caroline Turner traces the exceptional development of major art exhibitions since the 1970s.

During the period spanned by essays in this book, every major art museum in Australia has collected and exhibited work by Indigenous artists. Bernice Murphy outlines the context in which this uniquely Australia phenomenon has occurred. Meanwhile, Daniel Thomas provides a rich personal account of the development of Australia's art museums during his outstanding 30-year career as a curator and director.

Understanding Museums - Art museums

Art museums in Australia: a personal account

by Daniel Thomas

From 1958 to 1990 I worked in art museums – first as a multi-purpose curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, then at the fledgling National Gallery in Canberra as head of Australian art, and finally at the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide as director. The art museum world that I entered was very British, and rather unaware that it was run largely by artist directors and artist trustees for a small world of artists and collectors. Only the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne produced a good quantity of scholarly art historical research; only the University of Melbourne then had a department of art history, and thus harboured colleagues for museum-based scholarship.

I was the first-ever curator at the National Gallery of New South Wales (which dropped the anachronistic pre-Federation 'National' the year I arrived). Apart from nomenclature we were very backward: the roof leaked and the collections were mediocre compared with the wealthier state galleries in Adelaide and Melbourne, where curators existed and where there were huge private endowments for acquisitions – the 1897 Elder Bequest and the 1904 Felton Bequest. The state galleries in Perth and Brisbane were even more primitive than that in Sydney. In Hobart the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery was, and still is, a multi-disciplinary museum for natural sciences, local history and art. In the second half of the nineteenth century a three-part structure of science museum plus 'national' gallery plus library had been the format for the major institutions in most Australian colonies except New South Wales.

There were small late nineteenth-century institutions in mining boom cities such as Launceston, Bendigo or Ballarat, and also at Warrnambool and Geelong. After a stagnant early twentieth century for art museums throughout Australia, a professional regional gallery opened in Newcastle in 1957, the first in New South Wales. The University of Melbourne and the Teachers College at Armidale in New South Wales had been given significant art collections, precursors of the art museums now to be found within the present day swarm of universities. Almost all metropolitan local governments and regional cities throughout Australia now boast art collecting or art exhibition spaces. By 2008 there were almost 200.

Fifty years ago not even the state galleries had cafés, bookshops, lecture theatres or purpose-built spaces for receptions and entertainments. Above all, none then had purpose-built spaces to handle and display special exhibitions.

Membership organisations – 'Art Gallery Societies' – were founded in the 1950s; they improvised lectures, films, concerts and parties in the collection-display spaces. The six state gallery directors – the Australian Gallery Directors Conference – had been conferring regularly since 1948 to plan the touring exhibitions that similarly disrupted their collection displays. The art museums were becoming livelier for visitors, but in the process had become rather unsafe places for works of art. A great change occurred in the 1970s.

Melbourne started the big shift. The National Gallery of Victoria had been a rabbit warren concealed behind a great public library; galleries for paintings by Rembrandt and Cézanne also led to a science museum's galleries for skeletons and taxidermy. In 1968 a conspicuous new National Gallery of Victoria on St Kilda Road triggered a nationwide upgrade of art museum buildings. The new buildings, especially Sydney's in 1972, in turn caused unexpected changes to funding and to governance as well as to collecting capabilities and public programs. Economic prosperity and cultural globalisation had created the momentum.

The prior conditions were state and civic pride – and healthy competitiveness. The term 'global village' was coined in the 1960s, not only in regard to media and communications, but also to international transport. Australians were able to travel across the world far more easily and quickly than by ocean liner. Jet aircraft allowed local powerbrokers, taking breaks from business or politics in Europe or America, to appreciate more often the stimulus and glamour of overseas art museums and to compare them with the drab art museums at home in Australia.

The run-down Art Gallery of New South Wales in sub-tropical Sydney was a conservation hazard to its collections and, crucially, a discouragement to high-value exhibitions from overseas. Even so, it was interstate competition with Victoria and South Australia that caused the New South Wales government to embark in 1969 on upgrading its state gallery. The new National Gallery of Victoria building had opened in 1968, but ahead of the palatial state-of-the-art building in Melbourne the National Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide had opened a small extension in 1962 – Australia's first climate-controlled art exhibition space.

Both Adelaide and Melbourne have seasons that are kinder to art collections than Sydney's summertime steaminess; conservation needs were not the whole story. South Australia's lead in the climate-control stakes was instead a matter of synergy with the Adelaide Festival, the nation's first large multi-arts event, first held in 1960 and modelled on the Edinburgh Festival. Ultimately, arts festivals and special-event exhibitions are what changed Australia's art museums and art audiences.

When the upgraded and extended Art Gallery of New South Wales opened in 1972 it meant that, at last, the two largest cities, Melbourne and Sydney, could be entrusted with the kind of big budget overseas exhibitions that had to rely on box-office income and hence on large but essentially occasional audiences for art. There had been no shortage of overseas exhibitions previously, but they were fairly routine government-to-government cultural exchange displays that were easily borrowed for long absences from their owners; they interested the local art world well enough, but did not have much attraction for larger audiences.

Britain had sent 16 marvellous paintings by JMW Turner to the first Adelaide Festival in 1960, and then toured them on to Melbourne and Sydney. It was the only exhibition by a great artist to reach Australia before climate control was introduced. In 1962 a locally generated 'scholarly blockbuster' of Pre-Raphaelite art, for the Adelaide Festival and a subsequent extensive tour, secured loans of masterpieces from Britain. A decade later at the Art Gallery of New South Wales a similar formula, of scholarship based on the past century's steady accumulation in Australia – and New Zealand – of contemporary art from the British motherland, produced *Victorian Olympians* and *Victorian Social Conscience*. In 2004 at the National Gallery of Australia *The Edwardians*, with many key works borrowed from overseas, broke newer ground than scholarship within Britain itself. In 2007, at the National Gallery of Victoria, *Modern Britain: masterworks from Australian and New Zealand collections* continued this process of creating a strength out of what had begun as colonial British parochialism. And in 2008 the National Gallery of Australia internationalised our Britishness with *Turner to Monet: the triumph of landscape painting*. An art museum at last had sufficient curatorial imagination to conceive an exhibition theme never previously attempted anywhere in the world; sufficient curatorial clout to negotiate international loans of masterpieces by artists such as Caspar David Friedrich from Germany, as well as Turners from London; and sufficient confidence to include Australian paintings by John Glover, Eugene von Guérard and Tom Roberts alongside the great nineteenth-century Americans and Europeans. *Turner to Monet* was not only a major art historical event; it was also a popular success. It made money and covered its huge costs.

In 1975 Australia's first 'populist blockbuster', *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse*, provided by the philanthropic International Program of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), came to Melbourne and Sydney from New York. MoMA had already sent exhibitions to Australia, and had been early to exploit globalised airfreight for exhibition itineraries that moved works through Japan, India, New Zealand and Australia. Ardent art-world New Yorkers in the 1960s had also been the first foreigners to start re-routing their private visits to Asia through Australia, in order to check progress at the Sydney Opera House, then under construction. A city giving birth to a wonder of the modern world clearly deserved attention. The upgraded Art Gallery of New South Wales of 1972 had perfect synergy with the Sydney Opera House that opened in 1973.

MoMA's *Modern Masters* attracted huge attendances of 350,000 visitors – long queues had to wait outdoors – and produced hefty box-office income. Hare-brained ideas from businessmen suddenly cropped up for revenue-sharing productions with the art museums. Governments, more soberly, saw an opportunity to reduce their funding of the state galleries. Their investments in safe, attractive and high-prestige buildings had turned out well. Besides programs of immense high-cultural popularity there was also unexpected revenue, and the possibility of cost savings. Immense savings would indeed be achieved: 30 years later state government was contributing less than 50 per cent of total expenditure at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

At the federal level, the culturally activist Whitlam government had recently established a new

agency, the Australia Council for the Arts, which supported *Modern Masters* in 1975. Federal government therefore best understood what was needed next, and in 1977 set up an independent company, the Australian Art Exhibitions Corporation, to produce and manage blockbuster exhibitions. The Art Exhibitions Corporation began with *The Chinese Exhibition: recent archaeological finds of the People's Republic of China*, which was not really an art exhibition. Further archaeological exhibitions lost money. Inexperience at 'shoehorning' quasi-art exhibitions into art museums bankrupted the Corporation. For art museum audiences cultural edification was not enough; they also expected aesthetic delight or fright.

Outsourced management of major exhibitions, with the huge advantage of federal government indemnification in lieu of otherwise prohibitive insurance costs, passed to other structures and now resides in Art Exhibitions Australia (AEA). In 2003 AEA, by then entirely self-supporting and able to cross-subsidise its exhibitions, toured the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery's *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*. Though the scholarly exhibition of Australian art found a large audience and its box-office results were satisfactory, it's an example of what would never have been undertaken without reserves earned from dependable crowd-pleasing 'treasures' exhibitions from overseas such as the National Gallery of Victoria's recent *The Impressionists: masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay* and the sightings of Rembrandt and Vermeer in its *Dutch Masters from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*. The most spectacularly successful exhibition of this kind was the National Gallery of Australia's 2009–10 *Masterpieces from Paris: Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne and beyond* which – most unusually in the small population city of Canberra – broke Australia's record for exhibition visitation with a figure of 476,843.

Australian government indemnification of prohibitively expensive exhibitions was made available to the National Gallery of Australia as well as to AEA. State galleries, now with management skills and international curatorial clout of their own for obtaining loans, sometimes preferred not to share income with AEA and soon persuaded their various state governments occasionally to underwrite insurance for blockbuster exhibitions. All quickly found that high-end box-office populism could cross-subsidise smaller, riskier, free-admission exhibitions of local art and contemporary art. They also subsidise numerous scholarly exhibitions of Asian art, especially at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Major art museums began to make money, not only from major exhibitions but also from their cafés and restaurants, from their specialist art bookshops and designer trinkets, from their publishing, and from public lectures and receptions. Following the membership organisations that had been started in the 1950s, high-powered foundations, at first seeded with matching funds from government, began to accumulate non-government capital in the 1970s. Governments for a while demanded the introduction of general admission charges, by way of compensation for the cost of the new buildings, but such charges were resisted and did not last long. Exhibitions, and shops and cafés and publishing, were more effective ways of making money. Admission charges to collections are uncommon in art museums in Australia; they occur most often in smaller museums at tourist destinations.

Teams of keen volunteer guides and in-house education officers helped make the art accessible to a much broader public than previously, a political plus with governments nervous about assisting art consumption by 'elitist' minorities. Governments accepted the argument that upgraded buildings needed upgraded staff: young art history graduate curators came on stream, and registrars to handle art logistics.

The building-led revolution continued on from Melbourne and Sydney. A new Art Gallery of Western Australia opened in Perth in 1979, and then Australia's art-museum revolution climaxed in 1982. That year a new building for the Queensland Art Gallery opened in Brisbane and the Australian National Gallery opened in Canberra.

The advent of a real National Gallery in the national capital brings us to a problem bequeathed from colonial British times. Other colonial 'National' galleries in New South Wales and South Australia had already adjusted their names, in belated recognition that federation of the once separate colonies had taken place in 1901, but in the twenty-first century the 'National' Gallery of Victoria remains recalcitrant. It claims that its uniquely encyclopaedic collections, ranging from Mediterranean antiquities to international contemporary art, are a service to the entire federated nation, and it continues to use the nineteenth-century colonial name. However, in 2002 when it opened its separate building for Australian art, it quietly started using corporate-style abbreviations: 'NGV Australia' and 'NGV International'.

Naming demonstrates another unfortunate British colonial legacy. The peculiarly British terminology of (public) 'gallery' – not 'art museum' – causes trouble; art museums become muddled with dealers' galleries. Redneck Australian parliamentarians have sometimes started by assuming that government 'galleries' are commercial businesses in need of occasional subsidy, not cultural, educational and research institutions in need of permanent sustenance; foreigners have approached the state or regional 'galleries' hoping to buy works of art.

Universities, always more worldly than state or local governments, were early to adopt more appropriate naming conventions, for example the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne. Contemporary art is similarly a global field, and when the Power Bequest to the University of Sydney eventually generated an off-campus museum it was named the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney. The MCA receives assistance from the New South Wales government and the Australia Council for the Arts but is essentially a non-government museum, and so far the only one invited to supply an additional voice to the heavyweight gathering of state and national gallery directors that calls itself the Council of Australian Art Museum Directors. It was a lost opportunity in 1993 when the Australian National Gallery changed its name to the National Gallery of Australia. (Innocent first-timers, including parliamentarians, had been puzzled by its enthusiasm for non-Australian art.) Something like 'National Museum of Art, Canberra' might have better defined its role, and set an example.

The National Gallery's visionary founding director, James Mollison, wanted to show Australians a sampling of all kinds of art worldwide – African and Pre-Columbian American as well Asian and Western art – alongside a concentration of highest-quality international modernism and contemporary art and an extremely comprehensive collection of Australian art. In 1967 Prime Minister Harold Holt had committed the Australian government to a national gallery; Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972–1975) escalated cultural funding to hitherto astonishing levels, including acquisition funds for the future National Gallery. The 1973 purchase, at a world record price, of Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*, a masterpiece of Abstract Expressionist painting, caused Americans to say they now understood how the ancient Greeks must have felt when their great works of art disappeared to newly rich Rome. Mollison's National Gallery was startlingly different from the overly British collections formed previously in Australia. It was also different from the highly parochial state-based collections of Australian art elsewhere.

New South Wales and Victoria had neglected each other's art; only South Australia had previously been collecting the full range of interstate Australian art. There were also prejudices and demarcations about mediums and categories and periods. Victoria and South Australia collected European and Asian decorative arts as art, but New South Wales left them for its technology museum, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, which later metamorphosed into the Powerhouse Museum. At the Powerhouse 'applied arts' became 'craft' or 'design'. The decorative arts collections at state galleries have taken a greater interest in 'contemporary craft' since practitioners began to receive assistance from the Australia Council. Modern design, too, now has a stronger presence in the decorative arts collections at state galleries. Decorative arts collections had seldom incorporated Australian folk art objects, a neglected area usually left to the very numerous volunteer-run rural museums of local history, but a conspicuous and unexpected delight at the new National Gallery.

Another inconsistency was early colonial Australian art. The state galleries in New South Wales and Victoria saw it as history rather than art, and left it to the pictorial and memorabilia collections of the state libraries. Until the 1960s there was little or no expert knowledge of Australia's own art history, so outside their own states there was negligible awareness of the best nineteenth-century painters, John Glover who worked in Tasmania and Eugene von Guérard who worked in Victoria. On the other hand, in South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland the state galleries, not the state libraries, collected early colonial history. Photographs as history had resided in libraries and archives; photographs as art began to enter art museum collections only in the mid-1970s.

These inconsistencies and overlaps between art museums, natural science and anthropology museums, history and technology museums, libraries and archives, led the intergovernmental Cultural Ministers Council to create a Heritage Collections Committee. From that committee there emerged, in 2004, a company called the Collections Council of Australia, with an ex-officio board member coming from the Council of Australian Art Museum Directors, but it was defunded in 2009. The Collections Council established 'cultural significance' as an alternative criterion to aesthetic excellence for assessing the value of art objects and quasi-art.

The most important of the in-between categories is Australian Aboriginal art. One or two Hermannsburg School watercolours and Arnhem Land bark paintings had entered the art collections in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney in the 1940s. However, the liberation of Aboriginal art into the world of high art – a liberation from what some Indigenous Australians saw as the demeaning company of plants and animals in science museums – was chiefly due to the activities of the Adelaide anthropologist Charles Mountford. In the 1950s he engineered significant gifts of Aboriginal bark paintings to the state galleries throughout Australia and Tony Tuckson, deputy director at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, was the most eager of those who took up the challenge. From 1958 Tuckson carried out an extensive campaign of acquisitions for his art museum, which thenceforth always conspicuously displayed Aboriginal art. In 1960 the Directors Conference commissioned from New South Wales a large exhibition of *Australian Aboriginal Art*, mostly bark paintings, for an Australia-wide tour.

A very strong presence of Australian Aboriginal art, most of it contemporary, is now found in all art museums. In Melbourne at NGV Australia it has the ground level entirely to itself, but Aboriginal art has also been seen alongside Andy Warhol at NGV International. In Canberra a new ground-level entrance to the National Gallery, opened in 2010, continues the focus on the 200 burial poles commissioned in 1988 as an *Aboriginal Memorial*. As well as filling its own separate spaces, Aboriginal art continues to be intermingled with international and other Australian collection-displays at the National Gallery. Social empowerment of Indigenous Australians would have been Mountford's intention when he first inserted their work into art museums, but Tuckson's and Mollison's triumphantly realised initiatives were based largely on modernist aesthetics. They knew that the best Indigenous works were as powerful and beautiful as – although different from – the best Western works of art. Australian and foreign audiences now share that understanding. No other country in the world has done anything similar through its art museums.

New Zealand art also requires complicated curatorial handling. Specialists in international Western art will have little knowledge of New Zealand, so at least at the National Gallery, where it is more serious a political issue than elsewhere, New Zealand art is cared for by a department of *Australasian* art but displayed with European and American art as well as with Australian art. The National Gallery's privately endowed Gordon Darling Australasian Print Fund mutated in 2008 into an Australia Pacific Print Fund, a further acceptance that the whole Pacific Lake is best overseen by Australia-based expertise.

When the Museum of Contemporary Art opened in Sydney in 1991 it promptly staged important exhibitions from New Zealand, Japan and China, a conscious departure from Eurocentric attitudes. Later, in 1993, the Queensland Art Gallery began its *Asia-Pacific Triennials* as major contemporary art events that would be very different from the *Biennale of Sydney* instigated in 1973 by Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, an Italian immigrant tycoon who, like other wealthy patrons in the twentieth century, wanted to bring isolated Australians into contact with the most recent art from the rest of the world.

In the 1970s the National Gallery of Australia, acknowledging the NGV's great collections of Chinese art, began by focusing instead on South-east Asian art, especially Cambodian and Thai Buddhist sculptures and Indonesian batik cloths, and soon became probably the world's leading centre for South-east Asian textiles. In 1978 Edmund Capon, a sinologist from the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, became director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and promptly created a department of Asian art, programmed wonderful exhibitions, extended the meagre collections, and created purpose-built display spaces for Asian art. In Adelaide, the Art Gallery of South Australia developed special expertise in South-east Asian ceramics, but also now possesses the finest Japanese sculptures and screen paintings in Australia; in 2006 it installed the nation's only collection space dedicated to Islamic art, still a neglected field. In 2005, when Ron Radford arrived from the Art Gallery of South Australia to direct the National Gallery, he further strengthened all the Asian collections in Canberra and created a new focus on Indian sculptures and paintings. He also shifted Asian art from basement spaces to the main entrance level, where Australia's most spectacular displays of highest quality South-east and South Asian art displaced a scrappy display of European art.

The National Gallery's 30 or so European paintings and sculptures, from the early Renaissance to Neoclassicism, were pronounced unlikely ever to develop into a coherent display worthy of a national gallery. In a bold but not too controversial move they have been transferred on indefinite loan to better contexts in the state galleries in Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

Art museum deaccessioning is a related issue. In the 1940s and 1950s the state galleries in Victoria and New South Wales deaccessioned a good number of British Victorian paintings and sculptures – not to raise money, but because they occupied too much storage space and were out of fashion. The process was ill-advised, both artistically and politically. In the late twentieth century better deaccessioning policies were drafted in most state galleries, especially in relation to works originally received as gifts, or to works suitable for transfer to other institutions, or that clearly duplicated others of lesser quality. Even so, in 1996, further deaccessioning of a number of Victorian and Edwardian British paintings from the Art Gallery of New South Wales was not done well; a few paintings of superior quality slipped away, while others of low quality certainly met the criterion of cultural significance.

A converse matter to deaccessioning is the acceptance of gifts restricted by conditions such as permanent display. In 2006 NGV Australia accepted a selection from the celebrated Joseph Brown Collection, originally formed to illustrate the full timespan and geographical range of Australian art. It did much to correct Melbourne's neglect of Sydney art, and it must have pleased many that the collection was saved for Dr Brown's home state, but his condensed history of Australian art within a much more extensive history is an awkward interruption and an oddity for visitors. There was a better interstate offer from the Australian National University in Canberra, to house the complete Joseph Brown Collection in a building that would bear his name, but localism unfortunately prevailed.

Australia's art museums have always taken contemporary art seriously. Those deaccessioned Victorian and Edwardian British paintings and sculptures were contemporary art when they first entered the colonial and state collections. Contemporary art is best presented extensively in special exhibitions and best collected more judiciously than in the past; the upgraded special exhibition spaces of the 1970s allowed hugely increased and more appropriate attention to contemporary art.

The upgraded art museum buildings arrived just in time to cope with post-modernism, whose messy installation art, performance art, film and video could not otherwise have been accommodated. The international *Biennales of Sydney*, the national *Australian Perspectives* (1981–1999), also in Sydney, the *Adelaide Biennials of Australian Art* and, as mentioned, the *Asia-Pacific Triennials* in Brisbane became typical special-event showcases for newest art, local and foreign, designed for the large audiences that reach the state galleries.

Work by women painters and sculptors was never discriminated against in collections of Australian art. If they had assertive personalities like the modernist Margaret Preston, their excellence had been recognised from the start. If they had retiring personalities, like Grace Cossington Smith or Grace Crowley, or were out of fashion like Clarice Beckett, recognition took time, just as it did for retiring males such as Ralph Balson. A prime task for collection curators is recognition of neglected excellence, especially out-of-fashion excellence. The art museum upsurge of retrospective collecting and exhibitions of Australian art in the 1970s was part of that normal museological process, not a consequence of post-modernist feminism.

On the other hand, neglect of art mediums favoured by women artists was corrected by the newly changed mindsets. Prints, especially the mediums of woodcut and linocut, were one example; craft arts of all kinds, especially needlework, were another. Needlework quilts in the National Gallery's collections gave Australian nineteenth-century colonial women artists, including convicts, a voice.

As mentioned, the colonial multi-disciplinary format survives in Hobart at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. In 2008 a commitment eventually came from government to upgrade a building that is very inconvenient for visitors. The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, which opened in improvised premises in Darwin in 1964, was the one new multi-disciplinary institution established by a government in the twentieth century. A new post-Cyclone Tracy building opened in 1981. The combination of science, history and art still suits a small capital city.

By 2008 the Art Gallery of New South Wales had been extended twice since 1972 and in 2010 it converted its entire art storage floor to display its collections of international contemporary art, greatly strengthened by the John W Kaldor Family Gift of classic minimalism and conceptual art. In Melbourne, Jeff Kennett, a monument-building former premier of Victoria desperate to find functions for the 'iconic' Federation Square that he hoped would rival Sydney's Opera House, bullied the NGV into taking on the key tenancy as a museum of Australian art; in 2002 a museum of international contemporary art might have been more suitable for the site.

In 2006 the Queensland Art Gallery doubled in size, its beautiful Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA)

conveniently situated only 200 metres from its parent building, whereas NGV Australia and NGV International are on opposite sides of a river. GoMA is Australia's first art museum to include a cinémathèque. As well as showing the *Asia-Pacific Triennials* it also showcases Queensland's now extensive collections of contemporary Asian art. Acquisition funds from state governments were once substantial, but have dwindled and sometimes entirely disappeared; only in Queensland have governments continued since the 1970s with very generous funding for acquisitions as well as buildings and operations.

A National Portrait Gallery, opened in 2008 in Canberra, was almost entirely due to inspired lobbying from a private citizen. A former chairman of the National Gallery, Gordon Darling, and his wife Marilyn, had become addicted to philanthropy, persuaded prime ministers that a National Portrait Gallery was an essential asset for a national capital, and ensured its successful start by contributing financial support. Although the National Portrait Gallery is really a history museum, its director has been added to the elite Council of Australian Art Museum Directors, perhaps on the assumption that the Portrait Gallery will continue to use the not-so-secret weapon of aesthetic excellence in its campaign to make Australians interesting.

Ambitious private museums are a very recent development. Marc Besen's TarraWarra Museum of Art opened in 2003 in beautiful Yarra Valley wine country outside Melbourne. David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art, known as Mona, opened in 2011 at the Moorilla vineyard on the Derwent estuary near Hobart. There is nothing like it in the world. A self-proclaimed vehicle for the owner's missionary Atheism and Darwinism – marketed somewhat misleadingly as being about 'sex and death' – it displays major Egyptian and Greek antiquities alongside international late 20th century and 21st century art. It has free admission and in its first few months attracted an extremely high visitation, not only from an Australia-wide and international artworld but also, more significantly, from a non-artworld local demographic. Mona offers a paradigm shift in art museums; it's the result of altruistic self-gratification by an extremely free-thinking mind.

Before Mona it seemed the most significant new development was ACMI, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. One of the world's first such museums, it opened in 2002 in Melbourne, next door to NGV Australia at Federation Square. It is always crowded with young people, at home in the present-day age of disembodied digital images.

Older generations worry about one of the ways in which the Internet is changing the world; minds are narrowing as people graze on self-centred information, constantly reinforcing what they already know and believe. Bracing otherness in unfamiliar ways is seldom encountered by post-newspaper reading generations. Art museums should therefore treat complete Internet accessibility of their extraordinarily powerful images as a high priority.

However, their materiality gives the ideas and emotions embodied in art museum objects a much greater charge than their disembodied images can transmit from a laptop screen. At NGV Australia, a less crowded place than ACMI next door, video installations and other kinds of screen-based art are now taken for granted in temporary exhibitions of contemporary art, but they are not available all the time. To help capture present-day audiences for art they should always be available for serendipitous encounters by those who might wander through an art collection. In Hobart, the inaugural collection display at David Walsh's Mona included much more moving-image and installation art as paintings or photomedia, and thereby made its unusually eager young visitors feel at home.

Special exhibitions are wonderful temporary stimulants, and good marketing tools for art museums, but the collection is the more wondrous final product. Revisiting, rethinking and re-scrutinising the thoughts and feelings that have been worked into clear and graspable form is the best way to use an art museum. A universal and unedited ocean of Internet information has vast lucky-dip potential, but browsing a good library or a large museum collection is a better way to encounter the high-energy artefacts that we call works of art. Works of art exist to suddenly provide understanding of self or, equally important, to take viewers out of themselves.

Australia's art museums, more perhaps than any others, have become unusually well-suited to a post-European or post-North Atlantic age. For over 30 years they have been defining and hence creating the Asia-Pacific age whose time is upon us. Perhaps that is why, while he was still director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Ron Radford was invited to join the world's peak international Directors Council, the first from a museum outside Europe or North America to network formally with the directors of the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London, and the J Paul Getty

Museum in Los Angeles. And perhaps that is why in 2006 Michael Brand, a Canberra-born one-time curator of Asian art at the National Gallery of Australia became the director of the Getty, the world's wealthiest art museum. Australia is leading the world.

Note

A longer version of this paper is published in *Journal of Art Historiography*, No 4 June 2011. Daniel Thomas, 'Art Museums in Australia: A Personal Retrospect', <http://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/dthistoriogartmus-reedit29may11ref.pdf> [PDF, opens in a new window]

Daniel Thomas AM was a curator at Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Australia and was the Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Cite as: Daniel Thomas, 2011, 'Art museums in Australia: a personal account', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/DThomas_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Art museums

International exhibitions

by Caroline Turner

Overview

More than the entire current population of Australia has visited major international exhibitions at Australian museums in the last 30 years. [1] Australian museums, and in particular art museums, have been transformed by the advent of these international exhibitions. International 'blockbuster' exhibitions have created sophisticated and appreciative audiences. They have increased professionalism at every level in Australian museums, and created a paradigm shift in the way museums operate within their communities and public programming.

While it is problematic to identify exhibitions as highly significant only from attendances, inevitably a study of international exhibitions becomes a study of the so-called 'blockbuster' exhibitions; overwhelmingly in the twentieth century these were shown in state and national art museums, even when the subject matter could equally suggest a science, history or ethnography museum. It goes without saying that exhibitions about Australian subjects, particularly of Indigenous culture in this country, and exhibitions sent by Australia abroad are equally significant in the history of this nation. What follows is inevitably a compression of a complex subject. [2]

Australian art museums [3] borrowed from overseas to supplement their collections and to show new developments in international art. They could never hope to achieve sufficient depth through collecting alone, although the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) with its Felton Bequest and wealth derived from the goldfields very early built a most distinguished collection of international art. Nevertheless, some very significant exhibitions have been shown in non-art museums, especially at the Australian Museum in Sydney. In the twenty-first century the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney with exhibitions such as *The Great Wall of China* (2006–2007), the National Library of Australia with its hugely successful *Treasures of the World's Great Libraries* (2001–2002), the National Museum of Australia (NMA) since opening in 2001, the National Portrait Gallery and the Australian National Maritime Museum have all developed international programs.

Conventional wisdom records the age of the blockbuster as beginning in Australia with the series of international exhibitions inaugurated at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) from the early 1990s; but it is much more accurately dated to the 1970s, especially to *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse* organised by the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, in 1975 and to the Chinese exhibition of 1977, *The Chinese Exhibition: a selection of recent archaeological finds of the People's Republic of China*. The history of international exhibitions in Australia, however, spans more than a century. It is a fascinating history: attendances at many nineteenth-century exhibitions (which included artworks) numbered in the hundreds of thousands; in 1906 William Holman Hunt's religious painting, the *Light of the World*, was seen by an estimated four million people in Australia and New Zealand. Audiences have frequently been more adventurous than those who ran cultural institutions – an example being the enthusiastic public reception for the *Herald* exhibition of contemporary art in 1939 which had been rejected by the NGV. [4] The history of this engagement with international exhibitions suggests a people who felt a 'tyranny of distance' and were interested in the new – not simply clinging to the familiar past of the places they had left as emigrants or to the cultures of Europe, in which the great majority of the population had their roots.

From very early on the Australian populace has shown a great interest in culture and art from outside this country and from very diverse sources, including our near neighbours. Australia has been very successful in attracting loans. This reveals much about the image Australia projected to the world – of a new frontier and of enthusiastic audiences and of professional knowledge. The quality of international exhibitions since the 1970s has been extremely high, driven by curators and scholars within Australia and by sophisticated audiences, often well educated and much travelled, and, from the 1940s onwards, increasingly multicultural.

As might be expected, a history of international exhibitions in Australia reveals a predominant early interest in British, North American and European culture (especially French art) but also a

surprising number of exhibitions from other parts of the world, including Latin America and the Middle East. [5]

Apart from exhibitions on eighteenth-century voyages of discovery at the Australian Museum in 1970 during the Bicentenary year of 1988, *Cook's Pacific Encounters* at the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in 2006, and *Headlands* in 1992 (Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA)), there have been surprisingly few exhibitions on the Pacific and few trans-Tasman exchanges. There has been an early interest in the arts of Asia: as many as 20 per cent of the exhibitions shown in Australia since 1975 have been Asian in content and have held their own in popularity with European exhibitions. Australians have understood the importance of cultural diplomacy with our Asian neighbours, including sending Australian exhibitions to China. [6] A distinction should be made also between those exhibitions developed and curated in Australia and exhibitions developed overseas.

The story of international exhibitions in Australia has largely been a story of Canberra and the state capitals; blockbusters have predominantly followed larger east coast populations. While a majority of exhibitions have been organised by the NGV, the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) and NGA, the Art Galleries of South Australia (AGSA), Queensland (QAG), Western Australia (AGWA) and MCA have all organised major international exhibitions and outstanding exhibitions have been initiated by all states: for example, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque* by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG); and *Speaking with Cloths* by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT). Many exhibitions have been developed for Australian audiences, curated by Australians, and have catalogues written by Australian scholars. There has been considerable collaboration between institutions, in part because high costs have dictated the need for multiple venues. A major development was the national and international coordination undertaken by the Australian Gallery Directors' Council (AGDC) and the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council in the 1970s, and the International Cultural Corporation of Australia (ICCA), later Art Exhibitions Australia (AEA), from the 1980s. Both federal and state governments have been significant: the 'age of the blockbuster' would not have been possible without government support through indemnification provided by the Australian government from the 1970s and later by individual states, meaning that huge insurance premiums did not have to be paid. The Australian government's Indemnity Scheme had the result of encouraging a geographical spread of venues. Other important external players in facilitating exhibitions have included the British and French governments and MoMA's International Council.

If one were to attempt to name the most important international exhibitions in Australia's history there would inevitably be different contenders, but the list would include the earlier exhibition of *French and British Contemporary Art* in 1939 and *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse* in 1975 because of their impact on Australian art developments. The most significant portent for the future of art exhibitions in Australia was the reception accorded the display of *The Chinese Exhibition* in 1977, when 595,000 visitors marvelled at these works of Chinese genius.

In the years following the Second World War new immigrants, especially from Europe, including talented refugees from Hitler's regime, played a role in changing Australian tastes. In 1953 more than 200,000 people in Sydney and Melbourne alone – the exhibition also went to Perth, Brisbane, Hobart and Adelaide – came to see *French Painting Today*, [7] and exhibitions of Indian, Japanese, Mexican, Italian, Canadian, German, Scandinavian, American, Malaysian and Pakistani art and culture, as well as of works by Turner, Bonnard, Picasso and Surrealist artists in the next two decades, augured a major and exciting change for Australian museums. The 1960s saw several important British/European/American exhibitions. In 1974 came the national tour of the NGA's newly purchased painting by Jackson Pollock, *Blue Poles*, which aroused great interest and much controversy.

The Chinese Exhibition in 1977, *The Entombed Warriors* in 1982–1983 and the *Chinese Dinosaurs* of 1984 also had considerable impact. The Sydney Biennales which began in 1973 were vital in developing knowledge of international contemporary art, as were the Asia-Pacific Triennials at QAG from 1993. There have been a host of other exhibitions, including smaller non-blockbuster exhibitions, which have been significant. Two examples are the exhibitions of Scandinavian contemporary design which came to Australia from the 1960s and which, as Robert Bell has shown, had an enduring impact on design consciousness and craft in Australia, [8] and the vibrant series of exchanges with Asian countries organised by Asialink from 1991.

In the early years of the exhibitions, including blockbusters, fees were generally not paid to institutions sending loan exhibitions – the exhibitions were based on scholarly exchange. While

cultural diplomacy was a significant motivator, a web of individual relationships and networks built by museums and individuals underpinned each exhibition. Australian scholarship was vital in negotiating loans, and Australian professionalism in handling and displaying works earned the respect of lending museums. The contributions of a host of highly talented Australian museum directors, curators and scholars cannot be overstated in achieving the high quality of exhibitions.

There were many reasons why museums moved so enthusiastically to take international exhibitions. These include the potential to attract new audiences, connecting with international scholarship, researching existing collections and enhancing those collections through admission charges, merchandise, donations and sponsorships, and perhaps above all raising the profile of the institution with government and the public. While there were commercial and diplomatic pressures to have international exhibitions, there were equally overwhelming scholarly and artistic reasons. As well, the popular success of such exhibitions has assisted art museums to argue to government for new buildings – or at least for new facilities. Australian museums at first were not prepared for the public response to blockbuster exhibitions in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1975 at AGNSW the sewerage became blocked during the *Modern Masters* exhibition, and visitors to QAG in 1983 wore paths in new parquet floors for the *Entombed Warriors*. [9] The NGA, when it opened in 1982, had no large-scale temporary exhibition space in which to show major exhibitions. The intention of the first Director, James Mollison, was that the Gallery would focus on its own collection, but public demand soon necessitated a change in policy and a new temporary exhibitions wing. The advent of the blockbusters resulted in better facilities and new staff. Public demand also transformed the nature of education services: new types of public programs had to be developed, aimed at servicing new types of visitors.

The most dramatic result of the blockbuster phenomenon has been the increased professionalism of museums and the changed power relationships between professional staff and boards of trustees, resulting in a professional 'takeover' of the art museums which had been dominated until the 1970s by their powerful boards of trustees appointed by state governments. [10] It soon became apparent that overseas museums needed to deal with their professional colleagues, and that directors and curatorial staff needed to travel and to have control of decision making in critical operational areas. [11] The networks established with museums and lenders overseas were forged through scholarship and shared with others, including art practitioners in Australia. Increased professionalism led some staff to question the expenditure of time and resources on collections from 'other peoples' museums', rather than from permanent collections. [12] The insatiable appetite of the public for blockbusters was the deciding factor.

Audiences were no longer desperate for novelty, but they were impressively prepared to broaden their horizons of acceptance of artworks from other than Europe. A paradigm shift had occurred. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York had already sent an exhibition, *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse* in 1975, comprising 115 works by 58 artists. The Trustees of the AGNSW suggested tentatively that this was 'perhaps the largest group of major paintings ever to have been seen in Australia'. [13] It was undoubtedly the largest group of artworks seen in the country since the European Art Exhibition for Australia in 1923, and the standard of the works was far superior. As Leon Paroissien has pointed out, it set an artistic benchmark from which other international exhibitions would be judged.

The age of the blockbuster had arrived, and with it the need for more professional organisation of international exhibitions. The *Modern Masters* exhibition had been organised with MoMA through its International Council. Since the 1960s this had been important as a source of exhibitions for Australia. [14] The Australian Gallery Directors' Council (AGDC) in conjunction with the newly formed Visual Arts Board (VAB) of the Australia Council also emerged as an extremely important partnership in the 1970s. The AGDC cooperated with the VAB in a number of exhibitions, including Australian art exhibitions, but the AGDC disbanded in 1981. The VAB under founding Director Leon Paroissien played an impressive and critical role in organising international exhibitions and promoting the concept of government indemnity until a new agency was created to manage exhibitions – the International Cultural Corporation of Australia (later AEA).

The first few years of the blockbuster era had been inspiring. In the 1980s there were more Chinese exhibitions attracting large audiences, including *The Entombed Warriors* in 1982–83. It was the first international exhibition to be shown at the new NGA, where it attracted 50,000 people in nine days.

These exhibitions were the product of the new Australian Government Indemnity Scheme [15] and

the successor to the ADGC set up by the Australian government to coordinate exhibitions in 1980 – the ICCA headed by Robert Edwards who created its vision and purpose. Its role was to manage significant exhibitions of ‘cultural and historical interest relating to art, science and antiquities, working in close co-operation with Australian and overseas museums.’ [16] The ICCA received a total of \$1 million in funding from the Australian government between 1980 and 1983, but after that its programs became self-supporting through sponsorship, admission fees and merchandising. Over the next 25 years it staged an impressive 57 exhibitions, attracting more than 10 million visitors; raised \$42 million in sponsorships; and started a million-dollar foundation. [17] It changed its name to Art Exhibitions Australia (AEA) in 1991, reflecting the predominance of art museums in the arena of international exhibitions.

In the 1980s the AGNSW took a major lead in presenting Asian exhibitions. The NGV at the time had the more important collection of Asian art, but it was the AGNSW that began to present an array of exciting Asian historical exhibitions, including from China, Japan and India, and to build a highly significant Asian collection. The new QAG opened in 1982 as part of the striking new Queensland Cultural Centre. Excellent audiences in Brisbane quickly established QAG as a venue for AEA exhibitions, but QAG had from the early 1980s also begun to negotiate its own exhibitions including from Japan, China and France. From the early 1980s Asia – and particularly contemporary Asia – became a focus, culminating in 1993 in the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Triennials of Contemporary Art. [18] These exhibitions developed a specific strategy to educate audiences about the dynamic changes taking place in the region, and to demonstrate that Australia in its world view is no longer solely a Euro-American country.

Although the NGA held some very important international exhibitions in the 1980s, when Betty Churcher became Director in 1990 she inaugurated a major policy shift of curating major international exhibitions. This became a hallmark of the NGA in Churcher’s time. Her aim was to present exhibitions which led to research into works held in the NGA and other Australian collections – *Rubens and the Italian Renaissance* (1992) was a prime example, as well as *Surrealism: revolution by night* (1993). The NGA also assisted the devastated Cambodian National Museum, receiving in return the exhibition *The Age of Angkor* in 1992, and mounted several very successful exhibitions in the 1990s, including the challenging *Don’t leave me this way: art in the age of AIDS* (1994).

Another new player had emerged: the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney, opened in 1991 through the extraordinary efforts of an idealistic few who were convinced that Australia needed a museum of contemporary art. [19] With initial capital funding and a percentage of operating costs from the University of Sydney and the University’s Power Bequest, and under Founding Director Leon Paroissien and Chief Curator Bernice Murphy it initiated a new type of Australian museum, one without major government funding and thus pursuing an entrepreneurial model for funding, as well as a dynamic new style of international contemporary exhibitions with a focus on critical writing about contemporary issues – including social and political issues – and extensive public programming. The MCA showed works and exhibitions that were experimental, often edgy, such as the 1995 *Robert Mapplethorpe* retrospective, and major exhibitions of Australian Indigenous and contemporary international art from New Zealand, Europe, Latin America and Asia.

The established state institutions continued to curate important and scholarly exhibitions. One of the most popular was *Classic Cezanne* (1998) which attracted 188,000 visitors. AGNSW Director Edmund Capon hailed it as a demonstration of the will of the Gallery to initiate and produce major exhibitions of sustained quality, its capacity to do so now being sustained by the NSW Treasury Managed Indemnification Scheme. [20] Similar schemes emerged in Victoria and Queensland, reflecting renewed competition – the new 2003 Victorian scheme provides a staggering two billion dollars in indemnity but requires exclusivity for Victoria. [21] AEA, which had been vital in assisting the state museums to develop their professionalism and enabled many of the smaller institutions to receive important international exhibitions, continues to be of great significance as a national exhibitions management agency, including for the opening of the new National Museum of Australia in 2001. Some directors of art institutions have suggested they did not need AEA. Edmund Capon pointed to his success with *Darkness and Light: Caravaggio and his world*, shown at the AGNSW and the NGV in 2003–04, which drew 212,000 visitors. [22]

The dawn of the twenty-first century saw some exciting exhibitions, particularly the series of Asian exhibitions at the AGNSW on Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam which attracted new audiences, among them many young people, and were aimed at a greater understanding of Asian religions

and immigrant groups in Australia. [23]

NGA Director Ron Radford has observed that Australia has had more blockbuster exhibitions than it can justify as a lender. Why has Australia been able to show so many exhibitions and to obtain so many loans? There has undoubtedly been a belief among the world's great museums that Australia is a new frontier, and that the population has fewer opportunities than those in Europe or North America – clearly the appetite for, and appreciation of, loans from foreign collections has been enormous. Close links with Britain, Europe, North America and Asia have helped. Trade and diplomatic reasons existed for many exhibitions. Curators have wanted to come to Australia and, as Bernice Murphy has noted, Australia has not been merely 'a cultural receiver'. It is also important to note that, to borrow exceptional works the rationale and scholarship of the exhibitions for which the loans are sought has to be very high. But increasing effort is now required for loans, and costs are becoming almost prohibitive. The more prosperous East Asian and Middle Eastern countries can now afford to pay large fees. NGV Director Gerard Vaughan has concluded that the golden age of the blockbuster in its classical form – the all-encompassing format – is passing, and it may be necessary in the future for galleries to concentrate more on their own collections. [24] Yet the NGV also announced in 2007 its hopes for a whole new building for Indigenous, Oceanic and Asian art (and to include temporary exhibition space) having opened its \$100 million new site at Federation Square only five years before. [25] As Paroissien has noted, the demise of the blockbuster has long been wrongly predicted, and AEA Chief Executive Carol Henry remains optimistic about the future of international exhibitions.

While it could be argued that many international exhibitions contribute to scholarship and are greatly appreciated by audiences, not all actually contribute to expanding popular taste or knowledge about the world or Australian society. Most exhibitions continue to be drawn predominantly from a narrow period of Western European art history, but exhibitions such as the AGNSW's *Buddha: Radiant Awakening* have reached beyond this traditional focus. New players are emerging, especially in the non-art museums. Australian curators and scholars continue to put together ideas for exhibitions that are exciting, new and contribute to knowledge. As Jackie Menzies has pointed out, the skills and knowledge in the Australian community – from academics to immigrant artists – can be harnessed in developing exhibitions. [26] And Australians undoubtedly still want to see international exhibitions.

The author thanks Leon Paroissien, Des Griffin, Bernice Murphy, Jackie Menzies, Anne Kirker, Robert Edwards and Carol Henry, curators and librarians at all named institutions, and Harry Wise and Glen St John Barclay for invaluable assistance with research. Key statistical information was prepared by Harry Wise.

Footnotes

¹ Art Indemnity Australia states that 20 million Australians have seen indemnified exhibitions since 1979, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 'Art Indemnity Australia', <www.dcita.gov.au/arts_culture/arts/art_indemnity_australia> (accessed 3/10/07). Director of the NGA, Ron Radford, suggested at the 2007 Museums Australia conference (18 May) that 25 million Australians had seen 'blockbuster' exhibitions since the 1970s. Research for this essay suggests Radford's figure is realistic.

² Between five and 10 per cent of the exhibitions which have achieved high attendances, such as *Golden Summers* (1985–86) were Australian in content, but most did not achieve the attendances of the major international exhibitions. Many fine international exhibitions have also been shown at regional and university galleries and museums.

³ I apply the term 'art museum' in this chapter.

⁴ See Eileen Chanin and Steven Miller, *Degenerates and Perverts: the 1939 Herald exhibition of French and British contemporary art*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2005; Jeremy Maas, *Holman Hunt and the Light of the World*, Scolar Press, London and Berkeley, 1984; and Kate Darian-Smith, Richard Gillespie, Caroline Jordan and Elizabeth Willis (eds), *Seize the Day: exhibitions, Australia and the world*, Monash University ePress, Melbourne, 2008.

⁵ Based on figures in museum annual reports, about 35 per cent of very popular exhibitions dealt with European and American art after the late eighteenth century, slightly under 10 per cent dealt with European art from before the late eighteenth century, and about 10 per cent included European and American art from both before and after the late eighteenth century. Overall, major exhibitions from other cultures seem to have been roughly comparable in popularity with European/American exhibitions in terms of attendances. Attendances did reflect whether these were paid exhibitions – most international exhibitions have had a

charge to cover costs. These statistics are based on listings of attendances from annual reports of the major state and national museums in Australia and do not take regional museums into account. Attendance figures are not given for all exhibitions, and these statistics are an estimate only and cannot be regarded as definitive.

⁶ There were occasional exhibitions of Asian contemporary art prior to the 1980s, including *The Hiroshima Panels*, 1958.

⁷ *Report of the Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales Together with Statement of Accounts for 1953*, Alfred Henry Pettifer, Government Printer, Sydney, 1955, p. 1; *Report of the Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria with statement of income and expenditure for the year ended 30th June, 1953*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1953, p. 2.

⁸ Robert Bell, 'Nordic Wave: A Study of the Reception and Influence of Scandinavian Design in Australia', unpublished dissertation, 2007.

⁹ Sources for these anecdotes are Leon Paroissien for *Modern Masters* and the author's personal experience for *Entombed Warriors*.

¹⁰ Paroissien, Bernice Murphy and Des Griffin in discussions with the author.

¹¹ One major impact, as Paroissien notes, was the expertise they brought with them: the English scholar Edmund Capon came to Australia with the first Chinese exhibition and returned as Director of the AGNSW in 1978.

¹² The Art Museums Association invited leading scholar Albert Elsen to debate the subject. Albert Elsen, 'The Pros and Cons of the 'Blockbuster' Art Exhibition: a paper delivered at the CAMA Conference, Adelaide, October 1984', Art Museums Association of Australia occasional papers.

¹³ *Report of the Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales for 1975*. D. West, Government Printer, Sydney, 1977, p. 20.

¹⁴ Such MoMA exhibitions include *Two Decades of American Painting* (1967), *Surrealism* (1972), and *Picasso, Master Printmaker* (1973).

¹⁵ See Leon Paroissien, 'Art Museum Patronage through Government Indemnity: the Australia scheme, its context and application', unpublished, n.d.

¹⁶ *Art Exhibitions Australia Limited Annual Report 1999*, Art Exhibitions Australia Limited, Sydney, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Caroline Turner, 'Cultural Transformations in the Asia-Pacific', in John Clark, Maurizio Peleggi and TK Sabapathy (eds), *Eye of the Beholder*, University of Sydney East Asia Series, Sydney, No. 15, Wild Peony Press, 2006, pp. 221–243.

¹⁹ See Bernice Murphy, *Museum of Contemporary Art: Vision and Context*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1993; and Leon Paroissien, 'Contemporary Art in an Antipodean Context', paper presented at IV Foro Internacional de Teoria Sobre Arte Contemporaneo, Guadalajara, Mexico, 1–3 June 1995.

²⁰ *Art Gallery of NSW Annual Report 1998*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, p. 5.

²¹ Gerard Vaughan, Museums Australia Conference, 2007.

²² Lauren Martin, 'A case for passing on the buck', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 November 2005, accessed 3 October 2007, <www.smh.com.au/news/arts/a-case-for-passing-on-the-buck/2005/11/07/1131212004078.html> .

²³ Head of Asian Art, AGNSW, Jackie Menzies has noted that 'Museums are a space of connection with the community'. Many visitors come through public programs, e.g. the Durga Puja ritual for *Goddesses*, Menzies, Museums Australia Conference, 2007.

²⁴ Gerard Vaughan, Museums Australia Conference, 2007. Radford in the same forum pointed to the excellent collections in Australia including those of British art, small but important collections of Old and Modern European Masters, the American Collections and Asian textiles of the NGA, and Indian miniatures at the NGV.

²⁵ Paroissien, Radford, Vaughan, Menzies, Museums Australia Conference, 2007. For NGV see *The Age*, 22 September 2007.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Caroline Turner is a Senior Research Fellow, Research School of Humanities and the Arts, Australian National University.

Cite as: Caroline Turner, 2011, 'International exhibitions', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, 2011, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/CTurner_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Art museums

Collecting works on paper in Australia: specialisation at risk?

by Anne Kirker

Numerically, works on paper form the major part of permanent collections in Australian art museums. [1] They have traditionally been considered the linchpin for educating audiences in the histories of art. In the 1960s and 1970s there was a push to establish specific departments dedicated to them and a drive for curatorial expertise in such media-specific areas. This produced finely honed connoisseurship and notable acquisitions, leading to exhibitions of discernment and depth. This practice of connoisseurship was a key ingredient in safeguarding the integrity of an art museum's collection. However, the past decade has witnessed, especially in smaller institutions, the eradication of barriers between media. This partly reflects the impact of postmodernism in the approach to interpreting collections, where the production of meaning is paramount rather than an emphasis on contextualising art works within known frameworks of aesthetic excellence, chronological ordering and links with art history. [2]

There have been notable gains as custodians with overarching collection responsibilities bring fresh insights into the realm of works on paper. Often more heterogeneous explorations – combining paintings, three-dimensional works, film and works on paper – inspire connections that may not readily be made if the objects were isolated from each other. The expansion in understanding of how art can be articulated for contemporary audiences means also that medium-specific exhibitions from permanent collections now freely traverse an identified subject, placing prints from the 1990s, for instance, with their thematic counterparts from earlier periods.

A number of conundrums remain. One is that curators, unless they are employed in large institutions where it is impractical to disband or disperse comprehensive holdings formed under media classifications, are unlikely to be specifically trained in all fields under their care. [3] This can result in errors of judgement associated with appraisal of artworks and collection acquisitions. Another potential loss is the particular passion that specialists bring to a field – say, printmaking, – that, if denied recognition, can leave it on the sidelines.

A further development has been the corralling of modernist or small-scale works of photography, prints and drawings into a medium-specific department, while progressive post-1980s works are relegated to the general area of contemporary art. While we may rejoice in viewing displays of commanding series and installation-scale works on paper, this process is fraught with discrimination as more discrete statements are once more relegated to less frequented display spaces, or to the darkness of a Solander box.

With the rapid growth and popularity of art museums in the 1990s, visible through building programs and increased budgets for marketing, development and public programs, what tends to be hidden is the diminution of the traditional role of curator and the bond that person had with the collection.

Curators in the 1980s were confident of their brief: to have sole leadership in the care, acquisition, selection, research, display, publication and promotion of works on paper under their custodianship. These print curators were prized authorities in their field, and persons to be consulted for accurate and unquestionably sound appraisals and advice.

In the 1970s and 1980s specialist curators were understood to be, along with their fellow curators, *the* linchpins for defining exhibitions and education according to a clearly defined mission statement.

In opening up to fairer representation and widening of geographical bases for acknowledgement, the study of visual arts today has downplayed the fundamental imperative of curators to appreciate how a work is executed, when it is likely to have been made, and the circumstances surrounding its creation. [4] This disruption to tradition has provocatively 'opened up' art history. Yet at the same time it has tended to undermine the science of tracing provenance, of identifying date according to type of signature, paper and other materials used, the importance of language skills for research, knowledge of key reference texts, and of personnel equipped to assist in a work's

authentication. In short, connoisseurship has been dismissed as a preoccupation best suited to auction houses. The word 'connoisseur', in fact, is hardly used in the early 2000s.

While few would not welcome the stretching of art history as it has unfolded since the 1980s, what has inevitably been lost is the fact that most works of art have a genealogy and infrastructure of their own. Prints, for example have their own highly specific history, as does photography. [5] This in no way diminishes their valuable usage in mixed-media exhibitions and discursively driven projects.



Installation view of an aspect of the cross-media exhibition Masters of Emotion: Exploring the Emotions from the Old Masters to the Present curated by Irena Zdanowicz for the Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery 20 April – 24 June 2007. The photograph shows the juxtaposition of an etching ('Seven' 1974) by Bea Maddock with a painting ('Sorry' 1982) by Linda Marrinon. Photo: courtesy of Morning Peninsula Regional Gallery.

By the early 2000s, the very term 'curator' has shifted in emphasis from being a noun to being a verb, an active and engaging force. An individual 'curates' an exhibition, for example, rather than being 'a curator' of a collection. The curator of an exhibition no longer has the luxury of sole responsibility for the initiation, development and presentation of the show, but is usually surrounded by a team of people with an equal stake in the event. These 'stakeholders' are also highly trained within their particular spheres, whether it be exhibition design, promotion or education.

In this environment, the curator may be hired as a freelance employee rather than one located within the institution who, over a period of time, has built up a substantial knowledge of the institution and *all* its collections. The contemporary focus in art museums tends to be on the production of highly visible, entertaining events that are nevertheless educational and which may demonstrate in-depth research. Inevitably they attract the largest resources. They are intended for a broadly based constituency, but with specific programs tailored for groups such as children or senior citizens.

However, in larger art museums with in-depth collections, traditional curatorial standards are most likely to be maintained as a desirable aspect of the institution's corporate identity. The National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra is an obvious case in point. Specialist curators have largely been maintained there to ensure the care and maintain the scope of the collection, including acquisition, preservation and access, interpretation and exhibition, research and publication. The

sheer quantity of objects owned by the institution, and the desire of most NGA directors to focus on maintaining high levels of scholarship, are the reasons why within culturally determined departments there are curators who are trained in appreciating prints, and/or drawings and photographs. Furthermore, the NGA funds research internships and regular symposia to ensure print practice and scholarship is acknowledged and maintained in Australia.



'The Print Room (dedicated to Ursula Hoff) at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 2004', Photo: courtesy of Alisa Bunbury and the National Gallery of Victoria.

As a result of the munificence of the 1904 Felton Bequest, the Print Room holdings at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) boast one of Australia's most distinguished International (mainly European) works on paper collections. At the same time it has assiduously collected Australian material. The distinguished European émigré, Dr Ursula Hoff, steered the Print Room into its pre-eminent position in Australia at the St Kilda Road site. This model of a discrete department with viewing and research facilities was subsequently adopted throughout Australia. In Adelaide this model continues into the twenty-first century. At the Art Gallery of South Australia, there is one department responsible for 23,000 prints, drawings and photographs covering all schools, with trained staff – at least one formerly from the NGV – following the high standards of scholarship set by Hoff and the staff she mentored in Melbourne.

In contrast, while works on paper continue to be a significant area of collecting for the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG), the approximately 6250 works on paper are currently spread throughout the curatorial departments of Australian Art, Asian and Pacific Art, and International Art and Cinema. An expertise in photography and printmaking as discrete areas of specialisation may still be present, yet overarching briefs subsume it. Sometimes the art works themselves dictate this. For instance, in 1995–97 a large collection of Fluxus works entered the collection, courtesy of Francesco Conz in Verona. Practically all of these items defied the usual taxonomies of classification.

The collecting of works on paper for art museums in Australasia is an evolving phenomenon. This is subject to a number of contexts, including the physical, economic, ethical, and aesthetic as well as dramatic shifts in ideology, especially as they pertain to the function of art museums and the way in which art history has been rearticulated. Accordingly, the role of collection curators has changed significantly since the 1980s as their former autonomy within the institution has been diminished (especially in smaller institutions), and their specialist expertise has often been less valued.

A challenge for art museums in the coming years is to recognise the value of the integrity of their collections, and of congruent curatorial advice regarding exhibitions and publications. Core curatorial duties remain just as essential when changing priorities are facilitating the demonstration of the joy in collecting works on paper to larger audiences than ever. Through stimulating exhibitions and allied events, and all manner of publications (paper and online), their power and relevancy within the scope of the past *and* of art's expanded role can be emphasised.

Footnotes

¹ If this essay tends to use the print as prime example of the area of 'works on paper', it is because such collections began in the early development of collections and have become the mainstay of the print room in major public galleries in Australia. Perceived from the 1960s and 1970s as a democratic art form, being relatively inexpensive, the print was also an educational means to promote an appetite for and understanding of art in general.

² Konrad Oberhuber, former director of the Albertina in Vienna, one of the world's premier museums for prints and drawings, wrote that in the late twentieth century there were two kinds of art museums: the museum of 'information' and the museum of 'experience'; the J Paul Getty Museum being an example of the former and Guggenheim Museum Bilbao of the latter. See Oberhuber, 'Thoughts Regarding the Millennium', *Apollo*, January 2000), pp. 19–23.

³ In fact, in some cases where medium-specific curators are no longer at hand, as in the case of the Queensland Art Gallery, it is more likely that paper conservators would be consulting such texts and providing the relevant catalogue with their opinions. Unlike curators, conservators tend to have job descriptions that are more contained, with functions that are more readily identified.

⁴ See, for instance the provocative article by Charles Green, 'Art as Printmaking: the deterritorialised print', *Art Monthly Australia*, No. 58, April 1993.

⁵ It is important to note the numbers of works involved. For instance, the AGNSW's Australian works on paper collections, prints and drawings number 9798 Australian works, of which 4309 are prints. When including those administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Contemporary Australian art departments, these figures go up to 10,308 works on paper, incorporating 4653 prints.

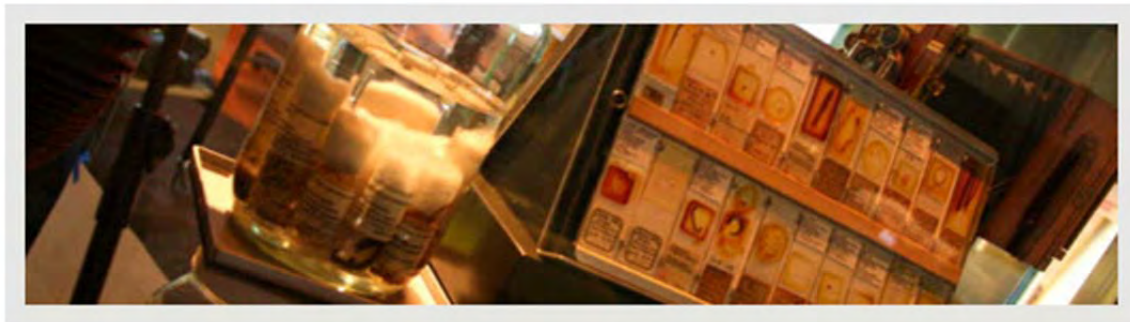
Anne Kirker is an independent art consultant, curator and writer.

Cite as: Anne Kirker, 2011, 'Collecting works on paper in Australia: specialisation at risk?', in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/AKirker_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

>

**Understanding Museums:
Australian museums and museology**

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



Museums and science

From the arrival of Europeans a fascination with the animals of the Australian continent and adjacent islands has generated scientific research. Since the nineteenth century Australia's natural history museums have been a principal site for the study of the diversity of animals, their relationships, and their distribution through the landscape and through time. The papers in this section explore natural history museums, science museums and science centres.

Contents

- Introduction, Des Griffin
- Museums and the environment, Douglass F Hoese
- Interactive science centres in Australia, Michael M Gore and Susan M Stocklmayer

Online version: http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Museums_science.html

Image credit: Microscope slides and specimen jars of tropical parasites from the Anton Breinl Centre, James Cook University, Townsville. Photo: Jen Wilson.

Understanding Museums - Museums and science: introduction

Science museums: introduction

by Des Griffin

Natural history museums, science museums and science centres

From the arrival of Europeans a fascination with the animals of the Australian continent and adjacent islands has generated scientific research. Since the nineteenth century Australia's natural history museums have been a principal site for the study of the diversity of animals, their relationships, and their distribution through the landscape and through time. Taxonomy, a major function of natural history museums, requires substantial collections in order to understand the natural variation within species. Universities and government agencies such as CSIRO have pursued other aspects including physiology and ecology and, more recently, genetics.

Natural history museums have also accumulated large collections of fossils, minerals and rocks. State departments responsible for mines, being more active than museums in geological exploration, have accumulated large collections of minerals. These have seldom found their way into museum collections. A notable exception was Sydney's Geological and Mining Museum. Founded in the nineteenth century, the NSW government semi-privatised the museum in the 1980s — a failed experiment that led to its closure in 1996 and the dispersal of the collection (part of which went to the Australian Museum). The Australian government's Geoscience Australia holds significant collections of minerals and fossils accumulated originally by the Bureau of Mineral Resources. There are similar situations with collections of fish being retained by fisheries departments. Unlike many natural history museums in other countries, plants are held by state herbaria and by the CSIRO National Herbarium rather than by museums.

Museums' fossil collections — mainly of invertebrates — are substantial. Most research and exhibition interest in these has centred on bony fishes, reptiles, dinosaurs and mammals. Many museums have made displays of dinosaurs a centrepiece of their presentations, and recent discoveries of interesting reptiles and mammals in various parts of Australia have also been featured.

In spite of the increasing importance given to taxonomic information in environmental management, agriculture and business, support for research on taxonomy continues to decline, although the Australian Biological Resources Study — an Australian government initiative — has supported important research and publications since the 1980s. Doug Hoesle reviews the major role that natural history museums may play in managing biodiversity by assisting government, industry and the wider community in their appreciation of the issues, and in shaping their contribution to securing the health of the natural environment.

Although the rapid decline of biodiversity is widely understood, state government funding for relevant research has been modest, and the little funding provided has been applied mainly to collection storage and maintenance. Research other than salary costs is funded by the Australian government that in 2010 — the International Year of Biodiversity — substantially reduced funding for biodiversity studies.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a burgeoning of science centres in many countries. Acknowledging the importance of science to society and keen to adopt new forms of communication, these institutions provided 'hands-on' learning experiences. The growth of such centres peaked in Australia in the late 1990s, whilst other museums emulated this approach to exhibiting and interaction. However a number of science centres have since closed. Michael Gore and Sue Stocklmayer trace the history of the science centre museum movement in Australia.

Museums offer vital links to the community's understanding of science, scientific research, the nature of theory, and the role of experimentation. Some of the most exciting and important science in the world is being pursued in Australia. However, the potential of science museums and science centres to contribute to the community's understanding of scientific developments in Australia and abroad remains to be fully realised.

Understanding Museums - Museums and science

Museums and the environment

by Douglass F Hoese

Natural history museums discover and document biodiversity – living organisms, their habitats and their genes – and communicate that information to the public, government and industry. This role involves collecting, identifying, describing known and previously unknown species and their evolutionary relationships to each other, and maintaining reference collections for future research. The term *biodiscovery* is used here for those activities, although the term is often used in a narrower framework in association with *bioprospecting*, specifically the discovery and exploitation of genetic and biochemical resources from plants and animals.

Most natural history museums in Australia are concerned only with animals (fauna), whereas some overseas museums also deal with plants (flora). In Australia the plant equivalents of natural history museums are the herbaria attached to major botanic gardens.

It is well recognised that biodiversity is declining worldwide. It is also recognised that for a robust biodiversity to survive, it will be necessary to manage biodiversity and the environment. Museums, which deal directly with identifying and documenting our biodiversity, have a major role in assisting the management of biodiversity. Museum collections form the basis for research documenting the fauna of the Australasian region.

Museums traditionally conduct extensive taxonomic (classification of organisms) and systematic research (study of diversity of organisms and their relationships over time), activities which are fundamental to our understanding of the environment and of evolution. Taxonomy establishes names for organisms, and thereby provides a central framework for all of biology, facilitating the organisation of biological knowledge. Without taxonomic research the biological collections would be merely a collection of curious objects, of limited value to our understanding of the natural world. The traditional focus of museum research is expanding to include genetic studies to facilitate identification of species and aid in determining relationships of animals.

The key role of natural history museums in auditing and conserving biodiversity has been documented in numerous reviews in many countries over the last 40 years; unfortunately the response has seldom seen significant additional support for the biodiversity research of museums. [1]

Unlike other countries, Australia does not have a national natural history museum with a national or worldwide focus in its collection, research and public programs. Instead the major state museums – Australian Museum, Museum Victoria, Queensland Museum, South Australian Museum, Western Australian Museum, Tasmanian Museum, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory – hold collections from their state or territory and sometimes hold extensive collections from other states and other parts of the world. At Commonwealth level CSIRO maintains, in different divisions but within a single program, three important collections of animals built up in the course of the research programs fundamental to CSIRO's mission. These are modest collections, although the Australian National Insect Collection is of special significance because of its size and the substantial research conducted on it. A National Herbarium (also within CSIRO) maintains an important collection of plants. The state and Commonwealth collections together are considered to constitute the 'Distributed National Collection'.

In 2003 the Australian government employed only one per cent of Australian taxonomists specifically engaged in research on plants and animals, and seven per cent of those were involved in taxonomic research as a secondary activity. [2]

State museums in Australia hold almost 20 million records of animal distributions based on the collections, more than double the records held by the CSIRO collections. The total workforce in museums is small, with about 40–50 research scientists and a comparable number of technical and collection staff that provide direct or infrastructure support for the research. In 2006, according to an Australian Biological Resources Survey (ABRS) survey that year, approximately 60 per cent of

the taxonomic workforce was employed in museums and herbaria specifically for research on or curation of biological collections in Australia. [3] The remaining 40 per cent was employed in universities or various other government agencies. Many museums rely heavily on volunteers to help maintain the collections, and in many cases research is conducted by unpaid or retired associates. While museums mainly employ taxonomists, some have employed ecologists; more recently some museums have created positions specifically focused on application of museum research to biodiversity conservation.

Much of the biological research in museums has focused on documentation of what species occur in the Australasian region. That research contributes to our understanding of the evolution of the unique organisms in the region and to improved conservation. Long-term benefits of that research are adequate documentation of a sufficient number of taxonomic groups to allow improved conservation and sustainability of the fauna, and an understanding of the evolution of the flora and fauna. A stable taxonomic nomenclature for the fauna is important to stakeholders. These benefits are achieved through research involving descriptions of new species, and revision of genera or families at a species level based on samples that are relatively comprehensive. Animals show considerable variability geographically, by sex, size or simply by random variation. Much of the work involves research on the variability to allow full identification of species from anywhere within Australia. Further stability is attained through studies of relationships of the animals. The modern aim of a nomenclature system is that it reflects the relationships of the animals and provides a basic standard for the scientific name of the organism.

History

Much of the early work on biodiscovery in Australia was carried out by scientists from overseas museums. For example, approximately one third of the species of fishes currently known from Australia were described prior to 1860, before collections and research programs were established in Australian museums. Today, extensive historical collections of Australian animals are held in the national natural history museums in Europe, with smaller collection in major museums in the United States.

Expansion of government funding allowed significant expansion in most museums after 1960. The number of curators approximately doubled between 1960 and 1980, and similar trends occurred in museums overseas. Many curators were recruited from overseas and the general level of training increased, with most curators having a PhD in zoology or a related field. Improved training and better resources provided by the museums led to an increase in the number and quality of descriptions of species. There was also a shift during this period from species descriptions to broader revisionary studies resolving issues confused by morphological variability. A considerable number of identification guides and popular books were produced. Genetic work was also incorporated into museum research during this period. During this time (1960–1980) a number of taxonomists were hired in universities, and taxonomists were trained in Australia.

Since 1991 the number of taxonomists employed in museums has declined, largely through retirement, the decline ranging between 10 and 30 per cent, depending on the museum. The overall decline in employed taxonomists in museums and herbaria over this period has been 17 per cent, [4] while technical staff numbers increased by 46 per cent. Many retired scientists are now working as associates within museums. In 1991, 73 per cent of the total taxonomic workforce (research and collections) were full-time paid employees. That number declined to 53 per cent in 2006, with an increase in part-time appointments. University trained taxonomists have also retired, resulting in relatively few taxonomists working in museums after being trained in Australia.

Federal and state governments have reduced research funding within many government agencies, which has impacted on research and collection funding. There was a 23 per cent decline in research funding as a percentage of GDP from government agencies' expenditure between 1996 and 2004, while higher education sector spending on research has increased by 14 per cent over the same period. [5] That reduction, and the general move to smaller government, have meant that museums have been unable to replace retiring scientists and fund research adequately. Similarly, universities have had little incentive to maintain small market subjects, such as taxonomy.

Factors influencing biodiscovery in museums

With increased concern for conservation of biodiversity and the impacts of anticipated climate change, it would seem logical that biodiversity programs in museums should receive more funds, not less. The 2006 State of Environment Report stated that 'One very important issue that

continues to get worse is a national decline in capacity in biological taxonomy. The situation in this field has become critical.' [6] A number of factors, other than just budget reductions, appear to be contributing to the decline. [7]

Other difficulties facing museums include the absence of infrastructure support from the Australian government. Grants from the Commonwealth through schemes such as the Australian Research Council (ARC) provide administrative overhead funding only for salaries to museums, but provide infrastructure support and substantial overheads directly to universities. As indicated earlier, the bulk of the national natural history collections estate and the research conducted on that estate reside in the various state museums dealing with biodiscovery. In other countries, infrastructure support for museums is often available through a national funding scheme; for example, the National Science Foundation in the United States provides funding directly to major state and private museums.

For some funding schemes, such as ARC Linkage grants, museums in Australia can only act as an industry partner and must provide funding to a major collaborative research program. At the same time, state governments are moving to fund research that is more focused on immediate problem solving. There appears to be a lack of understanding that biodiscovery plays a fundamental role in underpinning a whole range of other applied research. The major source of funding for biodiscovery in recent years has been the Australian Biological Resources Study, which issues grants of less than \$2 million per year throughout Australia.

Other issues include a lack of consultation between the Australian government and the states on research and collection issues in relation to museums. Another factor is that museums tend to be placed within arts ministries, whereas policy in biodiscovery tends to lie within environment, conservation and land management ministries. The lack of a national natural history museum also undoubtedly inhibits consultation between the Australian government and the states, particularly on research and collection issues. There appears to be better consultation between herbaria; this is likely to be related to the presence of a National Herbarium; and the fact that herbaria tend to be in environment or primary industry portfolios.

Bureaucratic protocols also can sometimes take precedence over access to knowledge. For example, Australia is a partner in the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) and contributes funding to that program. One of its major goals is to make museum distribution records from the collections available via the Web. The Australian involvement is supported by various Australian government organisations, such as the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the Department of Science. However, no formal consultation was held with the state museums. When the Council of the Heads of Australian Faunal Collections approached the committee responsible for Australian involvement in GBIF, the response was that, as the agreement was an international program the Australian government had responsibility. The states on the other hand had no role in GBIF, even though two thirds of the Australian records were to be provided by state-based museums.

Although no formal consultation mechanism relating to biodiscovery in museums exists between the states and the Australian government, the Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS) does provide a significant funding and communication channel. However it has a small budget, and is a small agency within a much larger portfolio (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities).

While the expertise and collections are largely held by state museums, Australian government funding tends to remain within the CSIRO. The Taxonomic Research Information Network established within CSIRO offers some promise. It was established with the stated goals to: (1) reinvigorate taxonomy within Australia, (2) evaluate and road test new methodologies for research and delivery of taxonomic information for a wide range of end users, and (3) create and maintain a modern collaborative national electronic framework for taxonomic knowledge delivery. However it has funding for only a few years and has not been involved in much consultation with state institutions.

Another inhibiting factor is that museums tend to have a local or state-based focus, but the organisms being studied in museums are often widely distributed. For example, 75 per cent of Australian fish species occur outside Australia.

International agreements

Australia has played a major role in the development of international initiatives on the environment, particularly the Convention on Biodiversity, the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Convention of the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Global Taxonomic Initiative (GTI) and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). Australia played a leading role in the establishment of GBIF, which seeks to increase access to data about the world's biodiversity. In addition, Australia helped to establish the GTI as a program within the Convention on Biodiversity. That initiative seeks to ensure that an adequate taxonomic framework exists to help manage biodiversity. The program seeks to have taxonomic input into major economic development projects. To achieve this goal there needs to be an effort to train taxonomists in the developing world, and to improve collaboration with taxonomists from the developed world. While it is a valuable program, Australia has not provided any major funding to ensure an adequate taxonomic workforce within Australia to meet those objectives.

The recently completed 10-year program called the Census of Marine Life was established in 2001 with the cooperation of 70 nations and considerable private funding of \$US650 million. The program was established to determine what once lived in the oceans, what now lives in the oceans, and what will live in the oceans. That program involved surveys of large areas of the ocean; Australian taxonomists, however, were involved only in a few of the programs. There is little evidence that the program has actually increased knowledge significantly as to what species of animals actually occur in the sea around Australia; much of the focus has been on documenting what is already known to occur here. There has been some involvement internationally by taxonomists, but to some extent it was a missed opportunity for the taxonomic community. Unfortunately, the taxonomic community tends to be fragmented and is not sufficiently geared up to capitalise on these types of initiatives. Taxonomists generally collaborate with workers in their own discipline and are not used to working in large multidisciplinary programs.

The future

Pressure in some quarters to focus on 'socially relevant' studies relating to issues such as climate change and conservation have caused conflict between traditional research and new priorities. Often the conflicts stem from fear of change rather than from genuine differences over desired outcomes. Resolution of that conflict is critical to the overall future of biodiscovery research. The distinction between scientific relevance and social relevance can be blurred, as research programs seek to have an impact both in the field of science and in future directions for society.

Critical to those efforts is increased collaboration between museums, government, non-governmental and industry organisations. Traditionally, many of these other organisations have treated museums as taxonomic service providers, to be called up at the end of a project for identification of specimens. While provision of service to the broad public and private community is still a high priority, museums are seeking to become partners in scientific discovery and the resolution of major environmental problems facing society. Early involvement of taxonomic expertise will produce the best outcomes for those programs. To help achieve increased partnerships, museums need to overcome the stereotype that they are dark, dusty, unchanging places, and that researchers in museums are out of touch with reality. Those perceptions are far from the reality of modern museums.

Despite numerous articles and representations to government about the importance of taxonomy and of museums conducting this research, there continues to be an ongoing reduction in permanent positions in taxonomy funded by governments. [8] Museums in Australia are increasingly moving to a strategy of temporary appointments, using various grant-funded fellowship programs to attempt to compensate for the reduction in permanent positions. The underlying strategy is efficiency: whether viable research is the result remains to be seen.

The museum community is divided on how to develop strategies to ensure a strong future for biodiscovery research. Optimists tend to argue that economic policies and reduction in size of government are cyclical trends, and museums should wait for better times. The main strategy is simply to tell people how important the work is. Reformists argue that there is a need for a cultural change within the research community in museums: strategies should focus on short-term goals and include identification of research priorities; employment of staff who can raise essential funds; and a focus on problem solving, rather than knowledge generation and increased reliance on contract work and temporary appointments. It is likely that a more pragmatic approach is needed that will promote better communication and advocacy about the importance of biodiscovery, attention to national issues and breaking down state-Commonwealth and state-state rivalry. What

is clear is that each of these approaches sees the need for improved communication within the research community, and between the community and management, that will lead to genuine mutual understanding of the issues and possible solutions.

In 1995 the Australian Museum established a Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Research. That Centre focused on the needs of various stakeholders, including government, and was successful in significantly increasing funding for research in the Australian Museum. The centre concept is now common in many overseas museums.

A critical strategy for the future will be making biodiscovery more visible to a broader community. One mechanism is for museums to act collaboratively, particularly on issues of national importance. Museums in Australia recently trialled a program called Networks of Excellence developed by Professor Mike Archer. Two networks were formed, one relating to biosecurity and a second aimed at developing an Atlas of Australian Fishes. Both achieved some success and the fish network (OZFishNet) is now developing an online atlas with the help and support of the ABRS and the National Oceans Office.

The use of new and emerging technologies is also critical to the future of biodiscovery. [9] Estimates indicate that only about 10 per cent of the world's organisms have been named in the last 250 years, suggesting completion could take hundreds if not thousands of years. Indeed, the rate of description of new species is possibly lower than the rate of extinction of existing species. However, applications of new technologies, such as publication on the internet, genome sequencing and high resolution digital photography, can dramatically reduce the time to completion to a single generation – assuming all the species can be discovered in that time.

Web-based programs are being established worldwide. [10] One of the major international programs, GBIF, seeks to make available records of species distribution, including those held in museums. It also seeks to generate a world list of all known species of plants and animals, and to help find funding to allow databasing of existing museum collections. Currently, only about one third of the records held in museums in Australia are in electronic databases.

One major advantage of using museum collections is that the identity of the species can always be confirmed by reference to a specimen (the type) held in a museum. Owing to rapid change in our knowledge of the identity of species in recent years, identifications in electronic databases often become out of date. This is a major problem in some groups, such as fishes, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates, where what was thought to be a single species turns out to be a composite of two or more species with overlapping distributions. In those cases, the discovery of the new species makes electronic databases based on observations obsolete for those records. Providing time and money to update such records is an issue that is receiving little attention.

In Australia, museums dealing with biodiscovery now have some of their collection records available on the Web, in a project called On Line Zoological Collections of Australian Museums (OZCAM). The program was developed through the Council of the Heads of Australian Faunal Collections (CHAFC). Currently, information is available directly from the OZCAM website or through one of the growing number of programs dealing with data, including GBIF and the Oceanographic Biological Information System (OBIS), an initiative of the Census of Marine Life.

The major priority identified by museums is to obtain funding to database all of their collections. The value of the information held by museums varies with various stakeholder groups. OZCAM and other distributional databases using museum records generally only meet some stakeholder needs. Recently many museums have made more information available to meet a greater range of stakeholder needs. Presently museum records are of limited value in comprehensive distribution pattern analysis used in geographical information systems (GIS). These analyses require high levels of accuracy of identification and locations, but museums have generally placed a higher priority on getting more data digitised than in improving the quality of their existing data. Ultimately both activities will be essential to ensure utility of the data.

Another limiting factor for the value of the data is that Australia is a big country and has a very large economic marine zone. The 22 million records of terrestrial animals means an average of three records per square kilometre, and for terrestrial vertebrates it equals about one record per eight square kilometres. Observation databases held by Australian government, state and non-government organisations (mainly for birds) hold 10 to 100 times the records held by museums. As a result, modelling of overall distributions is now using specimen and observational records. That modelling will be increasingly important in predicting effects of climate changes. It must be

recognised, however, that the absence of voucher records (based on specimens) can make some observational data of no value. Most of this work is being done in universities and various government agencies, but only in some museums. Museum databases and the taxonomic expertise behind those databases will become increasingly important in that modelling work. Information on which species are sufficiently well known for use in environmental and conservation assessment is particularly important. That expertise can best be provided by museum research workers, and museum databases will be used increasingly to aid quality control of observational databases.

A major initiative that is attempting to address many of the problems identified here is the Atlas of Living Australia, established as part of the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy and funded by the Super Science Initiative from the Education Investment Fund until June 2012. It is a program which is establishing an infrastructure to delivery information about the biodiversity of Australia. It was established as a partnership between the CSIRO, Australian museums, herbaria and other biological collections. It has gone a long way to overcome some of the communication problems between the states and Commonwealth organisations mentioned above and recognises the importance of the state collections. Organisation of the Atlas will follow a taxonomic framework provided by research conducted largely in museums and herbaria.

Many museums, along with the CSIRO, are contributing to the Barcoding of Life (COBOL) project, an international initiative established in 2004 and devoted to developing DNA barcoding as a global standard for the identification of biological species. Barcoding uses a short DNA sequence from a standardised and agreed-upon position in the genome as a molecular tool for species-level identification. The project is driven largely by the scientific community and funded by a mixture of private and government funding. The technique will be invaluable for many groups of organisms, particularly microorganisms, and will allow identification of a species from blood, hair or other tissue samples. These techniques, however, will not help to understand relationships, and will be of little use to a birdwatcher, fisherperson or ecologist who needs visual cues to identify animals, but it will aid taxonomists in better defining species. The costs of obtaining adequate specimens of every known species and sequencing even a single gene would run into billions of dollars. Consequently the project is planned over a number of years, with an initial goal of sequencing a gene from 500,000 species in five years. Improvement in technology is reducing the overall costs.

Biosecurity is another major area where biodiscovery is becoming important. Australia has a long history of introduction of overseas animals with negative consequences for native fauna and agriculture. With increased trade and speed of transportation, it is becoming much easier for animals to be introduced accidentally. Museum biodiscovery workers are often the first to confirm the identification of an introduced animal. Conversely, taxonomic expertise can show when a suspected pest is not a real threat. For example, fungal spores found in Australian wheat exports were thought to be from a diseased strain, which threatened to close a \$4 billion export trade. However, taxonomic identification showed the spores were not from a disease causing fungus, and export trade resumed. [11]

A number of museums have engaged in commercial operations in the environment area to increase general revenue, to better understand environmental decision making, and to provide high levels of expertise to inform that decision making. Environmental planning and conservation management and assessment are areas where biodiscovery expertise can contribute to commercial operations. Museums have had some success in that area, particularly as sub-consultants to larger environmental commercial operations. However, there are limitations to their ability to operate in a commercial environment, since government employment practices prevent museums from employing staff on comparable terms to commercial organisations, such as provision of financial incentives and other contract options.

Commercial organisations operate with very low profit margins of less than five per cent which smaller organisations, such as museums, often cannot offer. Consequently museums have tended to be successful only in providing their unique expertise. Government accounting and budgeting practices also make it difficult for museums to benefit significantly from commercial operations. Policy changes to improve development and general reductions in government funding have also led to reduced funding for conservation assessment; in some states commercial work now is primarily in the environmental assessment area, which requires less museum expertise than does conservation assessment.

Constitutionally, Australian states have responsibility for more 'applied' issues such as fisheries and agriculture. Over time, however, the need for research to underpin the quality of these collections

is not necessarily seen as a state responsibility. Nevertheless research within museums is critical to determining the conservation status of species.

Critical to the future of all of these programs is the need for a national training and recruitment plan to ensure that broad taxonomic expertise is available to deal with issues such as biosecurity and conservation, key challenges for Australia's future. Ultimately there needs to be recognition by the Australian government that the national estate for biodiversity is a distributed one that lacks adequate infrastructure.

Footnotes

¹ Joel Cracraft, 'The seven great questions of systematic biology: an essential foundation for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity', *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden*, Vol. 89, 2002, pp. 127–144; House of Lords, *What on earth? The threat to the science underpinning conservation: the government's response and the committee's commentary with evidence*, Third Report, HMSO, London, 2003; RM May, 'Tomorrow's taxonomy: collecting new species in the field will remain the rate-limiting step', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B*, Vol. 359, 2004, pp. 733–734; C. Pettitt, 'What Price Natural History Collections, or 'Why do we need all these bloody mice?'' *Museum Journal*, Vol. 91, 1991, pp. 25–28; QD Wheeler and AG Valdecasas, 'Ten challenges to transform taxonomy', *Graellsia*, Vol. 61, 2005, pp. 151–160; QD Wheeler, PH Raven and EO Wilson, 'Taxonomy: impediment or expedient?', *Science*, Vol. 303, 2004, p. 285; QD Wheeler, 'Invertebrate systematic or spineless taxonomy?' *Zootaxa*, No. 1668, 2007, pp. 11–18.

² Australian Biological Resources Study, *Survey of Australian Taxonomic Capacity*, Department of Environment and Water Resources, Canberra, 2007.

³ For international considerations see GW Hopkin and RP Freckleton, 'Declines in the numbers of amateur and professional taxonomists: implications for conservation', *Animal Conservation*, Vol. 5, 2002, pp. 245–249.

⁴ Figures from the 2003/2006 Australian Biological Resources Study.

⁵ FASTS, 'Proceeding of the National Taxonomy Forum', Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, Canberra, 2008.

⁶ RJS Beeton, KI Buckley, GJ Jones, D Morgan, RE Reichelt and D Trewin, *Australia State of the Environment 2006*, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra, 2006.

⁷ KC Kim, AE Loren and B Byrne, 'Biodiversity loss and the taxonomic bottleneck: emerging biodiversity science', *Ecological Research*, Vol. 21, 2006, pp. 794–810.

⁸ AV Suarez and ND Tsutsui, 'The Value of Museum Collections for Research and Society', *Bioscience*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2004, pp. 66–74; L Krishtalka and PS Humphrey, 'Can natural history museums capture the future?' *Bioscience*, Vol. 51, 2000, pp. 611–618; PH Raven, 'Taxonomy: where are we now?', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B*, Vol. 359, 2004, pp. 729–730; Rex Dalton, 'Natural history collections in crisis as funding is slashed', *Nature*, London, Vol. 423, 2003, p. 575; N Williams, 'Biodiversity challenge to funding priorities', *Current Biology*, Vol.12, No. 12, 2002, R405–R406.

⁹ EO Wilson, 'Taxonomy as a fundamental discipline', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B*, Vol. 359, 2004, p. 739.

¹⁰ V Gowin, 'All living things, online', *Nature*, London, Vol. 418, 2002, pp. 362–363.

¹¹ Gerry Cassis and Pauline Ladiges, 'Classify species or face extinction', *The Australian*, In Focus, Higher Education Section, 31 October 2007.

Douglass F Hoese joined the Australian Museum 1971 He worked as a research scientist and manager, becoming Head of Science in 1999.

Cite as: Douglass F Hoese, 2011, 'Museums and the environment', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/DHoese_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums and science

Interactive science centres in Australia

by Michael M Gore and Susan M Stocklmayer

The early history of Australia's interactive science centres shows that all were started in the early 1980s by people keen to share their passion for science. Many of the founders were university academics. Their stories tell of vision, determination, frustration and, in some cases, triumph. All achieved their initial goals but some of the first science centres came to a disappointing end.

One of the possible reasons behind the establishment of interactive science centres was falling enrolments in tertiary science courses. In particular, physics needed a more attractive image; it is no coincidence that many Australian physicists were influential in the early science centre movement. In common with science centres in other parts of the world, most of those in Australia were inspired by the Exploratorium in San Francisco developed by Frank Oppenheimer. The Exploratorium made its exhibits 'available' by providing a 'cook book' that showed how to construct and operate various exhibits they had developed.

Advocates of science centres in the 1980s saw them as fundamentally different from museums. Museums of science, including natural history, were considered to be concerned with scholarly research based on collections and with exhibiting those collections, but in a static and unchanging manner. Interactive science centre enthusiasts, however, encouraged experimentation: they made much of the fact that the visitors could actually handle the exhibits. Their early founders were driven by a sense of excitement, recognition that interactivity could bring 'their' science into the public domain. One advocate asserted that science centres were 'minds on', not just 'hands on'.

This belief in the value of experiment was paralleled by developments in formal and informal science education. The movement known as 'constructivism' placed a high value on experiential learning, the recognition that knowledge was developed by individual people based on their own experiences and was not simply something that was taught or learned from books. [1] Although early science centre research was based on museum methodology, it gradually moved to a different framework that acknowledged this different philosophical base and view of the nature of learning.

At much the same time, however, increasing attention was being paid to the 'failure' of a broader public to understand science. Surveys [2] found that the public lacked an adequate understanding of science. This so-called 'deficit model' of public knowledge [3] of the late 1980s considered that enhanced general science literacy would result in greater economic prosperity, greater appreciation of scientific research, and greater participation in democratic decision-making. [4] Science centres fortuitously provided a means of taking scientific ideas to a broader public, to foster such understanding.

There were problems from the start. The emerging science centres had little money and few people to construct exhibits. Fortunately, physics provides a vast source of ideas from which to make cheap, simple interactives. Chemistry is labour-intensive and poses problems of safety. In biology, living things need constant care and attention. Even for physics-based exhibits, there was the ongoing problem of maintenance. It was recognised at the outset that science centres must have technical people to build and fix exhibits, despite the expense. In the beginning therefore, science centres concentrated on physics activities that were simple, cheap to construct and easy to maintain.

Advocates for science centres also saw an important difference from museums in the 1980s, in that the former often engaged explainers in the exhibit areas. The need for explainers placed a further staffing burden on early science centres.

The first interactive science centre was the Questacon in Canberra, with just a few hands-on exhibits in rented premises. An Innovation Grant was obtained from the Australian Schools Commission and in 1983 it opened to the general public. Student 'explainers' were recruited to give science shows, and that group became the 'Science Circus' which now tours rural Australia. Questacon evolved into a major popular attraction in a purpose-built building sited in Canberra's

parliamentary triangle. The new Questacon opened in 1988 during Australia's Bicentenary, jointly funded by the Australian and Japanese governments, the latter providing half the capital cost.

A number of other science centres developed in various parts of Australia. The Supernova Science Centre, established in Newcastle in 1986, is now a centrepiece of the Newcastle Regional Museum. It began as a number of interactive exhibits for the Newcastle show of 1980. The Musbus travelling museum and hands-on science program was conducted during the 1970s and 1980s out of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Experilearn operated from 1983 to 1989 in the Museum of Victoria.

The Powerhouse Museum within the former powerhouse in the inner Sydney suburb of Ultimo housed traditional exhibits and others more characteristic of science centres, as did Scienceworks which opened in 1992 as an arm of the Museum of Victoria. This was a new project and not derived from Experilearn.

In Western Australian the Scitech Discovery Centre opened in 1988 in Perth. Scitech is one of Australia's most successful science centres. The Investigator Science and Technology Centre opened in Adelaide in 1991 but after years of struggling without adequate recurrent funding, it closed in 2007.

A Planetarium and Science Centre opened in 1989 within the Wollongong Botanic Gardens and moved into a purpose-built building as the new Science Centre and Planetarium in 2000. It continues to be a strong centre for informal education in the Illawarra region. The Queensland Museum Sciencentre opened in Brisbane in 1989.

Since the appearance of science centres in the 1980s, two more have opened, one in Bendigo, Victoria and the other in Devonport, Tasmania. They are officially linked and are very successful. Some centres, however, no longer exist, closing for a mix of reasons, including changing leadership, lack of funding, or declining government interest.

All science centres in Australia, however, are critically under-funded. In the past 10 years the goal of 'public understanding of science' has been substantially discredited. A major factor has been a growing awareness that 'teaching' science to an indifferent public has accomplished very little. Since the UNESCO World Conference on Science in 1999, there has been worldwide recognition of the significance, not only of science education, but of public engagement. [5]

Society's relationship with science is in a critical phase. It is clear that increasing 'scientific literacy' means more than just bringing science and technology to people's attention, or teaching them more scientific facts. Science 'awareness' is dependent on a general appreciation of what science is, how to use it, and its role in the economy. Moves to 'dialogue' are fundamental to a more equal relationship between the Australian public and its science.

It is important to understand the needs of the public, including school students, and how to address those needs. This constitutes a broader role for science centres, which are in a unique position to 'translate' the science so that the general public can understand, appreciate and use it to the benefit of themselves and the nation. It is no longer enough just to present traditional science through classical interactives. The challenge science centres face in the twenty-first century is to engage with current issues and develop techniques for reaching this broader public.

Unlike traditional museums, which usually have a core collection of intrinsic value and interest, the interactive science centre depends to a very high degree on personal interpretation of the science. This in turn requires dedication, understanding and excellent communication skills.

However, any distinction may be ephemeral. If the principal distinguishing feature of museums generally is seen to be the collections, then science centres are clearly a different entity altogether. But if museums are considered to be first and foremost about ideas, and as places of learning in the broadest sense, then science centres and museums have much to learn from each other.

Footnotes

¹ E Von Glasersfeld, *Cognition, Construction of Knowledge and Understanding*, National Science Foundation, Washington, 1988; RE Yager, 'The constructivist learning model', *The Science Teacher*, Vol. 58, No. 6, 1991, pp. 52-7.

² JR Durant, GA Evans and GP Thomas, 'The public understanding of science', *Nature*, Vol. 340, 1989, pp. 11-

14.

³ B Wynne, 'Knowledges in context', *Science, Technology and Human Values*, Vol. 16, 1991, pp. 111–121.

⁴ For a discussion of this see SM Stocklmayer, MM Gore and C Bryant (eds), *Science Communication in Theory and Practice*. Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2001. See also *UNESCO World Conference on Science for the Twenty-First Century: a New Commitment*, 26 June to 1 July 1999, Budapest, Hungary, online at: [UNESCO World Conference on Science](#)

⁵ *UNESCO World Conference on Science for the Twenty-First Century: a New Commitment*, 26 June to 1 July 1999, Budapest, Hungary, online at: [UNESCO World Conference on Science](#)

Michael Gore AM was the foundation director of Questacon – the National Science and Technology Centre in Canberra.

Susan Stocklmayer AM is the Director of the Australian National Centre for the Public Awareness of Science at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Cite as: Michael M Gore and Susan M Stocklmayer, 'Interactive science centres in Australia', in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/MGore_SSstocklmayer_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

**Understanding Museums:
Australian museums and museology**

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



Regional museums

Regional museums dealing with art and with history are distributed around the country, bringing to local audiences items of significance and understanding of the past and the present. They all share several important features: they contain amongst their treasures many works of national as well as local significance; and the contribution to them by volunteers is immense. In the case of local history museums those contributions are often critical, for without them the museum would not exist. All of them share one other critical feature: they contribute to a sense of personal and community identity.

Margaret Rich reviews the development of regional art museums in Victoria. Kimberley Webber with a number of museum people from around the country outlines the recent history of regional museums in mainland Australia. Kylie Winkworth reflects on the achievements and challenges which still face regional museums.

Contents

- Introduction, Leon Paroissien and Des Griffin
- The development of regional galleries, Margaret Rich
- Let a thousand flowers bloom: museums in regional Australia, Kylie Winkworth
- Drawing people together: the local and regional museum movement in Australia, Kimberley Webber et al.

Online version: http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Regional_museums.html

Image credit: *The Benalla Art Gallery in Benalla, Victoria. Photo: Benalla Art Gallery.*

Understanding Museums - Regional museums: introduction

Introduction

by Leon Paroissien and Des Griffin

The following essays jointly recount a remarkable story of Australians' commitment to their museums. This is reflected in exceptional local initiatives. Dedicated volunteers run many museums; local councils with professional staff govern others; and others again are co-located with libraries in cultural centres.

Many smaller-scale collections in comparison with our state or national institutions nevertheless contain regionally and nationally significant material – even iconic items revealing our natural, historic and cultural heritage.

In the case of art museums, particularly, there are numerous iconic works produced by Australian artists over two centuries, including some of our most famous figures, to be found in our regional galleries spread across the country. Regional art museums today with active collection policies in the contemporary area may even be acquiring works of equal significance to those being collected by our principal capital city institutions.

Margaret Rich's account of regional art museums (or regional galleries) focuses on Victoria, where early local initiatives and state government encouragement and support set an example for other states to follow. In general, regional art museums have fared better throughout Australia than their fellow non-art museum institutions that house other kinds of historic heritage.

In the non-art museum area, the capacities of regional institutions to acquire, manage and develop interpretation and exhibitions of local historical material formed over many years – even to document local historical collections adequately at the level of a reliable inventory – presents an extremely varied picture at a national level. Kylie Winkworth, who has studied regional museums and their collections for many years, adds a cautionary judgement to her analysis of the proliferation of regional institutions: 'Australians far prefer to open new museums than fix the ones they have'.

There has been no consistent rationale across Australia for government support for regional museums since they first emerged under varying colonial circumstances. Many still receive little or no financial assistance from any level of government today, while others may receive some direct or indirect support through their state museums. This strikingly varied situation creates sadly inequitable circumstances surrounding museums' direct connection with and capacity to play a vital role in their communities' cultural development and conservation of heritage at local levels across the nation.

The Australia Council meanwhile has provided a range of Australian government grants supportive of art museums over the years, while funding for touring exhibitions to all types of regional museums is available in some continuing Australian government programs of assistance: through Visions of Australia; and the National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program.

The 1975 Pigott Report on Australian museums recommended the creation of an Australian Museums Commission – based on models in the UK and elsewhere. This was envisaged as 'a statutory authority employing its own small staff and enlisting, whenever possible, the advice and specialised services of other government agencies'. [1] No national instrument of support and advice of this kind has ever been established in Australia. Its absence has keenly disadvantaged Australia's regional museums, since only through a national stimulus by the Australian government could comparative standards be raised, better equity be achieved, and other forms of support for regional cultural development be stimulated to match the amenities provided by state and national museums in capital cities. Such disparities in national envisioning and provision represent one of the deepest and most long-standing 'social divides' in the more equitable provision of cultural amenities for the benefit of all Australians.

Relatively few museums across regional Australia have purpose-designed buildings and facilities,

let alone museum-standard environmental controls or satisfactory exhibition facilities. Many historical collections languish in parlous circumstances, without a permanent home and visibility.

Historically, the establishment of a museum and its subsequent growth and maintenance has usually resulted from the efforts of an individual or a group of enthusiasts. In spite of a surprising number of museums having been established in this way through the admirable initiative of citizens over more than two centuries, some important regional cities whose history and culture would seem to recommend themselves as sites for museums have yet to see even modest institutions established to celebrate their history.

Despite such discontinuities in provision, the essays in this section describe many instances of regional museums and their supporters developing expansive and innovative facilities and programs to make significant contributions to the cultural life of their community. Such accounts hold the promise that future years will bring a more equitable development of regional museums in a national perspective, unlocking civic potential and cultural development amenities at the local level in ways that could more closely echo the striking upsurge and successive redevelopments of virtually all substantial museums in Australia's capital cities during the last four decades.

Footnote

¹ Pigott Report, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1975, p. 3.

Understanding Museums - Art museums

The development of regional galleries

by Margaret Rich

Victoria was the cradle for regional galleries in Australia. There were five regional galleries in Australia by 1900 and four were in Victoria. By 1970 there were just 26 regional galleries throughout Australia and 13 of those were in Victoria. It was, in the 1970s, a lively network of poorly funded galleries, with an umbrella organisation, the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria (RGAV).

This organisation emerged out of the earlier and smaller Victorian Public Galleries Group (VPGG), formed in the late 1940s through the initiative of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) to develop, support and provide greater access to the state's widely dispersed public art collections. The initiative was also of benefit to the NGV as it wished to demonstrate a state-wide interest in the arts to support their own claims for improved funding. The state gallery chose to remain separate from the VPGG, but assisted regional galleries by providing advice and artworks for exhibitions, and acting as a conduit to government ministers. The will to assist regional galleries was there, though limited, with the need to develop the state gallery's own resources a priority.

Regional galleries identified the key areas for attention as operating funding, exhibitions, conservation for their neglected but hugely important collections, and the need for professional staff. By the mid-1960s, they had, with the support of the NGV director and trustees, acquired a minimal level of operating funding, as well as access to state government capital works funding. The possibility of capital funding encouraged some local councils to establish new galleries, while older galleries sought to improve their buildings and add temporary exhibitions areas. Temporary exhibitions had not previously been a regular feature other than annual art prize exhibitions. Most of the newly established galleries were owned and managed by local councils, unlike the earliest galleries in Ballarat (1884), Bendigo (1887), Castlemaine (1913), Geelong (1896) and Warrnambool (1886) that began as incorporated associations. Funding assistance from the state government fuelled this extraordinary new growth of public art galleries in the 1960s and early 1970s, but it also reflected the enthusiastic encouragement by local pressure groups.

Enthusiastic local residents often lobbied local councils, providing an additional impetus. In the case of Benalla, the council held a referendum in 1967 that showed overwhelming support for a gallery to be established. Within four years of a gallery being opened in temporary quarters (in 1968) Mr Laurie Ledger, a local stock and station agent, offered his fine collection of paintings and a substantial gift of money on condition a new building was erected by the lake in the botanic gardens. The Benalla Council accepted. [1]



A view of the Benalla Art Gallery from across the river.

The Hamilton City Council proceeded more cautiously. The acceptance of a 1957 bequest by Herbert Shaw of £6000 to build a gallery and the offer of a significant collection was kept confidential for nearly a year before its announcement. [2] By 1961 a director had been appointed and the gallery opened. Other new galleries were opened in Mildura (1956), Sale (1964), Swan Hill (1964), Horsham (1968), Ararat (1968), Mornington (1969), Langwarrin (1971), and Morwell (1971).

Other gains for regional galleries included the allocation of a small budget at the NGV to use for restoration of artworks from regional gallery collections. By the 1970s the VPGG/RGAV had also established a central role in arranging touring exhibitions from a number of sources, including the state gallery, with each regional gallery paying a share of expenses.

The arts in Australia have always required government subsidies; here was an opportunity for the state government to assist in making art available to communities across the whole state, rather than just in Melbourne. There was enormous local pride and generosity, but little could have been achieved without a share of state revenue.

The issue of professional staff was partly addressed in the late 1940s when a chair in Fine Arts, the first in Australia, was established at The University of Melbourne. By the mid-1950s public galleries had the option of appointing graduates to professional positions. It was not until 1979 that a graduate diploma in Museum Studies was offered, initially at the Prahran College of Advanced Education and then, with the formation of Victoria College, the course moved out to the Rusden campus of the college (Victoria College has since been taken over by Deakin University). The course concentrated on the skills required for managing a public art gallery, registration and handling of artworks, curating exhibitions, marketing and fundraising, and working with committees. This course was immediately popular, and in its early years attracted around 25 students annually. [3] In the meantime gallery directors often lacked adequate preparation for their demanding roles, in spite of having access to speakers at workshops and meetings of colleagues. Museum leadership was an emerging profession in Australia; perhaps nowhere more than in regional galleries were directors so isolated from other arts professionals.

The growth of arts bureaucracies

In the 1970s and 1980s the Australian government gave significant support to public galleries, artists and art audiences. They were exciting times. The Australia Council had its first full year of operation in 1973. Throughout the 1970s its Visual Arts Board (VAB) developed programs of great benefit to small public galleries. These included assistance to exhibit contemporary art, to develop exhibition programs, and to conserve artworks. The Australian contemporary art acquisition program subsidised the purchase of contemporary art by regional and state galleries. There were lecture tours and professional development grants for gallery staff. Directors from regional galleries

were invited to serve on funding panels as peer group assessment was basic to the VAB approach. In the 1970s the director was usually the only art professional on a regional gallery staff, and the VAB programs gave an opportunity to network and consult.

The mood of the times in the 1970s was so supportive and progressive that if the VAB was approached with a stated need and a reasoned argument, a grant would often be possible. Towards the end of the decade criteria were developed and tightened. Exhibitions had to be innovative, and written reports became a condition of grants. For the most generous of all programs, the Australian Contemporary Art Acquisition Program, the applying institution had to guarantee public access, regular display, acceptable storage conditions and proper security arrangements. The works also had to be selected by trained curators and acquired directly from the artist or their agent. These conditions encouraged the establishment of galleries with good facilities and professional staff.

In 1978 the VAB launched a new initiative to assist geographically and culturally remote communities in Australia, the Regional Development Program. Under this program the VAB organised and toured small exhibitions of contemporary art to remote communities, particularly in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, 'for these states, unlike Victoria, have not yet developed a network of cooperative regional art museums'. [4]

Having pioneered these exhibition tours, the VAB hoped that another agency would take on this task, with VAB funding and support. The Australian Gallery Directors Council (AGDC), a not-for-profit company which also accepted regional gallery directors as full members from 1977, took on this role. It enabled exhibitions with well-researched catalogues to be initiated and toured, thus providing unsurpassable professional development experiences for staff in regional galleries. The networking opportunities at its conferences strengthened galleries throughout Australia. Its base funding was through the VAB, but it also attracted major sponsors, because of the involvement of state and national galleries, enabling the presentation of blockbuster exhibitions that excited galleries and their publics. The AGDC became insolvent in 1981, following a couple of large, expensive exhibitions that failed. Its successor did not open its doors to regional gallery representation, possibly in part because there were now so many regional galleries, with varying standards of facilities and staffing. Unfortunately the sheer number of galleries perhaps eclipsed the possibility of the larger, long-established galleries contributing to and benefiting from a national touring program.

The growth of Victorian regional galleries between 1956 and 1971 was unique in Australia, but from the 1970s regional galleries also began to spread throughout Australia, particularly in New South Wales and coastal Queensland. In 1971 there were 29 regional galleries nationwide, 16 of which were in Victoria. By 1995 there were at least 52 regional galleries: 18 in Victoria, 18 in New South Wales and six in Queensland and a further 10 in the other three states.

The number of public galleries had expanded so greatly by the mid-1980s that competition for VAB grants was fierce, with a rigorous assessment process put in place to ensure that available assistance was applied as widely as possible.

Victoria, with its extensive network of public galleries, established a Ministry for the Arts (later Arts Victoria), with its first full year of operation in 1974. By 1976 the RGAV had incorporated, listing its 16 member galleries. The funding formula and the process of approval had possibly been far more successful in encouraging the growth of new galleries than the state had expected, and from this date no new galleries were accepted into the funded network of regional galleries until 2006 as part of the new Arts Victoria Local Partnership Program. Pressure was growing from new metropolitan and university galleries, and from regional performing arts centres, for similar programs of assistance. The expectations placed on regional galleries were daunting, considering their funding and staffing restraints. Salaries in Victorian regional galleries (average \$11,000) were considerably lower than in NSW (average \$16,000). [5] It is not surprising then that the main issues from the galleries' viewpoint concerned salary levels for professional staff and the need for more specialised staff in the larger galleries, as well as conservation and security.

In response to claims for more funding, Arts Victoria focused on attendance figures and service to a region rather than just a town or city, arguing that if a region was served, then funding could be sought from the councils of the wider region. [6] Also, new galleries were encouraged to limit their collecting to specialist areas. Horsham chose photography, Ararat textiles, Latrobe contemporary glassware and Swan Hill naive art.

Other gains were made: part-time seconded education officers were appointed to some galleries,

specifically to serve schools, [7] provision was made for reviews of salaries and the establishment of a base grant formula assisted galleries with their administration and planning. An acquisition fund for regional galleries – the Caltex-Victoria Art Purchase Fund – was begun, with the state matching donations from the corporate sponsor. The most important gain was the opening in Ballarat in 1979 of a conservation centre to serve regional galleries – the Conservation Centre of the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria. It followed a provocative and highly publicised exhibition at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in 1976, *Attention your collection is rotting*. The centre's first annual report noted that the combined collections of the 16 regional galleries 'include one of the largest and perhaps most comprehensive collections of Australian art, valuable English watercolours, sizable holdings of nineteenth-century European and English pictures, medieval manuscripts and a considerable collection of decorative arts'. [8]

The conservation centre was never funded to adequately serve the regional gallery sector, and even with subsidised fees the costs were too great for many galleries to make extensive use of the centre. It was briefly reformed in 1986 at Laverton as the Victorian Centre for the Conservation of Cultural Material (VCCCM), but closed in the 1990s. It was easier and less costly, especially through grants, to use trained conservators working privately.

In the meantime, many philanthropic foundations had come to the assistance of regional galleries. The Ian Potter Foundation provided informed, professional help in the purchase of equipment for mounting and storage of works on paper, for acquiring sets of standard size frames, fitted crates, and assistance in the installation of security systems. But the needs of regional galleries continued to outstrip available government resources. Some gains in the 1980s included the establishment of a classification of galleries according to their collections and facilities. This included recommended salary levels for professional staff, important at a time when galleries were beginning to employ specialised staff.

Centralised advice and services were established, leading, amongst other achievements, to the cataloguing of 13 regional collections using the Commonwealth Employment Program to fund positions and a centrally employed registrar to train and supervise the program. [9] A state government insurance indemnification scheme was begun for major exhibitions. The Australia Council and Arts Victoria set up National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria in 1988, a jointly funded body to fund touring exhibitions of contemporary visual arts, craft and design, including exhibitions drawn from the collection of the NGV. Similar bodies were established in each state, all members of National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Australia, relieving the Australia Council of managing its own exhibition funding program. Both the Australia Council and Arts Victoria moved towards assisting arts institutions through specialised grants, advice and services. This allowed the growing number of small galleries, without the blessing of recurrent grants, to have some access to state government funding. Some Arts Victoria program funding was aligned with other current government initiatives, for example multiculturalism or youth outreach.

The Ballarat Fine Art Gallery celebrated its centenary in 1984 by launching a public building appeal. Its collection was now around 6000 items and improved storage space was badly needed, as were more display areas. The gallery doubled its size and included climate control, security systems, and excellent visitor facilities. Newcastle Region Art Gallery (NSW) was the only other regional gallery that had such state-of-the-art facilities, after its new building opened in 1977. Some state galleries were less well equipped.

By 1995 the RGAV resolved to expand its institutional membership and became the Public Galleries Association of Victoria (PGAV), a peak body for all Victorian public galleries. The PGAV saw its role primarily as facilitating networking. It developed an intern program for staff from smaller galleries to spend a week at the NGV and for staff from the NGV to spend some days at regional galleries; and in conjunction with arts bodies such as Museums Australia it initiated professional training programs. In 2008 the Association had 44 members. In the mid-1970s there were not even 40 public galleries nationally. In the late 1990s the state-administered Federation Fund provided major funding to all 16 of Victoria's regional galleries, enabling a significant improvement in facilities and services across the whole network. The larger galleries – Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong – with their important collections, benefited greatly, gaining attractive buildings and excellent facilities.



Contemporary gallery, Ballarat, Victoria.

In the early 2000s the arts sector changed even further. Arts Victoria no longer dealt directly with arts professionals. Instead, it began to negotiate memoranda of understanding with local councils. In the new Local Partnership Program [10] the total government grant a gallery might receive depended on the level of funding from its local council, as well as program responses to priority areas. With most regional galleries owned and managed by local councils, this approach held the promise of maximising both local and state government contributions. The relationship between the gallery and its local council became crucial, although not all local councils are supportive of the arts. Innovative, outreach and community and local artist involvement became important words for gaining funding.

The specialisation of the collections of the 1970s has given way to new orientations towards the region and the community. The concept of regional galleries has been diluted, and 'outer metropolitan' is a new term that is often associated loosely with regional. Funding from sources other than governments has become more difficult, as philanthropic funds concentrate on areas other than galleries, with the exception of the very generous Gordon Darling Foundation. Corporate sponsorship in regions far from capital city head offices has never been large, unless negotiated by state or federal agencies.

In the 2000s, the National Gallery of Australia emerged as the new champion of regional galleries through its touring of major exhibitions and a willingness to discuss joint ventures. It is probably no coincidence that its director, Ron Radford, was once a regional gallery director.

The federal government established a new program in 1993, Visions of Australia, to provide funding to eligible organisations to develop and tour exhibitions of Australian cultural material across Australia, in particular to regional and remote areas. This partially filled the gap left by the exclusion of regional galleries from involvement in AGDC's successor following its demise in 1981. It also opened up new possibilities as the program encouraged partnerships between collecting organisations – archives, galleries, libraries and museums – and encouraged community involvement.

Increased community interest in art, stimulated in part by the growth in well-marketed major exhibitions, contributed to a climate that made the arts a legitimate area for government support. New state and federal government assistance programs, as well as targeted grants from philanthropic funds, encouraged the growth of public galleries and also promoted the development of professional standards.

Arts Victoria claimed in 2008 that it was the only state government agency to offer operating

funding to selected regional galleries. [11] It announced in November 2005 that it would focus on bringing regional facilities and programs up to metropolitan standards, spending \$28 million over four years. [12] Both federal and state government funding has gradually become a more 'arm's-length' affair, with grants, advice and services offered through government-funded agencies, or in the case of Victorian regional galleries, through their local government. The initial growth of regional galleries in Victoria can be traced to determined and passionate individuals who inspired their communities and achieved government support.

Footnotes

¹ John Jones, *COLLECTION, The Benalla Art Gallery*, Benalla Art Gallery, 2002, p. 9.

² Danny McOwan, Director, Hamilton Art Gallery, emails to author 18 and 19 May 2008.

³ Roger Trudgeon, Senior Lecturer and Course Co-ordinator, Museum Studies, Deakin University from 1988 to 1994, email to author 21 May 2008.

⁴ Elwyn Lynn, Chairman VAB, Foreword in exhibition catalogue *Roadshow 1: 1978*.

⁵ Summary of Proceedings, RGAV Half Yearly Forum at Sale, 17 November 1979. Dr Eric Westbrook, then Director of Arts Victoria, was the keynote speaker.

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ In a 1965 pilot scheme at the Geelong Art Gallery the education officer had been a quasi-gallery director.

⁸ 'First Annual Report: The History of the Setting up of the Conservation Centre of the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria', October 1977, p. 1.

⁹ Joe Pascoe, Director of Craft Victoria and previously Arts Victoria registrar, telephone conversation, May 2008.

¹⁰ *Local Partnerships Program in Moving Forward: making provincial Victoria the best place to live, work and invest*, Arts Victoria, November 2005.

¹¹ Elizabeth Jones, Senior Arts Officer, Arts Victoria, telephone conversation, May 2008.

¹² *Local Partnerships Program in Moving Forward*.

Margaret Rich OAM was the Director of the Art Gallery of Ballarat and of the Geelong Gallery.

Cite as: Margaret Rich, 2011, 'The development of regional galleries', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/MRich_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Regional museums

Let a thousand flowers bloom: museums in regional Australia

by Kylie Winkworth

The idea of the museum inspires Australians. Since the end of the Second World War, Australia has experienced an extraordinary flowering of museums and the accumulation of collections in nearly every rural town and village, in regional cities and many suburbs. From the more than 1000 local and provincial museums estimated by the Pigott Report in 1975, current numbers are probably more than 3000. [1] This is the most remarkable and sustained grass roots movement ever seen in Australia. While organisations such as the Country Women's Association (CWA), the Red Cross, Scouts and more recent movements such Landcare also have a presence in more than a thousand towns and villages across Australia, these are mainly local branches of a parent organisation, sharing core objectives and a governance structure.

In contrast, the development of community museums [2] is a truly local initiative, forged by local enterprise, mad ambition, shared enthusiasm and millions of hours of volunteer work. Most of the museums in regional Australia were created with little or no government funding and that is how they continue to operate. The animating ideas behind these museums include preserving heritage places, researching local history, interpreting a way of life or industry, educating young people, demonstrating traditional skills, attracting tourists, creating a cultural facility for the community and collecting artefacts, archives and images as an enduring legacy for the future. They may be inspired by museums seen elsewhere in Australia or overseas, but the impetus and vision is driven by community passion and a sense of place. Unlike other environmental and community organisations, there is no head office-sponsored template for museums in rural and regional Australia. Affiliation with state and national organisations generally comes after the local campaign to create the museum. And where there might be one CWA or Landcare branch in a community, and one library, many towns and villages have multiple museums. [3]

There have been huge changes in museums since Pigott's Report, but the core idea of a museum still inspires communities. Every state and national celebration is marked by the opening of new museums. The continuing growth of museums underlines the potency of the museum idea for regional communities. Pigott said they were the 'bay window of local pride, especially when a town or district is declining in population'. [4] But if it was only about showing off there are many easier ways to make a display, like signing up for Tidy Towns.

Museum-making in regional Australia is based on a deep attachment to place and it is an expression of community self-belief. It is not just about celebrating the achievements of the past, but believing in the future, even or most particularly where the museum is based on a dying industry or way of life. Making a museum represents a collective commitment to a community in the present and for the future. It takes fundraising, advocacy, teamwork and the gift of family treasures and collections. Long before tax deductions, the Cultural Gifts program and opaque philanthropic trusts, museums in regional Australia were built through true philanthropy. People bought historic properties, took on personal loans and raised funds to restore or build museums. This work creates networks of affinity, trust and obligation between the museum, families, friends and service clubs, among others. In most cases these networks help sustain the museum over many decades, and sometimes across generations.

The result of so much work and local enterprise is the development of what are now important social institutions in their communities. The collections assembled over the last 50 years are significant historical and cultural assets. But the volunteer-managed museum movement is not recognised for its contribution to communities or its work in caring for the history and heritage of the district. While Landcare attracted some \$500 million in funding between 1995 and 2000, [5] just a few years after its branding, there is little funding support for the museums and volunteers caring for heritage collections in regional Australia. Coupled with the continued growth in the numbers of museums, this is creating sustainability challenges for museum custodians and communities.

The history and heritage of each state and territory is exhibited in the types and content of their museums. In South Australia place-based museums auspiced by the National Trust were a

dominant model. [6] Queensland favoured museums of moved buildings organised as pioneer villages, partly due to its heritage of timber buildings, which were traditionally relocated following mining booms and busts. Museums in regional NSW are predominantly historical society museums, generally in heritage buildings. Patterns of museum development reflect the influence of mentors and advocates. They visited museums in the region, reported on museums seen overseas and advised local committees. The lecturer Eric Dunlop was an influential proponent of the folk museum movement in NSW in the 1960s. [7] The legacy of his advice can still be seen in period room displays in many historical societies, influenced by his booklet about setting up local history museums. [8] Victoria's regional museums are richly endowed with collections from the second half of the nineteenth century, evidencing the wealth in these communities drawn from goldmining and the pastoral industry.

Pigott's chapter on 'local and provincial' museums discusses four main types of museums, 'provincial and suburban art galleries ... the string of small local institutions which provide ninety per cent of the self-styled museums, the large 'living history' or open-air folk museums, and ... privately owned museums'. [9] On the ground there is considerable crossover between museum types in regional Australia. Many local history museums also have moved buildings and were framed around demonstrating rural skills and technology, just like the open-air museums. The blacksmith's workshop is nearly ubiquitous in local history museums and pioneer villages, but is unfortunately rarely seen in action these days. In some former mining centres almost the whole town is a museum. [10]

Since the *Museums in Australia* report museum types have become more diverse and mutable. Museums in regional Australia include place-based museums, such as historic house museums, heritage sites and heritage centres; [11] halls of fame and theme museums on subjects including stockmen, mining, shearing, fishing, maritime, migrant communities, notable locals (think Don Bradman in Bowral or Slim Dusty in Kempsey), and even women; as well as railway, aviation and military museums; regional botanic gardens with collections; and keeping places and Indigenous heritage centres. Some state government museums still operate branch museums in regional cities. The Queensland Museum manages the Cobb and Co. Museum in Toowoomba, the Workshops Rail Museum in Ipswich and the Museum of Tropical Queensland in Townsville. The Western Australian Museum has branch museums in Albany, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie. However the majority of museums in regional Australia are volunteer-managed community museums, mainly heritage places or history museums. A smaller group of museums is managed by local government with paid professional staff; these are mostly regional galleries.

In addition to regional galleries new types of regional arts facilities are emerging, such as contemporary art spaces. Some, like Artspace in Mackay, also include historical displays. A number of Indigenous cultural centres have significant collections, such as Jilamara Arts and Crafts on Melville Island and Tjulyuru Cultural Centre in remote Warburton WA. There are galleries based in heritage places once owned by notable artists, such as Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest in the former home of Gerald and Margo Lewers; and Bundanon, based around Arthur Boyd's home on the Shoalhaven in NSW. While there are a number of museums in regional Australia that style themselves as national museums, Bundanon Trust is the only museum in regional Australia to receive recurrent funding from the Australian government. Privately owned galleries operated by philanthropic trusts are a new addition to the cultural landscape, such as TarraWarra near Healesville in Victoria.

Convergence is also creating new hybrid museums, including co-located or combined museums, libraries and galleries. The City of Wanneroo just north of Perth has opened a combined library, museum and cultural centre in a purpose-built facility. The regional museum includes a community access exhibition space, an active schools program and a community history centre. A notable feature of some of the newer developments is an ABM name (anything but a museum), such as Crossing Place in Albury or Dogwood Crossing@Miles in Queensland. Converged museums are not in fact a new development but a rediscovery of an older museum form where natural history, historical collections and works of art were part of a single museum. Perhaps the best example of this type is the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, established in 1891, the largest regional museum in Australia. Interestingly, redevelopment now underway will separate the art gallery on the original Royal Park site from the historical and natural history collections on display at the Inveresk site.

The living history or open-air museums have not fared well since Pigott, with the notable exception of Sovereign Hill at Ballarat. Two other examples discussed in the report have closed – Old Sydney

Town and the Lachlan Vintage Village at Forbes. Other open-air museums are struggling. Sovereign Hill marked its 40th anniversary in 2010 and is admired for its focus on visitors and education. There are many reasons for the enduring success of Sovereign Hill when so many other museums of this type are in decline. Some of the critical success factors include a compelling story about the impact of the gold rush on Ballarat, a commitment to education, research and historical accuracy, [12] the use of new technology to create memorable visitor experiences, excellent leadership, paid professional staff and committed volunteers, and significant government grants to develop new facilities and renew the interpretation. Then there are the visitors – about 450,000 per year – making Sovereign Hill by far the most popular museum in regional Australia. It helps that Ballarat is an hour away from Melbourne, a city of four million people. And the region is a museum hot spot with a critical mass of other museums and attractions. Also in Ballarat is the Eureka Centre, opened in 1998 adjacent to the site of the rebellion. It is currently developing an Australian Centre for Democracy@Eureka with \$11 million in funding from the Australian government and state and local governments.

Regional galleries are thriving in larger regional cities. Positioned as part of local council cultural services, they are supported in some states by regional arts councils and savvy friends who are well-connected members of the elite in their community. Regional gallery organisations are influential mentors, providing advice about development, design and funding. Inter-council envy or emulation helps drive new gallery proposals. Local government funding is supplemented by grants from state arts departments and occasionally the Australia Council. Fundraising by the local arts society demonstrates community support. Many regional galleries are in purpose-built buildings or have contemporary extensions providing good facilities for collections, exhibitions and visitors. A notable feature of the regional gallery movement is management and funding by local government with paid professional staff. Volunteers are still an important part of their operations, but most regional galleries make a seamless transition from initial advocacy by local arts societies to a new building developed by the council with staff to manage programs of travelling exhibitions.

While local government has accepted libraries and even galleries as an integral part of its cultural services, it is less common for councils to manage historical museums. Many councils support their local museums with occasional grants, waiving rates, paying power bills and maintaining buildings, but there are relatively few historical museums that are the equivalent of regional galleries in staffing, funding, programs or buildings. It is difficult for local history museums to make the transition from a volunteer-managed operation to one funded and managed by local government with paid professional staff, particularly when the museum has been running for 40 or 50 years. [13] It may be that volunteer-managed museums are victims of their own self reliance, funding their operations by admission charges, running markets and stalls, selling crafts, jam, books and research services, offering heritage tours and getting help from service clubs to throw up a new shed. In some tourism areas on the coast a few historical museums are able to pay staff out of earned income.

Reviewing the past decade of museum development, it is evident that Australians far prefer to open new museums than fix the ones they already have. The Centenary of Federation in 2001 saw the opening of many new museums in communities that already had one or more museum crying out for investment and renewal. Australia's passion for museum making, rather than museum fixing, is leading to unsustainable numbers of museums and the neglect of collections held in thousands of museums all over the country. In the UK there is about one museum for every 24,000 persons. The US has about one museum for every 17,500 people. Australia has about one museum for every 7458 persons. [14]

Given these figures, it is not surprising that the human and financial resources to sustain the legacy of the last 60 years of collecting in regional Australia are not keeping pace with decaying buildings and collections, aging volunteers, rising standards and the expectations of visitors. More importantly perhaps, the skills base for museum operations has shifted dramatically. In the 1960s and 1970s volunteer museums were essentially a hands-on operation, with an emphasis on manual skills – renovating buildings, constructing exhibits, moving large objects and buildings, restoring (or wrecking) the collection, and showcasing traditional rural skills. In general the book work of museum practice took a back seat, if it happened at all; hence the legacy of poorly documented and provenanced collections. In many ways these museums were an early manifestation of the community men's shed movement. Museum management now requires a completely different skills set, one which is not so readily found in small communities, and which in many ways is less rewarding for the available volunteers, who may have left school at 15. We do not expect volunteer librarians to catalogue books, which are in any case of low intrinsic value, but we still expect

volunteers in their 70s and 80s to catalogue irreplaceable heritage collections and meet ever more onerous museum standards. That so many volunteers manage to do this is extraordinary.

The sustainability crisis facing museums in regional Australia is exacerbated by a lack of policy and equitable funding structures for museums and heritage collections. Unlike the US and UK, which have well-resourced agencies to support collections in local and regional museums with significant grants, [15] our nearest equivalent, the Collections Council of Australia, was defunded in 2009. The Cultural Ministers Council (CMC), which made this decision, has overseen a succession of abandoned advisory bodies and lost policy opportunities for collections. [16] Despite its title, CMC has little interest in culture in regional Australia, apart from Indigenous culture. Its main focus is the arts in capital cities. In the last 10 years CMC commissioned the Nugent, Strong and Myer reports, which delivered tens of millions of dollars in recurrent funding for major performing arts organisations, orchestras and visual arts and crafts. CMC's commissioned report on collections, the *Key Needs Study*, had no funding outcome for collections. [17] The main outcome was the creation of the Collections Council of Australia in 2004, with grandiose terms of reference relative to its modest budget. [18]

Funding for the Collections Australia Network (CAN), another CMC program, was also discontinued in 2010. [19] CAN is the main online gateway to regional collections and museums, and it offers useful resources for volunteers working with collections. A consultant's report on future directions for CAN was never released. At a time when the Australian government is putting billions of dollars into the National Broadband Network, it is surprising that the main portal for discovering regional collections is now on ice. The digital divide between state and national museums and regional collections is set to widen with this decision.

CMC's primary interest in the professional arts is mirrored in state government arts departments, whose policy and funding priorities are focused on professional contemporary arts practice. Volunteer-managed museums struggle to fit arts policy and funding boxes. Their work and collections are not respected in funding allocations. Over the last 10 years governments have lavished funding on new theme museums without collections, or with collections of low significance. New art spaces and regional galleries are well supported by government funding, although many collections are dominated by artists already represented in other galleries. However there is no policy or funding impetus to uplift community museums which hold unique and irreplaceable collections about the history and heritage of their district. Many of the historical museums developed in the 1950s and 1960s have objects and collections of national significance.

Museums and heritage collections are stranded between arts and heritage policy with little access to the kinds of funds available to the arts. [20] Arts Queensland for example has targeted grant programs for regional gallery development and exhibitions, but no funding program to foster local government investment in museums or assist community museums to make the transition to a regional museum. Various reports on museums commissioned by state government arts departments have done nothing to lift museums and heritage collections in regional areas out of cultural poverty. [21] One possible exception is Victoria's *Strengthening our Communities* strategy, with \$20 million in funding over four years. [22] However community collections are only one strand in an ambitious strategy. It is not clear if it will result in realistic investment in museum buildings and collections, as opposed to more advice.

Instead of policy and strategic development funds, most state governments support advisory services for museums in the regions. Some are managed out of state government museums; others are run through professional associations or by museum and gallery support agencies. After decades of funding of advisory services, there is no evidence that advice leads to more sustainable collections or the renewal of museums in regional Australia. In some ways it is little more than palliative care for dying museums and aging volunteers. Accreditation and standards programs are the current focus of the museum services industry. In other areas of community service, an emphasis on standards and accreditation in the 1990s led to a new compact between community organisations, volunteers and governments, with investment in new facilities and government funding to professionalise services such as Meals on Wheels and surf lifesaving. [23] But there is no equivalent compact for volunteer-managed museums; the responsibilities are all one way. [24] Standards have not led to corresponding pressure on governments to fix decrepit museum buildings and fund professional staff to work on collections with volunteers.

While volunteers working on Landcare projects have been showered with resources and professional support, there has been little recognition of the work of volunteers involved in

collections care. There is no common branding for the plethora of regional and community museums and heritage places. Museums in regional Australia have not had the leadership and strategic advocacy which launched Landcare. When it comes to advocacy for rural and regional museums, museum service organisations generally ask first for more funds for advisory services. Most of the work of museum volunteers is done out of the public eye. Their steady work on archives and collections doesn't leave a statement in the landscape like a row of poisoned willows. Yet volunteers in museums in regional Australia make a remarkable contribution to their communities. [25]

A look at the Manning Valley Historical Society provides a snapshot of the work of museum volunteers in Wingham, (population 4500) on the mid-north coast of NSW. The Society began in 1964 and the museum, which is open seven days a week, is in an historic shop purchased in 1974. It is the oldest commercial building in Wingham. The vernacular timber building would probably not have survived without the Society's acquisition and restoration. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays there may be up to 20 volunteers at work on the collections, archives and building. Recent work in a three-month period includes researching the significance of the collection, reorganising the collection working space, documenting costumes for nomination to the Powerhouse Museum's Australian Dress Register, updating the catalogue database, hosting school visits, digitising photographs, indexing local newspapers, contributing a regular history feature to the *Wingham Chronicle* and answering research enquiries. The Society's archives are the most important local studies collection in the district and are used for all kinds of heritage studies and local history queries. In addition, the Society published its journal, which is issued three times a year, a newsletter and a new book, *Postcards from the Front*, in time for Anzac Day. Working with the tourism information centre, volunteers supplied copies of historic photographs and captions for interpretive signs. And they initiated a project to put historic photos of buildings and businesses in shop windows in Wingham. Museum volunteers were involved in fundraising for the Cancer Council, participating in the Biggest Morning Tea event. And volunteers helped organise the Scottish Festival, a three-day event initiated by the Historical Society. It is now a fixture on the tourism calendar of Wingham. Apart from economic development, tourism services and managing cultural assets, volunteer museums like the Manning Valley Historical Society generate other benefits for their communities, such as workplace training for the unemployed and social inclusion for older people and people with disabilities. A widow confided that the museum was her lifeline in coping with grief and loneliness after her husband's death.

Considering the large number of museums and their range of work and services, it is arguable that more volunteer hours are worked in community museums in regional Australia than in any other charitable or community service. [26] Many of these museums are open six or seven days a week. This shows great dedication by volunteers, considering that many museum buildings are freezing in winter and stifling in summer. Some have no collection working space or kitchen facilities to make a cup of tea, or even toilets. Many museum buildings do not meet local government building codes. Most historical collections in regional Australia are housed in heritage buildings and sheds that fall well short of acceptable standards for collections or people. Rabbit warrens of small rooms in heritage buildings put the collections at risk. Some museums are in former government buildings like courthouses, jails and railway stations which have been foisted on local communities without funding for maintenance or adaptation. The lack of investment in buildings, exhibitions and people means that communities are not realising the educational and cultural potential inherent in the collections. Nor is the asset value of the collections being protected.

Without understanding this background, it is easy to disparage the shortcomings of historical museums in regional Australia. It is true that some volunteer-managed museums prefer keeping to sharing, that some are resistant to new ideas, wary of outsiders and have barely changed their displays since they opened 30 or 40 years ago. Too many museums in regional Australia look like antique shops without the prices. In the jumble of obsolete technology it can be hard to see the unique objects, local innovations and national treasures. They are criticised for their focus on pioneers, lack of interest in migrants – not true, and for insensitive exhibits about Aboriginal people. But there is too little recognition of the value of local history museums, the significance of their collections and the services provided by thousands of museum volunteers across Australia.

There are ready solutions for the challenges facing volunteer-managed historical museums. Pigott had the right idea, recommending regional networks with professional curators, and an Australian Museums Commission to coordinate funding and policy. Variations on this formula have been restated in other papers and policy proposals and it has been tried and tested overseas. [27]

So what is the case for sustaining museums in regional and rural Australia? It is a fact that regional communities are taxed three times for cultural facilities. They fund state and Australian government collecting organisations through their taxes, and are taxed again for cultural facilities through local government rates. If the funding disparity for museums was reflected in education or health it would cause an outcry. Years of cost shifting onto local government makes it harder for councils to develop cultural facilities. Of course state and national collections are important for all Australians. But fairness, economic development and liveable communities mean there should be equitable funding for regional towns and cities to support museums about their history, culture and place. Collections should merit investment based on their significance, not accidents of geography. People should not have to live in Ballarat or marginal seats to get funding for museum development and renewal. Nor should funding for museums and cultural facilities in regional Australia be based on trickle-down economics, with volunteer-managed collections at the bottom of the heap. What's required is a tripartite partnership between the Australian government, the states and local government.

When public culture is already dominated by city-centric media, images and opinion, it is all the more important that diversity is fostered in museum culture and collections. Regional collections hold unique objects, images, ideas and histories. There are many aspects of Australian history that are not well represented in state and national collections, or in mainstream libraries and archives. Collections about mining, transport and agriculture are best understood in their regional context, connected with the place where the work was done and the objects were used. These are vital industries that powered Australia, transformed the environment and underpinned the prosperity of Australian cities. They merit professional curation and interpretation.

The history of frontier conflict and cooperation between Indigenous people and explorers and settlers is hidden in small museums all over the country. In the Cairns Historical Society 400 glass plate negatives taken by Alfred Atkinson include stunning images of Indigenous people in the district. Important histories of migration and settlement are intimately connected with specific geographies in every corner of Australia. Broome, for example, was excised from the reach of the White Australia Act to keep the pearling industry going. In 1900 it was an extraordinary cultural melting pot. This is one of the stories in the collection of the Broome Historical Society. In far north Queensland, museum collections illuminate the contribution and culture of Chinese migrants who flocked to the Palmer River goldfields. And in southern NSW the experience of ordinary rural working women is captured in the humble objects they made and used in daily life. Visionary collecting by the Pioneer Women's Hut at Tumbaramba has given these women and their stories a place in history.

Every region in the country, in its environmental and cultural diversity, is an important part of the mosaic that makes the nation. Australia's remarkable history, people and cultures are documented in the distributed national collection held in museums across the country. The collections are a credit to the enterprise and foresight of thousands of volunteers, and the generosity of Australian families. Building these collections was an expression of trust and optimism in the future of their communities. They recognised their place in a larger national picture. It's an open question whether museum policy makers will do the same and secure the future of these museums.

Footnotes

¹ There are no accurate statistics about the numbers of museums in Australia, let alone regional Australia. Most forms of museum census rely on responses to surveys that may not generate an accurate response rate from small organisations. In Western Australia in 2004, a survey of 250 collecting organisations elicited 143 responses. The Collections Council of Australia (CCA) began to document numbers of collecting organisations before it was defunded, including museums, galleries, libraries and archives. Its unpublished Australian Collecting Organisations Register includes approximately 5000 collecting organisations. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey just 1329 museums, of which 12 per cent are art galleries and the remaining 88 per cent are classified as 'other museums'. Its methodology excludes the vast majority of volunteer-managed museums. Arts Victoria lists 740 community museums and 18 regional galleries. Museums and Gallery Services Queensland identifies 408 heritage places including museums, galleries and keeping places. Museums and Galleries NSW identifies 586 museums, keeping places and galleries in NSW, not counting state and national institutions. Most of these statistics underestimate museum numbers, as many surveys do not count heritage place museums, many of which have significant *in situ* collections.

² The term 'community museum' refers to volunteer-managed museums such as historical societies, while a regional museum is generally managed by local government with paid trained museum staff, supported by volunteers.

³ The small town of Hay in south-western NSW, with less than 3000 people, has five museums. Goulburn in NSW has five museums including the regional gallery managed by council, an historical society and the National Trust house museum of Riversdale. Probably only one of these is counted by the ABS. Goulburn's museum mix of historical society, house museum, heritage places and a newer regional gallery with paid professional staff is representative of the museum profile of many older regional towns.

⁴ PH Pigott, *Museums in Australia 1975, Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, AGPS, 1975, p. 24.

⁵ Quoted in Melanie Oppenheimer, *Volunteering, why we can't survive without it*, University of NSW Press, 2008, p. 177.

⁶ By 1990 the South Australian National Trust managed 61 museums and 97 historic buildings. Carol Cosgrove and Susan Marsden, *Challenging Times, National Trust of South Australia 50th Year History*, National Trust of South Australia, p. 132.

⁷ Nicole McLennan, 'Eric Dunlop and the origins of Australia's folk museums', *Recollections*, Vol. 1, No.2.

⁸ EW Dunlop, *Local Historical Museums in Australia*, The Royal Australian Historical Society, 1968. McLennan notes this booklet was sent free of charge to all affiliates with the RAHS and that the Society also earned \$405 from sales in the first two years after its publication, suggesting a high demand for its advice.

⁹ Pigott, *Museums in Australia*, p. 19.

¹⁰ For example Mt Morgan in Queensland, Burra in South Australia, Hill End in NSW.

¹¹ With the crossover between Hope's *Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate* and Pigott's Report on museums underway at the same time, a decision was made to leave heritage place museums to Hope. This led to a disastrous split in policy making and funding for heritage places and collections that continues to the present.

¹² Graeme Davison calls Sovereign Hill a 'pleasure resort rather than a real mining town. It has many shopkeepers but few miners, several entertainers but no prostitutes, a picturesque school-house but no undertaker'. The dirty reality of an 1850s mining site cannot be reproduced in a form suitable for family outings in the twenty-first century, nevertheless Sovereign Hill is based on extensive historical research which animates every facet of its interpretation. Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Allen and Unwin, 2000, p. 170.

¹³ One example of this transition is the Museum of the Riverina, created through a partnership between the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society and Wagga City Council. The Historical Society transferred its collection and building to Council in return for Council employing professional staff and investing in the collection, exhibitions and building. Showing what can be done with a little investment and professional staff, the Museum won its category in the ABC's 2008 Regional Museum Competition. See <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/museums/2008/award/museums/MuseumRiverina/>

¹⁴ These figures are derived by dividing the population figures by the estimated number of museums. For the UK museum numbers see www.museumsassociation.org/about/frequently-asked-questions. For the US museum numbers see http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/abc.cfm#how_many. For a comment on the number of Australian collecting organisations see www.collectionscouncil.com.au/Portals/0/The%20Australian%20collections%20sector.pdf. There is no accurate census of museum numbers in Australia. I estimate the number at a conservative 3,000, see note 1. This may be an underestimation. Local and regional surveys show higher numbers of museums than statistics compiled by state agencies. For example, the New South Wales the town of Hay has one museum for every 527 people, while the village of Carcoar in central New South Wales has 1 museum for every 43 people!

¹⁵ The Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in the UK and the Institute of Museum and Library Services in the US develop policy for collections and provide significant grants to local and regional museums. Since the election of a new Conservative UK government, the MLA has been defunded and its responsibilities transferred to the Arts Council. However it seems certain that its well regarded 'Renaissance in the Regions' program, which supports museums and libraries, will be sustained.

¹⁶ For example *Australia's Heritage Collections; National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy*, Cultural Ministers Council and Heritage Collections Council, 1998; sensible policies and strategies which have mainly been ignored. Collections advisory bodies initiated and abandoned by CMC include the Heritage Collections Working Group 1990–93; the Heritage Collections Committee 1994–96; the Heritage Collections Council 1997–2001; and the Collections Council of Australia 2004–2009.

¹⁷ Deakin University, Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, *A study into the key needs of collecting institutions in the heritage sector*, Cultural Ministers Council, Canberra, 2002.

¹⁸ The budget was around \$400,000 per annum. The writer was a director of the CCA.

¹⁹ The Powerhouse Museum, which managed development of the CAN website, has agreed to keep the site live, but no new material can be added. This is a blow to those museums in regional Australia who were using CAN to share their collections with a wider audience.

²⁰ There is no equivalent to the Australia Council for museums or collections. The Australian government makes a small contribution to regional collections through the Community Heritage Grants (CHG) Program. And its much-criticised stimulus funding is also supporting some community museums in heritage buildings to undertake urgent capital works. Unfortunately this is one-off funding. Apart from the CHG Program, collections are the one aspect of culture that the Australian government does not support through policy or funding, except for items lucky enough to land in Australian government collections.

²¹ See for example, Jane Lennon, *Hidden Heritage, a development plan for museums in Queensland 1995–2001*, Arts Queensland; and Museum Policy Reference Group, *Developing a Way Forward for Western Australia's Heritage Collections and Collectors*, Department of Culture and the Arts, 2005. While these reports make many sound recommendations, they have not led to significant new investment in museum buildings, interpretation and professional staff. In the case of Queensland, *Hidden Heritage* led to the funding of Museum Development Officer positions in some regions, but it has had little practical impact on the funding and renewal of community museums. In the same period a number of new regional galleries were opened with paid professional staff and significant grants from Arts Queensland. In NSW the Carr government funded a strategy to develop a network of regional museums, which in turn were to support volunteer-managed museums and collections in the region – a hub and spoke museum model. This policy was abandoned by the Lemmon/Rees/Keneally governments. The dedicated museum grant program was abolished and direct grants to museums have declined by 60 to 80 per cent. Some \$700,000 per annum that was tagged for capital works and salary subsidies for regional museums appears to have been reallocated to other areas of the arts. See also Anne Dunn, *The Dunn Report: A report on the concept of regional collections hubs*, Collections Council of Australia, Adelaide, 2007. This led to a trial regional hub in the Kalgoorlie/Boulder region of WA, running in 2010–11, with funding from the Myer Foundation, but a wider rollout of the CollectionsCare regional hub concept was not supported by the Australian government.

²² See <http://www.heritage.vic.gov.au/Heritage-Victoria/Strategy.aspx>

²³ These changes in the relationship between volunteer organisations and government are discussed in Oppenheimer, *Volunteering*, chapter 7, p. 151.

²⁴ In some states, accreditation or completing a standards program makes museums eligible to apply for certain grants, but the funds available are modest.

²⁵ The ABC's Regional Museums Award web pages provide an interesting summary of the many ways that museums are working with their communities. See <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/museums/>

²⁶ While there may be greater numbers of volunteers involved in sporting activities, museum volunteering is often a seven-day-a-week operation over 363 days a year. Active members of volunteer museums commit more hours to their work on a weekly and year-round basis, without the seasonal fluctuations of volunteering in sporting organisations. It is not unusual for museum committee members to put in 30 or 40 hours a week of voluntary work.

²⁷ *Pigott Report*, p. 28; Dunn, *The Dunn Report*; and Kylie Winkworth, 'Fixing the Slums of Australian Museums', Museums Australia Conference, 2005.

Kylie Winkworth is a museum and heritage consultant and occasional advocate for regional collections.

Cite as: Kylie Winkworth, 2011, 'Let a thousand flowers bloom: museums in regional Australia', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/KWinkworth_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Regional museums

Drawing people together: the local and regional museum movement in Australia

by Kimberley Webber, Liz Gillroy, Joanne Hyland, Amanda James, Laura Miles, Deborah Tranter and Kate Walsh

Recent decades have seen a burgeoning of local museums across Australia, reflecting growing community interest. [1] Their funding sources are largely state and local governments and this contributes to distinct differences: Western Australia and Queensland, for example, have well-established regional museum networks overseen by the state museum; in New South Wales support comes from the Museums and Galleries New South Wales, which aims to nurture 'sustainable museums and galleries within their community'. [2] There is also similarity: the majority of local museums are run by volunteers and rely largely on their energy and commitment to survive and grow. Local and state government support is far from reliable. Regional Australia remains under-represented in the major state museums, and these under-resourced and largely volunteer-run institutions are the principal preservers of the tangible heritage of our past, and the accompanying stories.

In considering the significance of the regional museum movement in Australia, it is important to remember that it is comparatively recent. Unlike the United States and the UK, interest in collecting and interpreting material culture in Australia came late. The Royal Australian Historical Society was not founded until 1901, the National Trust not until 1946. Only in the 1980s, with the prospect of the bicentenary of European settlement, did state museums move from a focus primarily on natural history and technology to embrace the new social history. [3]

When Markham and Richards reported on the state of Australia's museums and galleries for the Carnegie Corporation in 1933, they found only three historical 'exhibits': the War Memorial Museum and Parliament House in Canberra and Vaucluse House in Sydney. [4] Forty years later, the Pigott Report argued that since the 1960s a quickening of interest in Australian history had led through a 'grass roots movement' to the founding of hundreds of small museums across Australia. The Report concluded that:

The nature of Australian history and its relatively long democratic tradition suggests that folk museums might eventually occupy a role as important as that occupied by natural history in our museums in the nineteenth century. [5]

But if the authors found much potential in regional museums, they also found common problems: inadequate buildings, the absence of professional staff or advice, poor conservation and documentation and scarce storage. They also considered there was a 'sameness' about the displays.

Over the last 30 years efforts have been made to address these problems. However, important recommendations of the Pigott Report remain unrealised, including the proposal for regional networks supported by professional advisers; the acceptance of material culture as a research tool; and a 'register of rarities'.

Some of the earliest regional museums are found in Western Australia: Joanne Hyland surveys their development and the impact of government initiatives, particularly the availability of funds through Lotterywest. In Queensland, Deborah Tranter explains the significance of the Queensland Museum's regional branches and the effect of a new interest in the state's cultural heritage on community museums. Kate Walsh and Amanda James identify issues common to all states, but also outline the role of the History Trust [6] in providing support and advice. In Victoria, Laura Miles demonstrates the importance of the Museums Association (Victoria) and government departments in supporting the state's regional museums, where today the majority remain volunteer run. Finally, in New South Wales, Liz Gillroy documents the rich variety of community museums in just one region, Port Macquarie, highlighting their challenges and achievements.

Western Australia

At the time of the Pigott Report's release in 1975, the needs of select regional museums (mostly historical societies) in Western Australia were already being addressed through the Western Australian Museum's (WAM) extension service founded in the late 1960s. Later outreach services – the Local Museums Program (1970 to 1994) and the Museum Assistance Program from 1994 – provided advice and support, initially to 18 'recognised' municipal museums, mostly in the south-west quarter of the state, and subsequently around 330 local museums by 2007.

In the mid-1980s the professionalism of the museum sector in WA was boosted by key developments: the Travelling Curator program, the introduction of quality education programs, and a specific purpose grants program funded by the then Lotteries Commission (now Lotterywest).

The establishment of regular funding for museums from the Lottery has had a significant impact on museums, as well as on the professional consultants who provide services. Contractors have been engaged to work on specific tasks including curatorial activities, development of conservation and interpretation plans, and conducting significance assessments. Lotterywest funding also enables community museums to purchase IT hardware and software, including the locally developed Mosaic collection management system. This system, now used throughout the country, also owes much of its success to the work of those in the Mid West Chapter of Museums Australia.

Since 1988 museums in each region of the state have had access to advisory visits by teams of Western Australian Museum staff, with regular regional training workshops. An annual introductory training course began in Perth and operated, in one form or another, for over 20 years, benefiting hundreds of people working in community museums. Until 2006 organisations were invited to nominate participants and to apply for Lotteries Commission grants to fund their attendance. This program has now been replaced by 'smart' delivery via Web and electronic systems.

With a state representing a third of the Australian continent, WA's collections contend with a range of environmental conditions encompassing tropical, arid and temperate zones. This has required great flexibility in planning for housing and conserving collections. Indigenous cultural heritage, often located in savage environmental conditions, has a unique range of requirements.

The period 2007 to 2010 saw reduced funding for services leading to reliance on technology, especially telephone and Internet, to meet client demand. Regional advisory services, field visits and workshops were cut back, however 2011 has seen the reinstatement of funding to support field advisory visits to the regions. Continuing collaboration with Museums Australia (WA) has seen improved communications with clients via surveys that allow tailored education and training programs to be developed.

Change has been incremental and cumulative. The impetus has come from increased funding sources and trained staff. Volunteers have gained a sense of achievement through training and working with their peers. However, museums that are wholly dependent on volunteer staff remain handicapped. While small, independent collecting bodies are entirely dependent on volunteers, problems that have plagued the sector from its earliest beginnings will continue: lack of recurrent funding; difficulty in attracting and keeping workers; lack of access to training and education; isolation; poor storage and display conditions; and limited documentation and scarcity of conservation services. Contemporary pressures create further demands: the need to accommodate digital technologies; the urgency of succession planning for an aging workforce; and increasing competition for scarce services.

The community museum movement in Queensland

Although there were some early museums in regional cities and towns in Queensland,^[7] a community museums movement only emerged with the economic and social changes of the 1970s. As clearing sale signs appeared on more and more farms, there was growing concern that the region's heritage was being irretrievably lost. Community museums were primarily established to save the contents of farm sheds and other objects left behind by retiring property owners. This was also the time of rescuing buildings and relocating them to a museum 'village' complex. The buildings themselves were treated as artefacts, with the added advantage of their being able to house collections.

The first attempt in Queensland to provide state support to community museums was in 1982, when the Board of the Queensland Museum convinced the government to introduce the *Grant Towards Local Museum Activities Scheme*. Although grants were limited, the scheme was popular in regional communities and enabled the Queensland Museum to provide professional guidance in

museum practices.

The Board of the Queensland Museum also established branches or campuses in regional Queensland from the mid 1980s, [8] bringing the state museum for the first time into direct contact with regional communities, museums and local authorities.

Community museums were increasing at the rate of nearly one a month in the early 1990s, [9] and by 1995 there were 175 small museum grants being distributed by the Queensland Museum. [10] The 1990 *Review of the Arts in Queensland* recognised that the contribution of the community museums to the 'cultural milieu in Queensland had been previously overlooked', but acknowledged that through lack of resources 'a significant part of Queensland's culture and history is underutilised, unknown and inaccessible to the majority of Queenslanders'. [11] Despite these concerns, the only outcome was an official decision to review the Queensland Museum and its relationship to the community museum sector. The subsequent report described these museums as 'one of the most dynamic and little recognised resources in the cultural area' of the state. However the then government took no action as a result. [12]

Two years later, Arts Queensland finally intervened, commissioning an assessment of the community museum sector in Queensland, which recommended the formation of the Museum Resource Centre Network (MRCN). [13] This unique partnership, forged between the Queensland Museum, Arts Queensland and local authorities, employs museum development officers (MDOs) to live and work in the regions and provide professional services to hundreds of heritage collecting organisations in regional Queensland.

Escalating interest in cultural heritage activities, generated through the Queensland Heritage Trails Network and the availability of other Centenary of Federation funding sources in 2001, increased demands on the MDO services. In response, a new strategic direction was introduced in 2005, with the commencement of a project to map thematically almost 300 heritage collections across the state, as had been suggested by the Pigott Report 30 years earlier.

As expected, the majority of the more traditional organisations still project a way of life dependent on traditional rural industries. There is much less collection emphasis on living and working in regional towns than on life on rural properties. A great deal of duplication of artefacts exists across collections.

Of greater concern is the fact that little collecting of recent material is taking place. Anyone born after the Second World War will rarely find his or her stories reflected in regional collections. Further, collections reflecting the state's rich cultural diversity are also few and far between although community groups, particularly in the far north of the state, are starting to realise the value of their collections to society as a whole.

There is also some increased collection-based activity by Indigenous groups such as the Cherbourg and Kowanyama Aboriginal communities and the Joskeleigh South Sea Islander community near Rockhampton. These and other groups look towards the Yugambah Museum, Language and Heritage Centre at Beenleigh as an excellent model for preserving and interpreting traditional and contemporary artefacts and photographs supported by oral histories.

Since 2007 museum development officers have been working on significance assessments across the state. Important material has been documented as a result, including the Chinese Temple Collection in Cairns.

Local government amalgamation in March 2008 has benefited many collecting organisations, with new regional councils seeking more coordinated approaches. The Toowoomba Regional Council has supported the development of a Cultural Heritage Network of 27 separate organisations, thereby having a single avenue for communication. Another development post-amalgamation is the move by some larger councils to employ heritage or museum officers to work across a number of their volunteer-run organisations.

In Queensland there is still much to achieve before heritage collections adequately reflect the state's vast natural and cultural diversity. However the partnership forged between the Queensland Museum, Arts Queensland and local councils provides a pathway to ensuring that all Queenslanders will have their stories reflected in collections and preserved for future generations.

Local and regional museums in South Australia

Numbers of museums in South Australia increased rapidly from about 20 in 1960 to 170 by 1990, and 200 in 2008, spurred on in the 1960s and 1970s by the push for heritage preservation, and in the 1980s by the state's sesquicentenary (1986) and Australia's bicentenary (1988). Often buildings saved from demolition became local museums, with records and objects relating to pioneering families and rural life.

Since the 1970s private collectors have also operated museums in regional South Australia, with displays reflecting their passions – shells, dolls, toys, coins, costume, cars and machinery. These museums have come and gone, with collections often selling on the open market.

Most small community-based museums accumulated mixed collections of furniture, documents and photographs, domestic artefacts, textiles and machinery. Some focused on aspects of the state's history, or were associated with a person of historical interest, such as explorer Charles Sturt (Charles Sturt House Museum) or colonial Premier Sir Henry Ayers (Ayers House). Others, such as the museum of the Embroiderers' Guild of South Australia, acquired specialist collections. Collectively, they acquired, displayed and stored thousands of historical items, relying on community support and their own fundraising efforts.

In 1976, the state government created a Museums Officer position at the South Australian Museum to provide advice and assistance and to mould these diverse and scattered museums into a strategic and supportive network. This network was accumulating and displaying the evidence of South Australia's European settlement and social history at a time when state-funded collecting institutions focused largely on art, natural sciences and anthropology.

The 1981 Edwards Report – commissioned by government to review museum developments on Adelaide's North Terrace cultural precinct – recommended the establishment of the History Trust of South Australia to operate social history museums and fill the gap in the state's collecting areas. [14] The History Trust was duly established as a statutory authority, opened the South Australian Maritime Museum and the Migration and Settlement Museum, both in 1986, and took over management of the Constitutional Museum and Birdwood Mill Motor Museum. [15]

The History Trust's other core responsibility was to 'accredit or otherwise to evaluate museums'. [16] The Museums Officer position was transferred to the History Trust and in 1982 the Museums Accreditation and Grants Program (MAGP) [17] was launched. Since 1982, reviews of the method of servicing museums, program standards and individual museum operations have mirrored the growing development of museological practice for social history collections and displays. In 2008, standards were aligned with the new National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries. A key feature of the MAGP has been its ongoing annual grant allocation which has distributed over two million dollars to assist small museums to improve their facilities, develop policies and procedures, install interpretive displays and preserve their collections. The MAGP has always been voluntary, with participating museums numbering as high as 97 at the end of the 1990s. In 2008 this had fallen to 62, representing about a third of the state's local and regional museum sector.

The History Trust's MAGP has encouraged small museums to develop major displays linking their collections to South Australia's key regional stories, and to work with professional historians and designers. Both the History Trust and the South Australian Tourism Commission emphasise the importance of local stories in attracting visitors and tourists.

Since the 1970s certain trends have typified the small museum sector. First, the vast majority of community museums were established, and are still managed, by volunteers. Only in the last decade have younger volunteers become involved. Numbers have remained steady at about 20,000 since the 1980s, although within particular museums they can vary greatly. The History Trust, Museums Australia and Artlab Australia (the state conservation laboratory) have offered field visits and training programs since the 1980s.

Second, few community museums have collection development policies, and as a result there is significant duplication of object types, especially common domestic and agricultural artefacts.

Third, many collections in small museums are poorly documented. Although more museums are entering collections onto computer databases, information is often scant and confined to descriptions of items rather than a detailed record of provenance.

Finally, local government involvement, especially in regional areas, has been uneven. Council support has been largely confined to helping with maintenance and administration costs, or rent

reduction and access to local community benefit funds. Metropolitan councils, however, have a better track record in supporting and funding local museums and interpretive centres. Most metropolitan councils employ local history officers, usually based in the local library.

Preserving and displaying the nineteenth and early twentieth century (pre-Second World War) British pioneer heritage has been the main focus of regional museums. Most gloss over local Indigenous history and European and Indigenous encounters. One outstanding exception is Melrose Courthouse Heritage Centre in the state's mid-north, where the story of the frontier encounter between the Nukunu people and early European settlers is told. Another is the Lady Nelson Interpretive Centre in Mount Gambier. The story of German settlement features strongly in regional South Australia, with important collections held in several museums. And a number of culturally specific museums and collections represent the post-Second World War experiences of Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish and Ukrainian communities.

There are individual examples of well-organised and viable local and regional museums, actively presenting changing displays related to South Australia's key regional stories and engaged with their local communities, but most small museums continue to operate in isolation, without strategic links to their region's tourist and economic activities. They struggle with scant resources to store adequately, display and care for their collections despite their immense historical significance to South Australia.

Museums in Victoria

The landscape of museums in Victoria has evolved significantly over the last 30 years. In 1981 the then Museums Association appointed Susan Tonkin as the first salaried executive officer to its Victorian branch. In the same year the state government's Ministry for the Arts appointed Roger Trudgeon, whose seminal survey of Victorian museums in 1984 [18] led to the creation of two state government structures: the Museums Unit, which developed grants programs and the Museums Resource Service, and the Museums Advisory Board, which advised the Minister for the Arts on community museums and policy for the Museums Unit. [19]

Between 1984 and its disbanding in 1995 by the Kennett government, the Museums Unit developed a cataloguing program, professional development opportunities, and a small grants program for community museums. These services and associated activities were transferred to Museums Australia (Victoria).

There are over 740 museums in Victoria [20] and 500 members of MA (Vic). Of these, 60 are in the Museums Accreditation Program (MAP) [21] which peer-reviews museums to achieve and develop standards. Museums with MAP status receive preferential promotion from Tourism Victoria and are branded with the Victorian tourism 'tick' logo, a recognised mark of quality.

Victorian museums are supported by a number of organisations and two state government departments, Arts Victoria and Heritage Victoria. Since 2001, MA (Vic) has devolved over one million dollars in small infrastructure and exhibition development grants from Arts Victoria. The variety of grants available in the sector is extensive, however navigating funding rounds and responding to opportunities remains a challenge, particularly for museums with limited resources. Access to sustainable support, both financial and otherwise, is arguably the biggest challenge for the state's museums.

In a 2002 report, a quarter (34 out of 138) of museums surveyed stated that government grants were their main income, and paid staff ran 22 of the 34. [22] This reliance on volunteers is an asset, as they represent a significant long-term resource willing to care for Victoria's cultural heritage. Increasingly, the larger institutions have supported volunteers and paid staff via partnerships, training and outreach programs. Organisations taking an active lead in this effort include MA (Vic), the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, the National Trust (Vic), the Public Galleries Association of Victoria, the State Library of Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria and Museum Victoria.

One model that has addressed this key issue is the 'regional hub'. Arts Victoria has long considered this approach, particularly in the 'Revitalising Victoria's Community Museums' consultation process in 2004–05, [23] and successfully piloted the Goldfields project with an established Community Museums Project Officer to bring together museum organisations and groups to collaborate on projects and best-practice networks.

Like other states and territories, Victoria's 'long tail' of community museums today offers a rich palette of social history collections and stories. However, the old terminology of 'local' museums is too general a definition. Two examples of 'local' or community museums established since 1976 are the Shepparton Keeping Place, now known as the Bangerang Cultural Centre, which was conceived in 1974 and opened in 1982, and the Physics Museum at the University of Melbourne, established in the 1980s. As with so many community museums, both were brought to life largely because of the sustained efforts of a handful of committed and resourceful museum people.

In 1993 organisations fitting the MA definition of a museum numbered 621. [24] Of those surveyed, the vast majority (158) was classified as historical societies, followed by historic collections (71), private collections (52), historic properties (35), heritage/theme parks (32), art museums (32), research collections (23), corporate collections (11) and archives (10). [25]

Most tellingly, half of the community museums are solely volunteer operated. This statistic has remained constant, indicating a relatively controlled expansion of the number of museums and museum people in Victoria, with virtually no increase in state funding. In Victoria today there are an estimated 2000 paid and 4000 volunteer museum staff caring for 1.5 million cultural heritage objects across the state. [26]

Some positive trends are evident from the strong commitment to museums in Victoria. The emphasis is shifting from pure collections management to a more integrated approach to both collections and interpretation when planning exhibitions. There are more collaborative partnerships and significance assessments carried out. Some community museums have found resources to upgrade their physical environment, attracting loans for temporary exhibitions. In the last decade, larger museums have applied technologies to offer interactive spaces both within the physical museum and online. It is now commonplace to have virtual visitors, with some larger organisations actively encouraging visitors to compile their own stories using social media tools and technologies such as 3G mobile phones, Flickr, Twitter, Blogger and mash-ups.

Port Macquarie: a New South Wales case study

As the third oldest British settlement on the Australian mainland, Port Macquarie has a history of convict settlement, economic decline with the end of transportation and free convict labour, followed by eventual prosperity through the timber industry. In recent years, tourism and the 'seachange' phenomenon have re-established Port Macquarie as the region's capital and brought a younger, more affluent and better-educated demographic.

For over 50 years local people have celebrated and commemorated this history in a particularly rich range of historical societies, museums and heritage groups. A local schoolteacher formed the first – the Hastings River Historical Society – in 1956. Today there are 12 museums, historical societies and history and heritage groups in the local government area.

Community volunteers manage all except Timbertown and Roto House. This leads to significant management changes at election time each year. However, a full-time local government curator provides continuity and assists in the development of a regional plan.

The Port Macquarie Historical Museum opened in 1957 and, since 1960, has been housed in an 1840s building in a prime CBD location, purchased by the Society in 1968. Its mission is to collect, conserve, research and interpret the history and heritage of Port Macquarie and the Hastings. Current membership is 100, of whom 70 are 'active'.

This Museum is a good example of the fate that can befall the volunteer museum sector. At first, the committee was far sighted, motivated by a passion to record and collect local history. In the 1960s, for example, members flew to Scotland to purchase the diaries of one-time local resident Annabella Boswell. Twenty years later, they redeveloped the Museum, organising exhibits into a 'street of shops', and winning the Museum of the Year Award in 1981 and again in 1982. However the same displays can still be seen today.

The National Parks and Wildlife Division of the Department of Climate Change now manage Roto House (built in 1890) with volunteers taking daily tours. The collection is specific to the house and to the Flynn family who lived there until 1976. Volunteers also manage Douglas Vale Homestead and Vineyard, dating to 1869. The house remained in the same family until it was left derelict in the early 1990s. The community fought hard to save the grounds and the title was recently handed over to the Douglas Vale Conservation Group. The Homestead has had the advantage of a

consistent group of volunteers, led by a professional conservator. Nonetheless there are tensions between commercial interests – such as the sale of wine from a cellar door on the property – and preservation concerns.

The Maritime Museum in Port Macquarie is spread across three sites: the Pilot Cottages, the Pilot Boat Shed – sales point for MV *Wentworth* tours and a small exhibition venue – and the Hibbard slipway which is used by volunteers and others to restore timber craft. The responsibility for so many sites creates great financial stress.

The 1869 Court House is owned by the Department of Lands and operated by the Friends of the Courthouse. It is popular with school groups who role-play using transcripts of trials, including those of convicts.

Beyond the township is the Wauchope Museum, founded in 1956 and housed in a relocated small heritage church. The Society owns the building but it is on Council land. The collection is not well documented and is managed by 10 volunteers. Another small museum focused on collecting local photographs and writing local histories is located in the recently restored Laurieton School of Arts. The Museum Advisor worked with the Society to produce a strategic plan recommending against further acquisitions. However collecting continues, and the range of domestic objects in the collection lacks documentation.

Other groups in the area include the Port Macquarie and District Family History Society with over 200 members and a younger demographic than museum volunteers; Friends of St Thomas' Church (built 1824); the Kendall Heritage Society; the Comboyne Heritage Group; and the Fire Museum Group who are currently looking for premises, despite the fact there is a fire station display at Timbertown.

Timbertown is a recreated timber village representing the period 1890–1910. Founded in 1986, its chequered history reveals the many problems encountered when local government attempts to maintain such a facility. In and out of Council management but always holding great significance for the local community, it is once again being managed by Council and has a commercial focus. Much of the collection is domestic in focus and collection management and security are problematic.

The number, range and quality of the museums and heritage organisations in the Port Macquarie area are undoubtedly typical of museum conditions in many parts of Australia. Collections tend to focus on saving historic material from dispersal or destruction rather than on interpretation and display. Good collection management practices are not common. Although the many volunteers give generously of their time, few have a special interest in collections and little interest in researching, documenting or caring for them. However, thematic studies have begun to address these problems. *Timber Stories* in 2003–04 and *Her Story* in 2005–06 highlighted the significance of some of the objects in these museums, and revealed gaps in collecting areas.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of Clare-Frances Craig in the preparation of the section on Western Australia.

Footnotes

¹ As the Pigott Report argued: 'Undoubtedly the country museums fulfil an important need in the local community. They draw people together; they give scope to the old and to the imaginative; they are a bay window of local pride'. *Museums in Australia: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1975, p. 24.

² 'Overview', Museums and Galleries New South Wales, mg.nsw.gov.au/about_us/overview11111/

³ See Kimberley Webber, 'Constructing Australia's Past: The Development of Historical Collections 1888–1938', in Patricia Summerfield (ed.), *Proceedings of the Council of Australian Museums Associations Conference*, Perth, WA, 1986, pp. 155–173.

⁴ SF Markham and HC Richards, *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia to the Carnegie Corporation*, Museums Association, London, 1933.

⁵ *Museums in Australia: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections*, p. 21.

⁶ The name has now been changed to History SA.

⁷ In Queensland in the 1930s there were museums that were open to the public only in Rockhampton and Bundaberg and these were housed in their respective Schools of Art (Markham and Richards, 1933, p. 3).

⁸ *Queensland Museum Act 1970*.

⁹ A Bartholomai, 'Improving access to museum services in Queensland', *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum*, 30 (3), pp. 355–372 at p. 370.

¹⁰ J Lennon, *Hidden Heritage: A Development Plan for Museums in Queensland, 1995–2001*, Arts Queensland, Brisbane, 1995, p. i.

¹¹ Arts Committee, *Queensland: A State for the Arts*, Department of the Premier, Economic and Trade Development, 1991.

¹² Queensland Museum Policy Review Panel, *A Policy Review of the Queensland Museum*, Brisbane, 1992, pp. 29–30.

¹³ J Lennon, *Hidden Heritage*. Starting slowly in 1996, the MRCN now has six centres and in 2009 can finally provide direct assistance to heritage collections across all of Queensland.

¹⁴ Robert Edwards, *Museum Policy and Development in South Australia: Final Report*, Adelaide, 1981.

¹⁵ The Birdwood Mill Motor Museum is now named the National Motor Museum and the Migration and Settlement Museum is now named the Migration Museum.

¹⁶ *History Trust of South Australia Act 1981*.

¹⁷ Now known as the Community Museums Program (CMP).

¹⁸ R Trudgeon, *Museums In Victoria: A Report on the Victorian Museum Survey 1982/3*, Victorian Ministry for the Arts, Melbourne, 1984.

¹⁹ Personal communication, R Trudgeon and H Newton, 2009.

²⁰ Museums Australia (Victoria) (2007) Long-list of Victorian museums, compiled 2 July 2007.

²¹ <http://www.mavic.asn.au>.

²² C Brophy, *Marketing Victorian Museums: A Report on Marketing and Audience Development in Small to Medium-sized Museums in Victoria*, Museums Australia (Victoria) and Arts Victoria Co-operative Audience Development Support Initiative, Melbourne, 2002.

²³ Heritage Victoria, *Victorian Heritage Strategy 2000–2005*, Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria, 2000.

²⁴ Of these, only 424 were surveyed due to a lack of response from 197 'because we cannot be certain of their level of operation, or if they still exist'. K Freeman, *The 1992 Victorian Museum Survey Report*, Museums Association of Australia Inc. (Victoria Branch), Melbourne, 1993, p. 4.

²⁵ Freeman, *The 1992 Victorian Museum Survey Report*, p. 4.

²⁶ Personal communication with Martin Hallett, 2008.

Kimberley Webber is the Principal Curator, Collections and Access at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum.

Liz Gillroy is Regional Museum Curator at the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council and Researcher and Cataloguer for the Council and for Timbertown collections.

Joanne Hyland has worked for the Western Australian Museum since 2006 following her experience volunteering on the museum's major collection relocation project during 2004.

Amanda James Amanda James is currently Senior Community History Officer at History SA.

Laura Miles is the Executive Director of Museums Australia (Victorian branch), working in a team of 12 to support over 700 museums in the state.

Deborah Tranter is the Director of the Cobb+Co Museum in Toowoomba and Director Queensland Museum Regional Services.

Kate Walsh Kate Walsh is a museums consultant and professional historian.

Cite as: Kimberley Webber et al., 2011, 'Drawing people together: the local and regional museum movement', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/KWebber_etal_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

**Understanding Museums:
Australian museums and museology**

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



Museums, education and visitor experience

Education in most museums has come to mean lifelong learning, expanding well beyond merely providing visits by children in school groups. Positive interventions in childhood have extremely important impacts on later life. Several museums in Australia, including the Australian Museum, the Melbourne Museum and the National Museum of Australia, have paid special attention to younger children.

The essays in this section examine education within museums, including art education, schools programs, children's programs and family visits, as well as looking at museum studies – the education and professional training of museum professionals.

Contents

- Introduction: learning, the visiting experience and the art museum as educator, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- 'Protecting the past, safeguarding the future': museum studies, the profession and museum practice in Australia, Jennifer Barrett
- What's driving children's cultural participation?, Barbara Piscitelli
- The museum education mix: students, teachers and museum educators, Janette Griffin
- Family visitors to museums in Australia, Lynda Kelly

Online version: http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Museums_education.html

Image credit: Visitors to the National Museum of Australia storage space, 2010. Photo: National Museum of Australia.

Understanding Museums - Museums, education and visitor experience

Introduction: learning, the visiting experience and the art museum as educator

by Des Griffin

Education in most museums has come to mean lifelong learning, expanding well beyond merely providing visits by children in school groups. Janette Griffin reviews the shift in focus of school group visits from just another lesson, often unrelated to what is happening at school and setting tasks such as filling in worksheets, to learning opportunities that include emotional, aesthetic and interactive experiences. The visit is enhanced when it has a clear and relevant purpose, when students choose appropriate parts of the museums suited to the purpose of the visit, and when they are in control of their learning agenda.

In her review of family visits to museums, Lynda Kelly notes that during museum visits family members talk about previous experiences and memories, thus developing shared understandings. Visits are centred on learning rather than primarily for social interaction.

Positive interventions in childhood have extremely important impacts on later life. Several museums in Australia, including the Australian Museum, the Melbourne Museum and the National Museum of Australia, have paid special attention to younger children. Some countries, notably the United States, have developed specific museums for children such as the Boston Children's Museum, Indianapolis Children's Museum and the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia. However there are no such museums in Australia.

Barbara Piscitelli points out that there were very few programs for young children in museums in Australia before 1990. Several museums now have special programs. With a focus on the Queensland Art Gallery, she shows how very young children gain from their visits to museums.

Prior to the 1970s the orientation of education programs in Australian art museums was towards supplementing the school curriculum through introducing students to original works of art. Government administrative links and, in some states, the policy of seconding teachers to museums, tended to confirm this focus. However, post-Second World War optimism regarding what the visual arts might contribute to the welfare of both the individual and to society in general nurtured a wider context in which Australian museum educators contributed to an international movement in art education, locating art not only at the centre of the curriculum but also as a vital aspect of adult education. [1] The Art Gallery of New South Wales pioneered an extensive touring exhibition program to country areas which also brought lecturers to present interpretative programs designed to be of direct educational benefit to children and adults. [2]

Victoria also toured exhibitions. However, when that state meanwhile became a leader in formal art education, art museums were active participants. The National Gallery of Victoria hosted the respected National Gallery School and close links were formed with Melbourne University and with schools.

Art education was still influenced by modernism's exploration of the relationships between self-expression, concepts of mental age and psychological development, with an inevitable reduction of interest in forms of objective analysis and the more social bases of creative endeavour. Self-directed expression was seen as providing a balance to the general orientation of education towards rational analysis, which tended to foster the 'suppression of the instinctual and emotional components of the human personality'. [3] From the 1970s, however, there was a move to balance self-expression with a greater attention to art as a learned language, involving symbolism, acquired reference and contextual meaning.

In the latter part of the 1970s major exhibitions, including biennial and triennial contemporary art exhibitions, became major generators of change. Australian and foreign curators and artists were increasingly involved in shaping a range of public programs around special exhibitions. The subsequent progressive growth in year-round attendances at state galleries created a demand for

further and more diverse public programs; gradually this encouraged increased investment in the idea of education for lifelong learning. Expanded wall texts, room brochures, audio tours, film and video screenings, lectures, curators' and artists' talks, have been complemented by children's events, children's exhibitions and workshops — including tailored activities for the very young — and new programs for previously disadvantaged persons unable to gain access to cultural institutions.

Meanwhile art museums over this period expanded their support of school art education, with specialised programs for teachers, symposia for art educators, online education resources, education kits for downloading, and a variety of online 'interactives'.

Art museums increasingly supplemented exhibitions and collections through material on the Internet and social media. The much-discussed contemporary role of the museum as a multifaceted civic space and community meeting-place has generated a plethora of new programs, including numerous evening events.

An indication of the strong links that have long existed between art education in Australian museums and art education in general is the fact that a number of senior art museum professionals, including three of the four directors of the National Gallery, began their careers in art education. Community outreach programs have been an essential factor in engaging interest, including the attraction of generous private donations to complement meagre government funding for acquisitions.

Just as young children show extraordinary interest in their museum visits, so do many other groups once considered to be marginally interested at most. Adolescents, including adolescents at risk, and other people on the margin of society are well able to articulate what they want from their visits. All people want to be treated as intelligent human beings, albeit with particular wishes in many cases.

The digital environment

At the 2007 'Museums and the Web' conference in San Francisco, Sebastian Chan from the Powerhouse Museum recounted the history of a project that offered visitors to the Museum's website additional ways to interact with the museum and its collections. In June 2006, the Museum had launched a new means for browsing and searching its collection database in order to optimise usage. The site offered 'folksonomies': 'visitors' no longer required familiarity with collecting and museological practice to locate objects of interest to them.

The advance of 'social media' through blogs, wikis, and sites for sharing views and images has attracted great attention and new adaptations seem to appear every week. These include using social media to promote the museum and its events and applications for iPhone, BlackBerry and similar devices allowing tours of exhibitions.

Footnotes

¹ In the post-Second World War period art became a compulsory subject throughout the whole of primary, and the first four years of secondary education in state schools in Victoria and a significant core subject in other states.

² Pamela Clelland Gray, *Public Learning and the Art Museum: Future Directions*, Master of Arts Hons. thesis, University of Western Sydney, Nepean, 2002.

³ Herbert Read, *Art and Education*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1964, p. 11.

Understanding Museums - Museums, education and visitor experience

'Protecting the past, safeguarding the future': museum studies, the profession and museum practice in Australia

by Jennifer Barrett

Museums and their associated disciplines differ in terms of their intellectual bases and their physical manifestations, the supporting technologies and specialist skills that underpin their activity, including the processes employed to attract and inform audiences ... Museum theory and rigorous intellectual discussion is in many ways having trouble in aligning with museum practice, whilst the debates around museum ethics, cultural and humanitarian rights, values and responsibilities are being played out in an increasingly activated public arena of attention to these issues. [1]

A tension between theory and practice is apparent in the above quote from the 2007 Annual Conference of Museums Australia (MA) President's report. An alternative perspective was presented at a sector forum in Sydney celebrating International Museum Day in 2000 by the then Director of the Powerhouse Museum, who suggested that specialised museum studies programs were not very useful or indeed essential. A good degree in a relevant discipline was a preferable basis for becoming a museum professional, suggesting that once in the sector 'learning on the job' was the place for developing knowledge about museums and how they work.

This chapter considers these tensions with reference to their history in Australia and their related international context. It argues that museum studies education provides vital opportunities for maintaining and developing vibrant museum practices and that genuine relationships between the museum sector and educational institutions should be based on this premise, but perhaps not museum studies as it has previously been understood. This chapter draws upon the sentiments of *Museums in Australia 1975*, which believed 'a course in museum studies ... will do much to safeguard the collections held in Australian museums'. [2] Museum studies as an area of academic research and teaching can indeed inspire new scholarship and innovation in a sector which, like many other areas of the public sector in Australia, has undergone enormous change in the last decade. These tensions, I suggest, emerge from a history of museum studies programs being synonymous with the museum sector and its representative bodies at a time when the museums sector was less segmented and complex, and perhaps not scrutinised in the public domain in the way that it is now. Other areas of education that intersect significantly with museum studies, such as heritage studies, arts administration and conservation, are also worthy of inclusion here, but for the purposes of this chapter I have focused on the discourse surrounding museum studies.

Significant developments in the museum sector

Writing in the early 1990s, Stephen Weil doubted that museum work would be lauded as a profession due to its diversity: the diversity of disciplines among museums and the diversity of the knowledge and skills required within any particular museum. Weil also argued that museums' associations in the US have completely failed in relation to the academic training that is offered for entry into the field. This problem involved the 'enormous and unsupervised proliferation in recent years of so-called "museum studies" programs' and 'the question of whether these programs are truly the best preparation for working in a museum'. [3] Weil suggested that the thousands of dollars spent on 'museum studies' might better be spent on discipline-based programs. Ultimately, he believed, it would be a 'terrible mistake' to control the entry of new practitioners to the field by 'licensing or certification procedures'. [4] There is a 'remarkable variety of backgrounds ... [and] an equally remarkable variety of paths ... called upon to perform a still equally remarkable variety of tasks'. [5]

Weil's acknowledgement of the diversity of the sector and its contribution to the museum is in keeping with developments in the late twentieth century. The new museums, restructured museums, social media, the changing roles of curators, and so on, raise numerous issues about the relationships between museum professionals, educational institutions and the state. Suzanne

Macleod writes about tensions between governments or boards and the forces of curators and academics, between scholarship and visitor-centred public programming. She defines museum studies as 'an area of enquiry made meaningful through the participation and active involvement of individuals and communities in training and education, research and practice'. [6] She discusses the problem of the 'theory vs. practice dichotomy', and the difficulties of providing university-based training of relevance within the museum sector. [7] Macleod proposes a three-dimensional conceptual model for thinking about museums studies – made up of the different dimensions of museum practice, museum studies training and education and museum studies research – where universities, museums, practitioners and scholars form a 'community of practice'. [8]

This sounds sensible, but is very challenging given the diversity and the complexity of the museum sector in Australia. The section on Museums and Art Galleries in *Year Book Australia* by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports on a survey in 2003–04 of museums that were open to the general public. [9] At the end of June 2004 there were 1329 museum locations operating in Australia. A staggering 49.1 per cent had no employees but were run by 9382 volunteers. The 676 museum locations with employees employed 7624 people, who were assisted by 11,061 volunteers. Of the employees, 4291 were full time and 3252 were part time. Only 13.5 per cent of the employees were curators. Given these developments in the museum sector, what changes have occurred in the higher education sector and how have these changes impacted upon the relationships between the museum sector and museum studies?

Significant developments in museum studies education in Australia

Since the 1970s museum studies programs have been offered at a postgraduate level in universities around Australia. The 1990 report on the *Development of a Training Strategy for the Australian Museum Sector* resulted in one of the first iterations of competency-based training for the sector. [10] Also included in the report was an indication of how museum studies programs had significant links to the museum sector, yet with differing perspectives on the role of tertiary education in the sector. Parallel to this (as outlined by [Jan Cook et al.](#) on this site), the first materials conservation program was established in Canberra in the late seventies. In recent years, the rise of Vocational Education Training (VET) and TAFE programs has highlighted issues about the levels of qualifications necessary or desirable for working in the museum sector and indeed, which organisations are in the best place to deliver them. Not to be forgotten is the real contribution made to the sector by volunteers and the consideration of their training and educational needs in this respect. VET has gone some way to deal with the needs of those not eligible for tertiary study, but the development of this within the museum sector is uneven throughout Australia. [11] The development of the VET programs is partially due to the ways in which changes in the tertiary sector mean that universities are no longer able to offer such short programs as they did in the past. [12]

The international context has also *influenced* museum studies in Australia. International discussion about museum studies coincides with the development of museum studies courses in Australia. In 1979 the International Committee for the Training of Personnel of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) met in Leicester (England) to continue previous discussions about the training of museum professionals. [13]

The reason for this choice of subject was threefold. First, the very unequal development of training from one country to another; second, the opportunity to make a general proposal of such training programs drawn up according to a universal, theoretical scheme which could then be adapted according to national requirements; and thirdly it was decided that this discussion would be followed up by a discussion on means, methods, and techniques used for this training ... [14]

The emphasis is on a general museum studies, 'not specialists in one specific field such as conservation'. [15] A general syllabus with the capacity and integrity to encompass disciplines in the human and natural sciences was needed because 'university trained people [who] leave the university as fully qualified zoologists or art historians, very often they have no museum training in museum studies – neither general training nor practical experience'. [16] In this context the general syllabus at a university level was expected to meet minimum requirements. Allowing for differences between nations, a general curriculum was accepted by the meeting as: the international museum context, collection management, museum management and museum services. [17] While Leicester University appears to have led this direction of curriculum, they did

consult internationally with museum studies programs, including the University of Sydney program, which commenced in 1976.

A review of seminars and conferences about museum studies education in Australia from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s reveals a general expectation that the industry should guide the museum studies programs. Reflecting trends in Britain, a 1989 symposium insists on this character of the relationship. [18] The publication from the *Museum Training Symposium* held in Sydney outlines the need to understand the impact of increasing numbers of non-museum professionals entering the museum sector (in areas such as finance and marketing), [19] the importance of ensuring that graduates are able to work within communities and in various regions (urban and remote), with local government and other funding agencies. In-service training for museum staff, voluntary staff and boards of management was considered, as was the development of management skills and training, and management and care of Aboriginal cultural material in the sector. There appears to be an emphasis on training the professional as distinct from training *and* education. The emphasis on the core aspects of 'museology' (i.e., museum context, collection management, museum management and museum services) *prevails*.

The invention of the 'new museology' in the late 1980s reflected a profound shift in the museum studies literature. A profession engaged in academia around the idea of praxis developed the new museology. [20] Peter Vergo coined this term in 1989 in an attempt to develop new methods for 'studying museums, their history and underlying philosophy, the various ways in which they have, in the course of time, been established and developed, their avowed or unspoken aims and policies, their educative or social role'. [21]

Vergo, and contributors to the volume from the sector and academia, signalled a new direction at the time to demystify the role of the museum by revealing how the museum constructs knowledge and to significantly redress the museum's understanding of the importance of visitors as active agents in the production of knowledge. These developments saw the rise of education departments and visitor studies in museums. In the twenty-first century, museums exist within new political and cultural contexts. In particular, museum sectors in countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia responded to critiques of their role in the process of colonisation and appropriation of material culture. The responses are evident in a range of policy debates for museums and their related professions, and governments, primarily relating to social inclusion and particularly repatriation.

Also of significance is how developments in social and cultural policy reflected similar concerns about access and provision of public services to communities. In academia new art history (i.e., social and feminist), social and public history, gender and cultural studies became better known for their tendency to unsettle the canons. Museums, in this context, also became prime sites for engaging with the critiques of power for these areas of the academy in particular. It is at this point, I argue, that these developments are also central to the re-configuration of many museums in Australia and the intellectual frameworks used in the museum context. In other words, the academic disciplines central to museum scholarship and practice were also challenged in debates by these new approaches in the museum world.

For example, in Australia critical developments in art history, anthropology and history have been central to the re-conception and presentation in museums of natural history and social history and vice versa. Several examples are well known: the interplay between history, History Wars and the National Museum of Australia; the way in which Curator Mary Eagle's mid-1994 re-hanging of Australian art at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), including the Rex Nan Kivell Collection, was thematic, reflecting new art history rather than emphasising a chronological hang; the way in which the *Indigenous Australians* exhibition at the Australian Museum involved extensive consultations with Indigenous people, as well as Indigenous museum staff being part of the exhibition development team, reflected changes in the discipline of anthropology in the nineties. Which brings us back to the issue of education and training for the museum profession and the relevance of museum studies programs to museums: have museum studies programs changed sufficiently (or too much) to reflect developments in the sectors and relevant disciplines? [22] How do museum studies programs determine and review their curricula? The new museology, I suggest, introduced museum studies as a generator of content as it engaged with the museum in new ways. It has gone on to inspire more scholarship, often with an aim to be both educative and useful to the sector while also engaging with the respective concerns of academic disciplines. [23]

Given the above changes over time, are the subjects that characterised museum studies in the

1970s still taught in museum studies programs? In short, yes. Most courses in Australia include units on the history of museums and museology, collections, management/administration practices and principles, public programs and education.

The following is a list of the courses that generally reflect this pattern.

- The Australian National University offers postgraduate coursework and research programs on campus in museums and collections, art history and curatorship.
- Deakin University offers courses on campus and by distance in the areas of museum studies and cultural heritage. Deakin also offers short professional development courses on and off campus.
- The University of Sydney offers postgraduate courses and higher degree research programs on campus in both intensive and regular modes in museum studies and art curatorship and at times offshore intensively in Hong Kong. Heritage studies is offered as a major at an undergraduate level and the university plans to introduce global heritage studies at a postgraduate level in the near future.
- The University of Adelaide offers programs in art history and curatorial and museum studies on campus at a postgraduate level.
- Queensland University offers postgraduate programs in museum studies on campus and occasional field courses in locations such as Vietnam.
- Curtin University of Technology offers postgraduate programs in arts and cultural heritage studies on campus and by distance education.
- The University of Melbourne offers postgraduate programs in art curatorship, museum studies and conservation.
- The University of Canberra offers undergraduate courses in museology and heritage preservation and cultural materials conservation.

With the exception of Macquarie University, most courses are taught at a postgraduate level and include potential pathways to PhD research or professional degrees. [24] This listing is indicative only and demonstrates the current range of museum studies programs offered in Australia. [25] What such a list does not indicate is the way in which specific academic disciplines, such as history, art history, archaeology and anthropology, philosophy within the respective institutions intersect with museum studies programs. This does vary significantly between institutions, as does the research output of each program. Such a list does not indicate the impact of individual academics who work on the subject of museums in their respective discipline base in areas such as education or history, for instance.

What is not often recognised in debates about museum studies in Australia in the late 1980s is how this development coincided with significant changes to the delivery of higher education, in particular the conversion of Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology, which became universities. The Dawkins reforms to higher education were to have great implications for postgraduate education in particular. [26]

By the early 1990s, the capacity to charge fees for postgraduate courses was introduced. In very recent years the higher education landscape also changed significantly with the introduction of fee-paying undergraduate courses and preparations for the introduction of the Research Quality Framework (now replaced by the Excellence in Research for Australia initiative). Add into the mix the expansion of the Australian higher education market, which has been extended to international students (taught locally and offshore), and a complex and dynamic picture emerges. The implications of this for museum studies in Australia are interesting, and perhaps show that museum studies has been ahead of its time in being well established and having a strong partnership with an identifiable sector. Nevertheless, the institutional pressure for such courses has changed dramatically. Overall, the number of courses has increased, although several courses of significance were not offered for a period of time, at least in their previous form, such as the conservation program at the University of Canberra, which still offers museum studies within a cultural heritage program and has recently developed the Bachelor of Cultural Heritage and Bachelor of Heritage Conservation. [27] Academics are increasingly required to ensure that such programs are financially viable and not isolated units within the academy. [28] Teaching is to be

informed by research and have links to the relevant sector. These changes raise a number of issues about how the evolving museum sector and the changing landscape of museum studies education can be articulated in a mutually beneficial manner.

The museum sector and museum studies

Underlying the discussion about the history of curriculum for museum studies has been the expectation that professional staff assist museums to meet certain standards and to be recognised by funding agencies and the sector. Standardisation for museum sector professionals is a difficult issue in a diverse sector such as Australia. Demanding standardisation for museums in general has produced significant discussion about resources, professional development, education and training. Individual university programs in Australia, however, have established relationships with particular museums and staff that contribute in various ways to program development, delivery and research. [29] Standardisation in museums focuses somewhat on the level of education and training of staff, with emphasis also placed on the physical conditions of the institution and the practices and policies it follows. [30]

In Australia, this issue of standards may inform the curriculum of museum studies programs but is not monitored or formally guided by any particular area of the museum sector. Museum studies programs are, however, wise if they choose to remain informed by the developments in this area and to consult accordingly. Similarly, the sector can elect to inform or involve museum studies programs in such processes and discussions.

There is also the issue of ongoing training of existing museum staff in Australia and opportunities for mid-career education. The Museum Leadership Program managed by Melbourne Business School and sponsored by the Gordon Darling Foundation and the Australia Council for the Arts, has been a popular residential intensive program for directors and senior managers of museums and galleries; however it is under review. This course followed a similar one organised by the Council of Australian Museum Directors (CAMD) and delivered by Melbourne University through the executive education arm of the University's Business School at Mt Eliza, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria. An option for many museum professionals in this category has been to attend the internationally competitive Getty Leadership Programs in Los Angeles, or to undertake a (discipline-based) PhD, or other management or public policy postgraduate programs.

In Australia in recent years it seems that the delivery of professional development programs has been most effective at a state-based level. While I understand that in recent years Museums Australia has made attempts to develop its capacity to deliver training programs, it seems to have been most effective in the facilitation and support of the state branches to deliver certified training programs. The strongest appears to have been Museums Australia Queensland. Other branches have tended to develop professional development seminars, and organisations such as Museums and Galleries NSW have contributed significantly to the landscape of the offerings for industry seminars across the state. Like the state branches of Museums Australia they contributed to the development of a National Training Network (organised through the Queensland branch of Museums Australia in 2003).

Writing about museum training needs in Western Australia, Ian McShane suggests ways for training providers to develop on-the-job training and non-academic courses for potential staff. [31] He maintains that the museum sector should encourage the provision of institutional accreditation along with individual training. He acknowledges that training requirements are different for each part of the museum industry: there should be a 'landscape of museum training' – a suite of programs and opportunities – that harness local requirements and existing museum assets and expertise.

In 2002 Museums Australia Queensland commissioned the report, *Training and Professional Development for the Museum Sector in Queensland 1996–2002*. This report summarises the activities of the MAQ regarding training and professional development for the museum sector 1996–2002; it builds on the findings of the McShane report. The MAQ report states that VET is the focus of the report, but that it is one of a portfolio of options available to museum workers, which includes museum studies courses, and professional development courses offered through Special Interest Groups of Museums Australia. Again the focus is on training volunteers — of the 123 institutional members of Museums Australia in Queensland, 52 per cent are entirely run by volunteer staff. The report states 'experience indicates that, particularly for community and regional museums wholly or substantially reliant on volunteer labour, skills development through accredited training is important', but should be 'seen as part of a broader focus on industry

development'. [32] This report went on directly to influence the establishment of a museum studies program at the University of Queensland. Such collaboration continues and is productive for the museum sector, prospective students and the University of Queensland.

Conclusion

Existing historical literature about museum studies focuses on the vocational aspects of courses, yet this seems outmoded in the twenty-first century for both museums and the higher education sector, particularly in Australia. In higher education in Australia today, teaching is required to be both informed by research and the needs of candidates and the related sectors — to ensure that the degree programs have value beyond the academic institution. In this sense, we see Australian government and institutional support for research collaborations between these institutions. This is not merely in the form of Australian Research Council Linkage Grants, but in a common everyday sense with closer relations between universities and museums. This could include the sharing of research resources such as libraries, greater knowledge of collections, and more regular engagement with the development of new knowledge.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that ideas have changed about what constitutes professionalism in the museum sector, and similarly how higher education and scholarship at least in Australia has changed over time. The history of the museum sector and the discussion about changes in higher education highlight that it is impossible for museum studies to provide for all of the professional needs of people working in the museum sector. Museum studies programs give people the foundations, tools and contacts with which to build their careers in the sector. Learning on the job is necessary, whether one has a museum studies degree or a good degree in a relevant discipline. A museum studies degree, however, provides the intellectual foundations to understand the history, theory and practice of museums in Australia and internationally. A good museum studies qualification should enable graduates to engage effectively with the debates emanating from other disciplines about the ideology, practice and future of museums. These capabilities are likely to lead to better museum practitioners, well-run museums responding to changing needs and scenarios, and a better experience for museum visitors. In summary, we can better protect the past and be more able to safeguard the future of museums.

Footnotes

¹ Pat Sabine, President's Report to Council, Museums Australia AGM, 18 May 2007, Old Parliament House, Canberra, p. 1.

² PH Pigott, *Museums in Australia 1975: A Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975, p. 69.

³ Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the museum and other meditations*, Smithsonian Institution, 1990.

⁴ Weil, *Rethinking the museum*, p. 83.

⁵ Weil, *Rethinking the museum*, p. 83.

⁶ Suzanne Macleod, 'Making Museum Studies: Training, Education, Research and Practice', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2001, p. 51.

⁷ Macleod, 'Making Museum Studies', p. 52.

⁸ Macleod, 'Making Museum Studies', p. 54. Also see E Wenger, *Communities of Practices: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Museums and Art Galleries', *Year Book Australia*, Canberra, January 2006. The scope of this survey included: historic trusts and sites; historical societies with a collection; house museums; social and natural history museums; archives (excluding the national and state archives); art galleries (excluding commercial art galleries); keeping places and cultural centres; outdoor museums; science museums; maritime museums; military museums and transport museums.

¹⁰ *Development of a training strategy for the Australian Museums Sector: Arts Training Australia and the Council of Australian Museum Associations*, Street Ryan and Associates, 1990.

¹¹ Indeed the meeting of the MA National Training Network in Brisbane in 2003 discussed ways in which

pathways to universities could be developed for museum workers with industry experience, VET qualifications and vice versa.

¹² For instance, short courses for the museum sector were offered at some universities up until the late nineties. At a postgraduate level, universities now advise prospective students to enrol in units of study as non-award students with a view to the potential of transferring their program into formal pathways. Some universities do offer 'Executive award' for short courses. The problem still exists however, for volunteers and those without undergraduate qualifications.

¹³ The first ICOM symposium on Professional Training was held in 1978 in Brussels, Liège and Antwerp.

¹⁴ J-B Cuypers, 'Introduction of the President', in International Council of Museums International Committee for the Training of Personnel, *Methods and Techniques of Museum Training at University Level*, report of a symposium held in Leicester, England 16–22 September 1979, p. 6.

¹⁵ Cuypers, 'Introduction of the President', p. 6.

¹⁶ Cuypers, 'Introduction of the President', p. 6.

¹⁷ These areas were also reflected in ICOM's 1972 *Basic Syllabus for Museum Training* and used for the development of a *Treatise on Museology*. See International Council of Museums International Committee for the Training of Personnel, *Methods and Techniques of Museum Training at University Level*, report of a symposium held in Leicester, England 16–22 September 1979, pp. 62–3.

¹⁸ *Papers of the Museum Training Symposium*, The University of Sydney, 16–17 February 1989; the symposium was convened by the Museum Studies Unit, University of Sydney and Museums Association of Australia (MAA) Inc. (NSW Branch) and funded by the Chancellor's Committee at Sydney University and WESTPAC.

¹⁹ Mary-Louise Williams, 'Non credit training', *Papers of the Museum Training Symposium held at the University of Sydney*, Museum Studies Unit, University of Sydney, 16–17 February 1989, pp. 22–25.

²⁰ Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, Reaktion Press, London, 1989.

²¹ Vergo, *New Museology*, 1989, p. 1.

²² An account of how museums in Australia have influenced other academic disciplines is worthy of further investigation but is beyond the scope of this chapter.

²³ Over the past 15 years the number of museum-related titles being published has continued to increase. Books about museums, written by geographers, philosophers, linguists and academics in cultural studies and museum studies have also proliferated.

²⁴ For an excellent list of museum studies and related courses in Australia see Museums and Gallery Services Queensland, *2007 Education and Training Opportunities*, available as a PDF from http://www.magsq.com.au/01_cms/details.asp?k_id=39. The Museums Australia website also has a list of museum studies courses available in Australian universities. Also see Jay Rounds, 'Is there a core literature in museology?', (*Curator*, Vol. 44, No. 2, April 2001, pp. 194–206) for a discussion about the bibliometric evidence supporting the claim that museum studies is a discipline.

²⁵ Programs at the University of Technology Sydney, College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales, Griffith University and the University of Melbourne offer art administration and cultural leadership courses, areas that intersect with museum studies. Academics associated with these programs are engaged in research with museums and galleries.

²⁶ Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education, *Windows onto Worlds: Studying Australia at Tertiary Level*, Report of the Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education, Australian Government Printing Service, 1987.

²⁷ The University of Canberra's museum studies and conservation courses were discontinued in 2003 and redeveloped for delivery in 2009. See [Ian Cook et al.](#) this site.

²⁸ In other words, the postgraduate courses were not necessarily protected on academic grounds, as many undergraduate programs tended to be. Indeed, since Ministers Nelson and Bishop of the Howard government increased pressure on the sector to make undergraduate programs 'economically viable'.

²⁹ Furthermore, in the US it is expected that museum staff hold a traditional discipline-based education – at

Bachelor or Masters level. In other words, museum studies is an additional qualification in the US that qualifies graduates of a particular discipline to work in a museum or gallery. See Reynolds, 2000.

³⁰ For instance, see the use of the term by museums, regardless of size, and respective membership of professional organisations or bodies such as Museums Australia or related state-based affiliations, such as Museums and Galleries New South Wales (MGNSW) and Museums and Galleries Queensland. For an example of a state-based Standards program ([see MGNSW website](#)). MGNSW provides links to other museums standards programs in Australia and overseas. Working with regional partners and providing resources to undertake self assessment have all been integral to the success of this program.

³¹ I McShane, 'Training for the Museum Profession in Western Australia: a report to Museums Australia (Western Australia)', November 2001.

³² Museums Australia (QLD), *Training and Professional Development for the Museum Sector in Queensland 1996–2002*, February 2003.

Dr Jennifer Barrett is the Director of Museum Studies and Associate Dean (Postgraduate Coursework) in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney. She is currently completing a manuscript for *Museums and the Public Sphere* for Blackwell Publishing (Oxford and NY, 2008) and *Australian Artists and the Museum* with Jacqueline Millner for Miegunyah (MUP) and Power Publications (2008).

Cite as: Jennifer Barrett, 2001, "Protecting the past, safeguarding the future": museum studies, the profession and museum practice in Australia' in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, National Museum of Australia, 2011, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JBarrett_2011.html. ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums education and visitor experience

What's driving children's cultural participation?

by Barbara Piscitelli

Children have long been visitors to Australian museums, galleries and libraries, and today they form a significant audience for the stories and objects contained in collections across the nation. Whether attending a cultural venue for a formal school excursion or a more casual family outing, children enjoy learning from objects and stories in Australia's collections.

This relationship between children and collections has changed considerably over time as different museums, galleries and libraries respond to social and educational trends. Early programs and exhibitions for children were academic and often formal in orientation, prompting one 1970s observer to remark: 'Children and museums go hand in hand, though not always willingly'. [1]

Innovative exhibitions for children began to emerge in the 1980s, with the growth of science centres as hands-on learning and entertainment sites. At that time, most major Australian museums, galleries and libraries did not have permanent designated spaces or exhibitions for children; for the most part, interpretation of the collection and exhibitions for children were undertaken in formal public programs.

Opportunities for connecting children with culture emerged very quickly with new programs, spaces and research projects across Australia:

- *Every Body* – designed by Mary Featherston in 1985 for the Melbourne Museum – was an exhibition about the human body and how it works. It drew a large audience over its lifetime, and provided a fresh new way of designing and interpreting for children. [2]
- A number of specially designed exhibition spaces for children were developed, including Kid's Island (1999–2009: Australian Museum, Sydney), [3] Nipper's Railway (2003: The Railway Workshops Museum, Ipswich) and The Big Box (2002: The Melbourne Museum).

Researchers studied children's learning and family learning in museums and galleries in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra, [4] starting in the late 1980s.

By 2009, there was strong appeal and steady growth in popular demand for cultural activities all across Australia. [5] Interestingly, in the 5–12 year age group, there was a significant growth in cultural participation over the three years 2006–2009, with 1.9 million children (71 per cent) attending at least one museum, gallery, library or theatre event outside of school hours. [6] Children's cultural participation outpaced their involvement in organised sport in 2006, and again – by rising numbers – in 2009. [7]

Rising cultural participation by Australian children: seven snapshots

What is driving the steady rise in cultural engagement by Australian children – and is it sustainable? To explore this question, the chapter presents snapshots of seven strategic innovations that have shaped the growth of children's cultural programs in Australia, and examines their role in promoting a rise in children's cultural citizenship.

Out of the Box: Queensland Performing Arts Centre

Out of the Box is a Brisbane-based biennial festival of the arts for early childhood. Established in 1992 by the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, the festival has become a well-loved part of the cultural lives of many Queensland children, schools and families.

The festival features high quality arts experiences for young children, showcasing culturally diverse stage productions, internationally renowned theatre companies, community-based arts projects, and children's creative outputs. Historical highlights of the festival include a commissioned stage production of Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*, and a fully interactive exhibition of *The Art of Eric Carle*. [8]

From the beginning, Out of the Box was delivered by a Creative Producer and a dedicated team within an established public performing arts centre. Though different people have occupied the positions, the festival remains focused on delivering high-quality child-centred arts experience.

Not content to simply deliver programs to the public, Out of the Box focuses on building strong relationships with various communities and professions. The partnerships have enabled many innovative arts opportunities, such as Island, a festival stage for Indigenous and Islander children throughout the state to perform traditional and contemporary dance on the big stage at a premier performing arts venue in Brisbane.

Local schoolchildren in Brisbane have co-produced performances and exhibitions in festival-organised partnerships with artists, filmmakers, musicians and actors. Volunteers have worked behind the scenes to make every aspect of the festival a comfortable and welcoming experience for the thousands who attend.

Importantly, Out of the Box partnerships extend to cultural precinct partners, with the gallery, museum and nearby parklands offering spaces and programs for young audiences during the festival.

Each festival features a conference for professional discussion about the place of the arts in children's lives. Featuring artists, educators and researchers, the conferences provide a platform for exchanging ideas and information about research findings, social trends and innovative practices.

In 2004, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre joined with the Australia Council for the Arts and Queensland University of Technology to undertake action research on how parents and children experienced the festival. The research findings led to the publication of guidelines for organisations to use when working with parents of young children. [9]

Children's Gallery: Ipswich Art Gallery

At the Ipswich Art Gallery (IAG), [10] children have been a central part of the program since 1999 with the design and development of a dedicated children's gallery. Informed by community consultation, one key aim of the Children's Gallery was to assure a welcoming and engaging experience for new audiences. The creation of a dedicated space for children's exhibitions and activities meant that the gallery had a permanent home where they could forge new relationships with children and families in the area. [11]

With a space for regular exhibitions and activities, IAG presents a diverse and changing menu of program options for children from birth to 12 years of age. Decisions about exhibitions and programs are based on a set of principles, which articulate the principles, values and beliefs underpinning the gallery's commitment to children. [12]

With a changing exhibition program, the gallery is constantly refreshed. For visitors, this means there is always something new to see at a favourite child-friendly place. Over its decade-long history, IAG has hosted more than 30 exhibitions for young audiences, including *Bright + Shiny* (2008), an innovative contemporary art environment for babies and toddlers. [13]

The gallery invests in research to inform its decisions and to advance knowledge of cultural learning in childhood. [14] Recently, IAG commissioned a small-scale study of how infants and toddlers respond to art and play in a purpose-designed gallery environment; findings have been disseminated at national and international conferences. [15]

Children's Art Centre: Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art

The Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) has been a leader for innovative children's programs in Australian art museums. QAG first participated in child-centred research in 1987, [16] and has since generated many early innovations in exhibitions and programs for children and art. In 1998, QAG initiated a series of changing exhibitions for children. Initially installed in a small area, the popularity of the exhibitions led to increasing size and scale to accommodate the growing audience. [17]

As a partner in the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Museums Collaborative research group (1997–2004), QAG implemented many new design and exhibition practices for young audiences, thus providing an ideal situation to study children's responses to innovative, interactive

learning in an art gallery. Researchers worked collaboratively with gallery staff to investigate children's participation during a series of exhibitions, including *Play* (2000–2001), [18] *APT Summer Spectacular* (2003), *Colour* (2003), and *Lost and Found* (2004). [19]

Among many innovative practices, QAG designs special exhibitions of contemporary art for children, provides multi-sensory and technologically interesting interactive resources, publishes children's activity books to advance artistic understanding, provides teacher in-service education, and focuses on both school and family audiences.

In 2006, the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) opened in the South Brisbane cultural precinct. Sitting alongside the Brisbane River and in the cultural precinct, GoMA offers a venue for contemporary art in Queensland, and hosts the Children's Art Centre, a dedicated space for exhibitions, activities and programs for young audiences.

The changing nature of the Children's Art Centre program allows for repeat visits by a faithful audience, and also allows on-going experimentation in exhibition design, installation and program. The Children's Art Centre is the result of 20 years of innovative practice – a whole generation of knowledge about designing exhibitions and interpretation for child audiences. The gallery hosts conferences and participates in seminars to disseminate information about the artist collaborations and innovative museum practices.

ArtPlay: City of Melbourne

In 2004, the City of Melbourne opened its first dedicated children's arts space on the banks of the Yarra River in the heart of the city. Named ArtPlay in honour of its dual commitments to children's art and play in the city, the site offers a stage for innovative, playful arts programs of all kinds. Under the direction of a Creative Producer, the small organisation has reached out to a wide and diverse audience.

As a space, ArtPlay is simple – it is a large open space formed by the elegant architecture of the former industrial building. The building was stripped back to its essentials during the re-purposing of the powerhouse from its former use to its new identity as a generator of creative practice in childhood. The interior is voluminous, with a mezzanine balcony over a basketball-court-sized open space. Naturally lit from above by enormous industrial-scale windows, the space offers ultimate flexibility and adaptability to the requirements of the diverse ArtPlay program.

ArtPlay quickly made its mark on Melbourne's cultural scene. With its innovative program of artist-led projects, ArtPlay attracted a wide audience – as diverse as the city itself. Each year, approximately 300 different events take place, celebrating artistic and creative practice of all kinds in the company of world-class artists – musicians, dancers, chefs, potters, puppeteers and more. A second venue for children's arts and culture has been developed by City of Melbourne in 2009: Signal is a space for 13–20-year-olds and features an array of options for artist-participant interaction in a space designed to offer new platforms for arts media for a teenage population.

Partnerships of all kinds are at the heart of ArtPlay's philosophy and practice: partnerships with participants, artists, arts organisations, funding agencies, philanthropic groups and university researchers. Each partnership adds new value to the work of ArtPlay and enables expansion of the program and products to wider audiences.

Community studies informed the early concept development for a cultural space for children in Melbourne. [20] As a creative organisation, ArtPlay commenced its research agenda with their operation. In collaboration with The University of Melbourne, ArtPlay is examining children's cultural engagement. [21]

The corner: State Library of Queensland

When the State Library of Queensland (SLQ) re-opened in 2006, there was a significant focus on connecting with children and young people as part of the core audience. During the time of its closure, the library established a committee to advise on matters related to children and young people and then commissioned a review of its policies, practices and programs.

The library prepared in various ways to augment new child and youth-centred practices. Key personnel undertook professional learning on new practices; additional personnel were engaged to lead the new programs; small-scale project innovations were developed and refined; and audience research was completed.

Two major built-in programs were designed to cater to all segments of the population of children and young people. The first was the development of *the corner*, a space for young children (opened in 2006). *the corner* features a curated space for children's play and learning. Four times a year, the exhibitions and interactive play-scapes of *the corner* transform, thus attracting repeat audience participation. The space is set up to cater for children's drawing, writing, reading, computing and dramatic play. Children may also engage in a story, song or rhyme with artists who work in the space.

The second major initiative at SLQ is a space for young people – *the edge*. Focused on young people (5–15 years), *the edge* provides a platform for ideas to be communicated and expressed through various forms of publishing and distribution. Opened in 2010, *the edge* is directed by a creative team including 'catalysts' – technical and conceptual assistants to work with young people in realising their ideas.

The Art Factory: Maitland Regional Art Gallery

The redevelopment of the Maitland Regional Art Gallery (MRAG) was a major expansion project for the gallery in this regional community. The aim was to enlarge the gallery space to a significantly larger footprint with purpose-designed, contemporary spaces. In addition to extending its exhibition areas, MRAG proposed to integrate a large interactive space for children and young people, branded as The Art Factory.

During the construction phase of redevelopment, one of the gallery's top priorities was to undertake a systematic audience research project to learn more about the values, wishes and needs of people in the local community and nearby regional area. MRAG hosted a two-week long community-wide conversation about the value and potential use of the gallery by diverse populations in the local and adjacent area.

More than 150 individuals took part in the conversations in small group sessions, including parents of young children, primary school students, middle school students, secondary school students, young adults, men (aged 25–55), women (aged 25–55), seniors (over 55s), education professionals, Indigenous people, advocates for people with special needs or persons with a disability, creatives (artists, designers, craft workers and others), local government officials and gallery staff. [22]

Every group identified children as a primary audience for a gallery. The design of the interactive gallery space, The Art Factory, generated excitement and animated conversation. Participants were eager to see exhibitions of art by, for and about children in the gallery. They were also eager to see low-cost or free workshops for children to be involved in making art.

When the gallery re-opened in its expanded building in August 2008, The Art Factory welcomed its first visitors. Embraced by young visitors, the venue provides an innovative two-storey exhibition and studio environment. Changing exhibitions by emerging artists and curators provide a menu of possibilities for cultural exploration and engagement.

School Education programs

Over more than 50 years, the sector has built educational programs to introduce school students to their collections and to make the most of educational synergies across the curriculum. Education is a key part of the mission of museums, galleries and libraries, so there are sequenced programs for primary and secondary students at most large venues. In recent times – in response to demand from schools and changing trends in education – museums, galleries and libraries have extended their school education services into the early childhood years, expanding programs and resources for children from four to 18 years.

A serious and substantial part of most cultural organisations' practice involves interpreting and presenting objects, ideas and stories for the school audience. While statistics are available for outside of school participation in cultural organisations, no comparable readily accessible data exists for children's participation during school hours.

Even so, the cultural sector reports a steady audience of school students for exhibitions, programs and events offered during school terms. Over the coming years, this number may rise considerably as the new national curriculum provides many references to learning from objects and stories contained in the nation's collecting and cultural institutions. [23]

Usually school students experience museums, galleries and libraries in a more formal or structured manner than they do when they come to visit the same place outside of school hours. Ideally, students are prepared for the visit at school, with a pre-visit lesson to heighten interest and broaden knowledge. At the cultural venue, most often schools will organise for a guided tour as part of the visit, though not all cultural organisations offer such a service. Following the visit, learning can be augmented in the classroom where the teacher offers reflective and analytical activities to extend ideas.

Over many years, education resources have been developed widely in the museum, gallery and library sector. A few cultural organisations maintain extensive loan resources to be used by school children and the wider community. [24] The National Museum of Australia recently developed a set of primary school textbooks to introduce students to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. [25] Originally education publications were presented only in print form, [26] but now there are many online resources also available for teacher and student use, including blogs about objects (e.g. photographs, paintings, and specimens), on-line lectures and curriculum-related activities.

Partnerships drive many innovative education programs in the sector, with philanthropists contributing to the extension of services to disadvantaged or remote portions of the population. [27]

Drivers for cultural change

Innovative children's cultural participation programs have been sustained in the community for three main reasons – the programs are:

- developed and produced by creative directors;
- supported by sound research and reliable funding; and
- informed by fundamental principles, theories and values.

Creative direction

Visionary leaders have shaped and sparked leading cultural programs for children in Australia. The creative direction of key child-centred arts innovations focuses on twin priorities: a) production of high quality cultural programs and b) widespread access to culture by a diverse population of children and their adult carers (e.g. parents and teachers).

By nature, a creative director works in the zone of innovation. Over more than 20 years, creative directors in Australian cultural organisations have developed and delivered a wide array of innovative exhibitions, programs, productions and spaces for children, often adhering to a set of high-quality indicators [28] to inform their creative decisions – criteria such as:

- **Developmental appropriateness:** Children's cultural background, age and individual differences are taken into consideration. Programs are developed and delivered to respect the differences in maturity and knowledge of the audience.
- **Flexibility:** Multiple entry levels and situations allow for children of all ability and skill levels to take part in some way.
- **Collaboration:** Programs are designed so that children can participate with peers, parents and experts.
- **Interactive:** Interactivity includes opportunities to engage in social learning, with technological tools, and in a multi-sensory environment. Children participate in hands-on, minds-on, self-directed, enjoyable situations.
- **Empowering:** Opportunities are provided for children to make choices and be agents of their own learning.
- **Connected:** Partnerships of all kinds characterise creative cultural programs for children, families, organisations and communities.
- **Quality:** High quality programs are developed to ensure children get access to best practice, original materials and expert knowledge.

- Bottom-up consultative process: Programs are developed through consultation with participants.

Sound research and reliable funding

Innovative programs for children require ongoing attention to social and educational trends. With rapid social and technological change, childhood experiences alter at a rapid rate with the uptake of consumer products and technological devices.

Audience research programs across the country are assisting leading cultural organisations to make informed decisions about how best to structure programs, invest in exhibition design, and remain relevant to young audiences. Leading organisations have built-in audience research and development as a part of core business.

Most cultural organisations have made considerable investments in children's learning and programs from within core budgets, but the growth of children's participation often means new sources of funding must be found to accommodate the spurt in demand. Funds often come from within the cultural sector, or from the community (fundraising and fees), but more and more the philanthropic community is providing resources to enable expansion of programs for young audiences.

Fundamental principles, theories and values

The growth of children and young people as cultural participants and as cultural decision makers is an important new phenomenon. Children and young people form a strong and significant part of the population. As citizens, children and young people have rights to form ideas and to express them through various media, and to participate in social and cultural life. Since 1990, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [29] has assured their rights to express their views (articles 12 and 13) and to participate in cultural life (article 31).

Maintaining and serving an audience of culturally aware and active citizens requires deliberate strategies and initiatives. Government policies (both state and Australian government) support the growth of cultural engagement in young Australians – both in and out of school, so there is commitment at a high level for supporting the cultural life of children. Some leading organisations have clearly defined philosophies, policies, programs and practices to support children's cultural development.

Conclusion

Children's cultural participation has grown significantly in the past generation in Australia. Some hypothesise that the first generation of cultural consumers from the late 1980s and early 1990s are now parents taking their children to a range of exhibitions, events and performances. Others speculate that children and young people are democratising culture as they generate new creative practices and engage in a rich cultural life. [30]

Both are correct in their observations: increasing numbers of children visit Australia's cultural and collecting organisations – and most of them are accompanied in their out-of-school visits by a family member.

And, yes – children are democratising culture. By their mere participation, children are voting with their feet about what appeals to them in the marketplace of entertainment options. To take advantage of this growing audience, various organisations take the time to talk with children about various aspects of the work of creating and delivering cultural programs. For example, ArtPlay invites children to make decisions on grant applications, thus enabling children to gain skills and learn how to make judgements about program funding. Other leading organisations involve children in trialling and testing innovative programs, thus taking account of children's views and feedback during design and development.

So, what is driving cultural participation in Australia? Both children and cultural organisations are driving participation. By working hand-in-hand, both children and cultural organisations have developed new products, new programs and new levels of engagement. This coming together of the audience and the organisation generates respect and commitment – key ingredients to the sustainability of the relationship.

Footnotes

- ¹ John Hodge, 'Museums and children in Australia', *Museum* 31 (3), 1979, pp. 160–3.
- ² Jan Henderson, 'Design Catalysts: Mary Featherston', *Australian Design*, online publication, viewed 05/05/2009.
- ³ L Kelly, S Main, S Dockett, B Perry and S Heinrich, 'Listening to young children's voices in museum spaces', *Proceedings of the AARE Conference*, 2006.
- ⁴ QUT Museums Collaborative, 'Young Children's Interactive Learning in Museums', ART SPIRT Grant #C10024104, 2000–2003 and L Kelly, G Savage, J Griffin, and S Tonkin, *Knowledge Quest: Australian Families Visit Museums*, National Museum of Australia and Australian Museum, Canberra/Sydney, 2004.
- ⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Arts and Culture in Australia: A Statistical Overview*, first edition [4172.0], ABS, Canberra, 2008.
- ⁶ 1.5 million Australian children (54 per cent) visited a public library and 1.1 million (41 per cent) visited a museum or art gallery. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities* [4901.0], ABS, Canberra, 2009. p. 6.
- ⁷ *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities*, p.15.
- ⁸ B Piscitelli and K Weier, 'Learning with, through, and about art: the role of social interactions', in S Paris (ed.), *Perspectives on Object-Centered Learning in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, NJ, 2002.
- ⁹ Queensland Performing Arts Centre, the Australia Council for the Arts and Queensland University of Technology, *Children, their parents and the arts: some guidelines for working with parents of young children*, Australia Council, Sydney, 2004.
- ¹⁰ The Ipswich Art Gallery (IAG) was known as Global Arts Link (1999–2005).
- ¹¹ Piscitelli, 'Designing galleries with children in mind', in B Henson (ed.), *Exploring culture and community in the 21st century: a new model for public art museums*, Global Arts Link, Ipswich, Qld, 1999.
- ¹² Ipswich Art Gallery, Guiding Principles: www.ipswichartgallery.qld.gov.au/kids/guiding-principles, 2010.
- ¹³ Piscitelli, 'Infants, Toddlers and Contemporary Art', presentation to the International Arts in Early Childhood Conference, National Institute of Education, Singapore, June, 2009.
- ¹⁴ QUT Museums Collaborative (1998–2004) was comprised of researchers from Queensland University of Technology, and Industry Partners from Queensland Museum, Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland Sciencecentre and Global Arts Link.
- ¹⁵ B Piscitelli and B Smith, 'Infants, toddlers and contemporary art: bright and shiny research finding', Third International Arts in Early Childhood conference, National Institute of Education, Singapore, June 2009.
- ¹⁶ B Piscitelli, 'Preschoolers and parents as artists and art appreciators', *Art Education*, 41(4), 1988, pp. 48–55.
- ¹⁷ M Beckmann, 'Engaging a young audience at Queensland Art Gallery', *Artlink*, 21 (2), 2001, pp. 50–4.
- ¹⁸ B Piscitelli, 'Young children's interactive experiences in museums: engaged, embodied and empowered learners', *Curator*, 44 (3), 2002, pp. 224–9.
- ¹⁹ M Mallos, M Everett, K Weier, and B Piscitelli, *Lost & Found: school holiday audience research report*, Queensland Art Gallery/ QUT: internal report, 2004. M Everett, K Weier, and B Piscitelli, *Colour: School audience research report*, Queensland Art Gallery/Queensland University of Technology, internal report, 2003. M Everett, K Weier, and B Piscitelli, *Summer Spectacular: child-family audience research report*, Queensland Art Gallery/Queensland University of Technology: internal report, 2003.
- ²⁰ City of Melbourne, *ArtPlay – an inspiring art studio for children: celebrating five years*, City of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2009.
- ²¹ ArtPlay and University of Melbourne, 'Mapping and augmenting engagement, learning and cultural belonging for children undertaking ArtPlay workshops', ARC Linkage Grant, 2007–2010.
- ²² J Eisenberg and L van Katwyk, 'The Art Factory: Children's Art Space', room brochure, MRAG, Maitland,

NSW, 2009.

²³ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Agency (ACARA), 'The National Curriculum: History', ACARA, Canberra, 2010.

²⁴ For example, Queensland Museum has an extensive loans kit service that distributes kits with specimens, objects and experiments for class and community learning.

²⁵ For example T Albert, *Stories through Art*. First Australians: Plenty Stories series, Pearson/Rigby, Melbourne, 2009.

²⁶ Print education publications, e.g. J Vyrhtlik and E Schaffer, *Kids, Customs and Culture: a teaching resource for years 4–6*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 1995.

²⁷ A Fulton, 'High school students drawn to a whole new world', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 and 2 May 2010, p. 15.

²⁸ B Piscitelli, M Everett, K Weier, and QUT Museums Collaborative, *Enhancing Young Children's Museum Experiences: a manual for museum staff*, QUT, Brisbane, 2003.

²⁹ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1999.

³⁰ Young People and the Arts Australia, 'Changing Habitats: are children and young people democratising culture?', National Symposium, Brisbane, 2010.

Barbara Piscitelli is a member of the Board of Directors of the Queensland Museum and a former member of the Collections Council of Australia, and Chair of the National Review of Visual Education. She has undertaken extensive research into children's learning in museums, and has published widely on children's understanding of arts and culture. Currently, she is Visiting Scholar at the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Cite as: Barbara Piscitelli, 2011, 'What's driving children's cultural participation?', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/BPiscitelli_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums, education and visitor experience

The museum education mix: students, teachers and museum educators

by Janette Griffin

Introduction

While some school classes may still sit in a classroom, talked at by education officers, or be met at the museum's schools entrance and provided with rules and worksheets, there are now many innovative and interactive programs available in museums. Learning opportunities that include emotional, aesthetic and interactive experiences have replaced 'teaching'. Students spend more time immersed in the galleries, participating in drama, role play, online and hands-on interaction. Changes have been influenced by recent research into school students' learning in museums. Numerous people, especially in the US and the UK, have contributed to these changes. [1] Many Australian educators and researchers have also expanded our knowledge of students' learning in museums through practice and/or research. Some examples of their work will be described in this chapter. [2]

Museums have always positioned themselves as educational institutions, and yet the role of education staff has developed erratically and variably. In school-level programs there has been a trend to smaller groups working with a museum educator: from up to 60 in the 1970s to smaller groups now. Less time is spent in classrooms and more time in exhibition areas complemented by hands-on experiences. Programs are considerably more learning- and student-oriented and less object-driven. If worksheets are provided at all, they now seek thought-provoking investigations rather than simply 'fill in the blanks'. Opportunity for communication with teachers and students has expanded dramatically through web-based information, materials and activities. In this chapter I will explore these changes for the museum educators, [3] the students, the teachers [4] and the museums as a whole. An interesting question that remains as yet unanswered is the amount of influence that students exert on cultural institutions, especially considering how large, diverse and measurable the group is.

Museum educators

Tony Sadler and Beryl Morris, who worked in South Australia, gave a picture of the perspectives and experiences of museum educators across Australia in the 1980s. [5] Many of the articles emphasised the importance of specialist content knowledge, familiarity with the institution's collections and ability to give advice on labels, displays and publications. Interestingly, there was little emphasis on teaching and learning processes.

Even by the 1980s many institutions had only one educator who, because of professional isolation, needed to be assertive and actively promote their ideas and their profession. However new ideas were spreading with discussion about displays engaging 'all the senses' and being more than simple 'copy down the label' exercises.

Over the past 30 years the work undertaken by museum educators has broadened considerably. Programs consisting of children sitting in rows listening to a 'lecture' and having specimens or objects passed around, or filing past displayed objects, have largely disappeared. There has been a major shift towards experiential opportunities for students to enjoy shared, engaging and relevant experiences. Many more programs are conducted within exhibition spaces. Many more programs emphasise learning processes more than outcomes — for example, how to look, interrogate, deduce, and evaluate. Inquiry-based learning, personalised learning agendas and allowing students to have ownership and responsibility for their learning rather than simply gathering information are emphasised.

Museum educators have been increasingly involved in development of web-based and online materials. Electronic booking and access to pre-, during, and post-visit materials are available from many museums. This reduces the need, but sadly also the opportunity, for museum educators to

talk with teachers before the visit. At the same time, however, it provides extensive materials for work in the classroom before and after the visit, and in some instances considerable insight into the museum's exhibitions, programs, information and collections.

Some museums, particularly those with widely scattered constituents, are using school intranet, the Internet and web-based materials as learning tools. Hence, teachers and students can be better informed before going to the museum. At the same time, outreach programs – such as travelling exhibitions transported on trains, buses or trucks and boxed materials – are being reduced. There has been little investigation into the impact of these changes.

Educators have been involved to a degree in exhibition development for some time, but often at the edges only, or after the main themes have been developed. However, Pamela Clelland Gray at the National Portrait Gallery gives us an example of more recent approaches. [6] She looked at the educational aim of art museums and concluded that development of exhibitions involving both curatorial and educational staff leads to greater opportunity for engagement and enhanced visual literacy of wider audiences.

Historically artworks have been subject to curatorial procedures that tend to generate a fixed and single meaning. Art is positioned at an interface between the museum's culture and the audience's and shifts the ownership of the meaning of the works — interpretation rather than perception. Increasingly educators are involved in aspects of text development, aspects of comfort and environment, curatorial involvement in exhibitions, and web-based outreach programs. Education staff on exhibition teams not only represent the school visitor but often theirs is the most authoritative voice on appropriate approaches to understanding.

Many museum educators today have a responsibility that goes well beyond the school student audience. While in some institutions public programs are separate from school visit programs, there is a move toward staff working across all audience groups. This link enables shared theoretical and philosophical approaches which in turn enhance visitor experiences, as well as giving greater recognition to the professional role of educators in all aspects of the museum's work.

At the same time staff are focusing programs for discrete audiences — very young children, primary, secondary/adolescents, singles or groups of adults and family groups — and these programs are seen as 'audience drivers'. Rather than being an adjunct to an exhibition, they are the programs which attract people to the exhibition and institution and provide the key experience for the visit. This has meant that, for example, family and holiday programs are being taken much more seriously by institutions and funded accordingly.

While educators have become involved in more diverse ways, there has also been a trend toward varied employment arrangements. Thirty or more years ago the majority of museum educators were seconded from state or Catholic education systems. Today museums in only one state, South Australia, predominantly employ seconded teachers in museums. Working conditions have ranged from working at the museum for school hours on school days to full-time hours and days. Pay scales were and still are variable from state to state and between institutions in the one state.

A number of museums have moved to having fewer full-time staff who work across many programs, and instead have engaged increasing numbers of part-time or casual staff for each specific program. There are both positive and negative outcomes from these changes: a wider pool of skills provides opportunities for specialists in each of the audience segments. In some museums there are fewer teacher-trained staff, but the skills base is broadened by employing youth workers, communication experts, drama or other arts experts.

Casualisation, however, can lead to increased complexity of jobs and heavier workloads for the remaining full-time staff through project management, leaving less time for professional development opportunities such as attending meetings and conferences at local, state or national level. Casualisation may also lead to lower commitment to the organisation.

Student experiences

Museum educators consider their main job to be providing learning opportunities and student-oriented experiences. The museum educator is no longer accurately described by the contributors to the booklet of Sadler and Morris. Increasing varieties of resources and pedagogies are being used to encourage choice, discussion, questioning and active involvement. Educators must develop understanding of student-centred learning approaches and experiences in keeping with ongoing

research based on sociocultural and constructivist learning processes. This move away from content information in the learning agenda of museums privileges the students, giving individual students responsibility for their own learning. Students are recognised as capable and willing to learn when given the right opportunities in these stimulating environments – be they face-to-face or online.

Research in Australia on learning complements many studies conducted overseas and has informed changes in the nature of public programs in Australia. The studies explore experiences of very young children in museums, primary and secondary school students, adolescents and young people, families and older visitors. Leonie Rennie and Terry McClafferty [7] at Curtin University investigated the design of exhibits and environments in Science Centres to see what can help or hinder learning. The exhibit design must *allow* for the learning objectives to be achievable. Critical characteristics for understanding in museums are the personal nature of learning; being contextualised; and given time. David Anderson [8] found that students at the Queensland Sciencentre learned through reflection, making links to prior experiences, and later application of the resulting understandings in the classroom. Displays and activities that involved a diversity of sensory modes led to greater learning than did any other components of the visit. [9]

Susan Groundwater-Smith and Lynda Kelly in Sydney [10] asked upper primary and secondary students to photograph examples of aspects of the museum that help or hinder their learning. Students then developed posters of their findings. They revealed four categories that helped learning:

Cognitive: when they know how things work, have opportunities to ask questions, seek information from varied sources, and are stimulated through various senses;

Physical: when safe and comfortable, able to move easily, space is well lit, and the scale is appropriate;

Social: when learning with friends, a satisfying social occasion;

Emotional: when connected to their interests but not when emotionally confronted.

Students' understanding of why they are visiting a museum, knowing what they are there to learn about, having choice in the specifics of their learning, and being able to learn and to record information in ways that they prefer, leads to substantial engagement in learning. These parameters are equally important for both primary and secondary students. [11] Sadly, there are many teachers who do not involve their students in decisions about, and the planning of the field trip. I return to this below.

Interestingly, despite teachers and worksheets, students of all ages nevertheless learn from their visit. Observations of individual students visiting museums in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra revealed that learning behaviours account for about (a surprising) 87 per cent of all behaviours. Most adolescents choose learning as the first thing that they think of when asked to describe their thoughts about museums, and most of them have positive things to say about the atmosphere of a museum. They like seeing the real thing, enjoy interactive exhibits and dislike being distracted by others. Students prefer to visit a museum with their school class rather than with their parents, reflecting the positive social experience of being with their friends. [12] Young children in science centres learn more when given the opportunity to interact with peers and adults. [13]

Teachers' (or museum educators') expectations that students should complete detailed worksheets are an impediment to student learning. Students feel rushed to find the answers and do not have time to appreciate the exhibits. Too many museum experiences still seem to concentrate on verbal/linguistic learning processes. [14] Peter Hoban and colleagues at Sovereign Hill present a wide variety of topics and activities from which the students can choose, in consultation with their teacher. The visit comprises five steps: Define your topic; Think, wink and decide; [15] Undertake the excursion; Present the project; Self-assessment.

Young children quickly take on the observed practices of those around them, and happily interact with all aspects of their environment. They are less likely than older people to be concerned about the environment as they readily incorporate it along with all other aspects of the program or exhibits. [16] They readily learn 'about' art, for example, when given opportunities to not only respond to it but also be involved in making it: 'Social interaction is a key to enabling children to build conceptual understanding through their encounters and transactions with objects. Teachers, parents, museum educators, and peers play an influential role in helping children form ideas through dynamic discussion about art objects.' [17]

The experiences of both museum educators and researchers clearly show that students DO learn and enjoy their visits to museums, as long as they are allowed to do so. School teachers, however, may be the ones whose attitudes and behaviours have changed least. This is shown by research and evaluation studies and educators' experiences over more than 20 years in Australia.

Teachers

While museum educators have been working to form closer relationships with schools, there is still an ongoing lack of meaningful communication between museum educators and school teachers. Teachers find excursions to museums to be worthwhile but stressful. There is considerable logistical preparation: a need to consider cost, safety, behaviour, organisation, relevance, justification to parents and principals. On the other hand, they see the benefits as extending classroom learning, involving relevant and interesting learning experiences and widening the students' horizons and life experience. Teachers choose excursion venues based on relevance to their school topic, easy access to the site, and proximity to other excursion venues. [18] Excursions are also seen as an opportunity 'to get out of class', and for social interaction.

Teachers frequently find themselves out of their depth and feel inadequate, even frightened, when conducting excursions. Hence many seem to be running excursions in the same way they experienced them when they were students at school. The 'fear factor' seems to interfere with learning-oriented interactions with the students while in the museum. Often teachers simply hand over the students (and the responsibility of the learning) to the museum educators. (This has been and remains a feature of museum visits in many countries.)

There is very little understanding by teachers of pedagogical approaches which help students learn in a museum. There are gaps between teacher aspirations and teacher practice. For their part, museum staff don't always understand teachers' needs. Teachers make the key decisions regarding field trip planning and implementation, but the inherent conflict between the systems of formal schooling and informal education with their different learning formats, different bureaucracies and different philosophies are not resolved. [19]

Both teachers and museum educators consider 'that better museum-school communication is the most important component necessary to increase the effectiveness of school visits to museums. Teachers should be more knowledgeable of what museums have to offer and museums should provide more information to the right people so that they may become so'. [20] This underlines the need to provide pedagogical preparation for teachers in order to actively participate in the potential learning opportunities provided by the museum. While teachers view the school and museum as complementary learning experiences, very few perceive a difference between classroom and excursion learning strategies. There is a misrecognition of the social relations of power in which museum staff are dominant and in which school-based educators have an ill-defined and often educationally ineffective pedagogical role. [21] The implicit power relations create barriers and silences that impede engagement by teachers. Pathways are needed to develop relationships that make each group's roles and responsibilities explicit and valued.

A framework has been developed to provide teachers with a process that prepares the students for their visit and makes school excursions operate more like family visits. The framework School Museum Integrated Learning Experiences for Students (SMILES) is based on three major elements: Purpose (students know exactly why they are going to the museum because the visit is part of a classroom-based topic); Choice (which specific parts of the museum will be visited and how students will find and gather information); and Ownership (of their own or their group's learning agenda). The students' and teachers' declared outcomes of both learning and enjoyment when the school field trips are run in this way clearly affirms the validity of the process. The preparation allows for meaningful interactions with the museum educators and the exhibitions.

The SMILES framework leads to students and teachers feeling positive about their enjoyment of the visit and the learning outcomes. Aspects of this process have been adopted (if they were not already being used) by many museums in their materials for teachers and in their on-site programs. However, despite the clear benefits, many teachers still do not use the framework.

Opportunities are needed for teachers to undertake appropriate professional development which emphasises that learning in an informal setting such as a museum requires different pedagogical approaches from those commonly used in schools. More opportunities are needed for museum educators to take formal courses or to have appropriate professional learning in this area. Few museum studies courses have dedicated subjects on museum education, although there are public

program subjects in which this is incorporated. Generally museum educators learn 'on the job' and can only rely on their considerable dedication and professionalism.

Museum educators in many states have been active in working with professional teachers' associations in many learning areas. Unfortunately much of the interaction is one way – we need to find ways to encourage and facilitate shared roles and responsibility for teachers and museum educators in the learning process. Some university teacher education faculties include visits to museums: there is, however, a need to be careful not to let this reinforce the view that 'we (the museum) can do it all for you'. University of Technology, Sydney has established a subject for all primary teacher education students that involves placements in museums to gain an understanding of the role of museum educators and of the learning environment. At the same time the program is emphasising the key role that the teachers have in facilitating learning in informal settings. There is an important opportunity here to facilitate more workshops that develop shared responsibility for the learning between teachers and museum educators.

Conclusion

Significantly, six of the 10 Aims for Museums described in the Pigott Report of 1975 [22] included aspects of learning and public programs. Key elements included curiosity, educating formally and informally, extending knowledge, the magic of rare and unique objects, use of art and theatre and relevance to all ages. It is salutary to reflect on this emphasis, and perhaps to revisit these aims.

There are many gems but also some dinosaurs in the combined efforts of museum educators and teachers in providing excellent learning opportunities for school students in museums. Strengthening the membership and activity of the Museums Australia Education National Network across all states is an important way forward. Recent links between this network and development of the National Curriculum [23] in several areas is an excellent advance. The museum education profession has moved forward in many positive directions. The two areas important in making further progress are shared recognition and respect for ongoing learning by both museum educators and teachers.

Footnotes

¹ Leaders in this field internationally include John Falk and Lynn Dierking (Institute for Learning Innovation and Oregon State University), George Hein (Lesley University, Cambridge, Massachusetts), Paulette McManus (University College, London), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (University of Leicester), David Anderson (Victoria & Albert Museum, London).

² To gather a broad picture of past and current programs in Australia 20 interviews and/or surveys were conducted with experienced museum educators from major Australian museums covering all states and territories and including museums of art, botanic gardens, history, maritime, natural history, science, and social history. I would like to acknowledge the following people with whom I have consulted to develop this paper: Helen Whitty NSW, Lyn Beasley ACT, Genevieve Fahey VIC, Janelle Hatherley NSW, Peter Hoban VIC, Brian Ladd NSW, Sarah Main NSW, Terry McClafferty WA, Chris Nobbs SA and Ian Watts VIC.

³ For simplicity, the term *museum educator* is used to describe all people employed or volunteering in a museum to work primarily but not exclusively with school groups.

⁴ Similarly, *teachers* are those who have brought the group from school, and may also include parents and other helpers accompanying the school group.

⁵ Tony Sadler and Beryl Morris, *Museum Educators Think Aloud on Educational Philosophy*, Quoll Enterprises, Seaton, SA, 1989, p. 41.

⁶ Pamela Clelland Gray, 'Public learning and the art museum: future directions.' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, 2002.

⁷ Leonie Rennie and Terence McClafferty, 'Objects and learning: understanding young children's interaction with science exhibitions', in Scott Paris (ed.), *Perspectives on Object Centered Learning in Museums*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 2002, pp. 191–211.

⁸ Formerly at Queensland University of Technology, now at University of British Columbia.

⁹ David Anderson, Keith Lucas and Ian Ginns, 'Theoretical perspectives on learning in an informal setting', *National Association for Research in Science Teaching Conference*, Boston, MA, 1999.

- ¹⁰ Susan Groundwater-Smith and Lynda Kelly, 'As we see it: improving learning in the museum', *British Education Research Association Annual Conference*, Edinburgh, 2003.
- ¹¹ Janette Griffin, *School-Museum Integrated Learning Experiences in Science*, University of Technology, Sydney, PhD Thesis. 1998, <http://hdl.handle.net/2100/254>
- ¹² Janette Griffin, Carolyn Meehan and David Jay, 'The other side of evaluating student learning in museums: separating the how from the what', *Museums Australia Conference*, Sydney, 2005.
- ¹³ Rennie and McClafferty, 'Objects and learning: understanding young children's interaction with science exhibitions'.
- ¹⁴ Peter Hoban and Marion Tonkin, 'Children should be seen AND heard: catering for multiple intelligences in a museum setting'. Presentation at *Museums Australia Conference*. Adelaide, 2002.
- ¹⁵ Think: Things I know; WINK: What I Need to Know: and Decide: Where and how will I find information at Sovereign Hill. Booklet available for download at <http://www.sovereignhill.com.au/?id=wuthenticlearningbey>
- ¹⁶ Lyn Fasoli, 'Following the signs: induction of preschool children to the Art Gallery', *Uncover: Graduate Research in the Museum Sector*, University of Sydney and the Australian Museum (AMARC), Sydney, 2002.
- ¹⁷ Barbara Piscitelli and Katrina Weier, 'Learning with, through, and about art: the role of social interactions', in Scott Paris (ed.), *Perspectives on Object-Centered Learning in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 2002, pp. 121–151.
- ¹⁸ Kathy Stewart, 'Up the garden path', *Uncover*, Vol. 1, 2002, pp. 199–206.
- ¹⁹ David Anderson, *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom* Department of National Heritage, London, 1997.
- ²⁰ Lisa Edwards, *Museum School Interactions: A Sydney Study*, Honours Thesis, Faculty of Education, University of Sydney.
- ²¹ Donna Mathewson and Penny McKeon, 'Disrupting notions of collaboration: the problematic engagement of museums and schools', *Australian Association for Research in Education*, Brisbane 2002.
- ²² *Museums in Australia 1975, Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975, p. 6.
- ²³ [The Australian Curriculum website](#), Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority.

Janette Griffin has been teaching and researching in school, museum, a science centre and university programs.

Cite as: Janette Griffin, 2011, 'The museum education mix: students, teachers and museum educators', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JGriffin_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums, education and visitor experience

Family visitors to museums in Australia

by Lynda Kelly

Museums in Australia have recognised the need to become more responsive to their audiences, especially families who both visit museums and see the value of them. Changes in family and social structures have provided opportunities for museums to play an important role in social engagement and bonding and for meeting the learning requirements of families in this complex information age. Research has consistently found that positive early family visits to museums have a significant impact on later visiting habits. [1]

Families are a key audience for museums in Australia. For example, at the Australian Museum, Sydney and the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, they account for over half the number of visitors. In regional museums in New South Wales, contrary to established beliefs, almost one-third of visitors are families. Research has established that families access a wide range of information sources when learning together during their visits to museums. When people visit museums as young children with their family they are more likely to visit when they are older. [2]

This chapter will discuss museum visits and family life and how families form successful learning units illustrated through examples from research with families visiting an Australian Museum exhibition. The principal gains from recent research are the recognition of the importance of learning in family visits and the different roles that various family members play before, during and after their visit.

Families in the new century

The forces of social change, economic circumstances, increasing divorce rates, remarriage/re-partnering, and changing living patterns have meant that the term 'family' is not as straightforward as it was in the past.

The Institute of Family Studies, Australia, defined a family as a group of individuals related by blood, marriage, adoption or cohabitation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics also has a similar but more detailed description: a family is two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household. [3] The common elements in these definitions are that there is some type of relationship, and that the group themselves identify as a family unit.

John Falk and Lynn Dierking of the Institute for Learning Innovation (and now Oregon State University), who have carried out extensive studies of learning in museums, recognise that families are 'those who self-define themselves as a family (in other words, all members are not necessarily biologically related)'. [4]

As in other countries, there have been significant changes in the nature of family groupings in Australia in the past 20 years. Families consisting of couples with children of any age remain the most prevalent type of family in Australia. However, between 1986 and 2001 the number of one-parent families increased by 53 per cent, and couple families without children living with them increased by 33 per cent. Consequently, two-parent families with children are forming a smaller proportion of all families — 47 per cent of families in 2001, down from 54 per cent in 1986. [5] Due to these demographic shifts, museums are increasingly using the term 'intergenerational groups' to refer to mixed groups of people, including children, who are related in some way.

Families in Australian museums

Museums in Australia have long recognised the importance of families as visitors, with several establishing separate spaces for these groups, especially those with very young children. Patricia McDonald, the first professional education officer employed by the Australian Museum, in reviewing the history of educational activities at the Australian Museum, observed, 'From its inception the Australian Museum has been regarded as an educational institution and its activities have been concerned with increasing general public interest in and knowledge of the natural sciences'. [6] The

Museum has provided programs for students and children since the early 1920s, with the establishment of a special *Children's Room* in 1962.

Due to both audience demand and changes in thinking about how people – particularly children – learned, the Museum developed the *Discovery Room*, one of the earliest interactive spaces and one heavily used by families. This was followed by a whole exhibition floor dedicated to interactive learning specifically aimed at children and families (the *Discovery Space*). Since that time these areas have undergone several iterations, with the establishment of the popular *Search and Discover* in 1998 and *Kids' Island* in 1999 as active, hands-on exploratory learning spaces catering specifically to children and their families, and drawing on the Museum's collection strengths and research expertise.

The latest key development in family programming has been the opening of *Kidspace* in 2007 as part of the Museum's redevelopment. These developments were informed by extensive evaluation with both adults and children, which repeatedly found families commenting on the importance of having spaces for young children within the Museum that were enjoyable, promoted hands-on learning, and stimulated children's curiosity and creativity while providing a chance to explore and discover within the special context of the family.

Two other major museums developed dedicated spaces specifically designed for children and families during the past 10 years. The Melbourne Museum's *Children's Gallery* is aimed at three- to eight-year-olds and has a mandate to encourage discovery and exploration within a range of science issues. The aim was to provide an interactive, hands-on and playful space that engages all the senses through continually updated exhibitions. The National Museum of Australia developed *Kspace*, an interactive, technology-focused space where children 'design their own future'. In addition, *Our Place* was designed as a series of cubbies for children to explore the Museum's themes in their own ways, as well as being useful programming spaces.

The Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney, when developing its *Pirates* program for families, realised that, in exhibitions aimed at children, the accompanying adults also needed something to occupy them. The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, while catering for family audiences through its many exhibitions (both permanent and temporary) and programs, recognised the value of a dedicated space for children who were visiting with their parents. The interactive installation, *Zoe's House*, caters specifically for children aged three to six years to facilitate both cooperative and creative play in children.

All these examples demonstrate an approach to programming for families that is based on constructivist learning principles [7], being interactive, playful and learner-centred, while encouraging social interaction through providing something for all ages.

Families and learning in museums

Learning is a key reason for museum visits generally, by individuals, small groups and families. People who visit museums value learning and seek opportunities to learn in many ways. Those who visit more often are usually better educated. 'The primary reason most people attend museums, whether by themselves or with their children, is in order to learn ... [therefore, they are] likely to see museums as places that provide opportunities for them to expand their own and their children's learning horizons'. [8]

Why is the family such an important learning unit? Culture plays a strong role in learning survival and life skills, with much of this being learned through the family. Studies of literacy and adult learning suggested that an orientation to lifelong learning and readiness to learn in later life is strongly linked to the family. [9] Families live and learn together, and the attitudes and behaviours developed there continue through later life, including their visits to museums. [10] 'Family members talk about what they know from previous experiences and memories ... these discussions provide opportunities for parents to reinforce past experiences and family history and develop a shared understanding among family members.' [11]

Whereas earlier research indicated that the principal motivation for visits to museums by families was to give opportunities for social interaction, many more recent studies reveal that family conversations and behaviours in museums are centred on learning. [12] Family interactions strongly influence how people learn in later life, particularly in forming attitudes, values and views of the world. [13] Learning is a key 'life skill' that assists a child develop along the right 'life path': 'With the correct guidance from the family you hope that they will have a better life with all these

learning skills that they have gained.' [14] Over time a family's behaviour is developed and refined and, through the rich experiences provided by museums, families become more successful as learning units.

Visitors also recognise the important role that museums play in learning about difficult or sensitive issues. Adults visiting the Australian Museum's *Indigenous Australians* exhibition felt that it was important for them and their children to learn more about Australia's Indigenous cultures in order to understand and reflect on past injustices and to better comprehend contemporary issues. [15] Parents with children aged less than five years visiting an Indigenous program at the Australian Museum felt it was critical that their children were introduced to Indigenous issues from an early age to help prepare them for later learning. These families especially valued their visit because it filled gaps in the adults' knowledge about Indigenous subjects and issues and helped them become more confident when talking to their children about these issues. [16]

Family visits to museums in Australia share a number of characteristics. [17] When families voluntarily choose to visit museums they wish both to learn and engage in social interaction in a recreational context. They take time for orientation, enter with a sense of curiosity, bring with them a set of prior experiences and a personal agendas, link what they see to their own prior experiences, are most attracted to concrete and/or interactive displays, have a common viewing behaviour which involves looking very closely at each display in the first gallery, then skimming and moving randomly in subsequent galleries. The visiting behaviour is modified by increased experience with the setting: they like to revisit favourite displays, share their viewing and learning in a social context, enjoy and remember interactions with people from the museum, respond to physical needs by sitting or having a break after little more than an hour and generally stay for less than two hours.

Research has found that visitors play three roles which are particularly relevant to the family group during the visit: *visit manager* by directing and organising; *museum expert* through explaining, clarifying and correcting; and *learning-facilitator* in questioning, linking, reminiscing and wondering. [18] These roles occur simultaneously, are closely linked to the process of learning and are dependent on both the social context of the visit and the group composition, particularly the ages of any accompanying children.

Adults spend as much time playing the visit manager role and engaging their children as looking at displays themselves. Adults have many strategies on hand to manage their children's needs, such as distracting them, asking questions and directing their attention to something they might like.

Accompanying adults play a key role in facilitating family learning: 'Parents can be effective facilitators for their children's learning when exhibitions are designed with collaborative learning in mind and when adults feel comfortable with the content and experiences provided in the museum'. [19] Mothers and fathers take different roles during a visit, mothers being more concerned with the logistics of the visit whilst fathers see museums as 'family business'. [20] Parents often play a 'teaching' role in a museum visit, [21] and assist learning through drawing on their own experiences, and they often took 'central control' over the visit. [22]

The mood and behaviour of the child may influence the learning that takes place through its impact on the accompanying adults. Adults sometimes have to spend time trying to activate interest and enthusiasm from a disengaged and bored child, which can also create tension if the adult wants to see something that appeals to them, as illustrated in another conversation of the same family.

Families sharing learning

Research has consistently shown that social interaction promotes learning and that the role of the parent is critical. A key finding of one study of learning in children's museums showed that 'children stayed longer at exhibits and learned more when they were accompanied by an adult who was actively involved in the activities'. [23] Museum behaviours of family members include reading labels together, discussing what they are looking at and asking each other questions. These family interactions stimulate learning, providing an extensive, continuous reciprocal influence on visitor/exhibit interactions. [24]

Paulette McManus, a UK-based museum audience researcher, also described family visitors as 'hunter-gatherers':

actively foraging in the museum to satisfy their curiosity about the topics and objects which

museum professionals collect and study ... [This] behaviour is practical and economical since the exploration and information-gathering is shared out between the family members. [25]

There is a two-way sharing of learning between parent and child: each has expertise and experience to share. Different levels of expertise can emerge among group members that provide a wider range of explanations than occur among groups with a balanced level of expertise among its members. [26]

Linking to prior, present and past experiences

Visitors engage with exhibitions through the lens of their personal experiences and identity. [27] They make personal meanings from the objects they are looking at and connect these to their own lives. [28]

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill of the University of Leicester in England, well-known internationally for her work on museum communications and education, concluded from her research on teachers and students in the United Kingdom that children exhibited more positive learning identities after visiting a museum. Families can get very excited about exhibitions, holding animated discussions about the many things they had seen and learned in a positive and confident manner.

Tales of successful learners: families visiting museums

'Museum experiences embedded within children's familiar culture and contexts are powerful mediators of memory, enjoyment and learning in these settings'. [29] New museum experiences are linked with familiar prior knowledge, there is a strong tendency to share learning with family members, the physical needs of visitors and their 'natural' viewing itinerary must be addressed, curiosity and choice in learning selections are important.

Parents facilitate learning when the exhibits allow for collaborative participation and they feel comfortable with the information. [30] Adults' views of knowledge, such as understanding the tentative nature of science knowledge, influence the way they interact with their children and how they convey the learning process. Parents make use of learning facilities such as open access libraries and activity kits if they know they are there and understand their role. Family members each take notice of different aspects of an exhibit and construct a shared meaning together.

Museums are one part of the family's free-choice learning activities. Parents consider museum visits to be valuable in creating and strengthening relationships with their children, in spending quality time together, in sharing experiences and in enabling them to tune into what fascinates their children. Museums are seen as a good day out, something the whole family can enjoy as a different form of education and are considered generally good value for money. [31]

In this increasingly complex world, where the real and virtual are blurring and where changes in society can seem overwhelming, museums are able to provide spaces for families to be together as well as learn together. Parents value museum visits because they provide children with opportunities to learn in different ways through bringing concepts to life and enhancing school learning experiences. They stimulate visitors of all ages and open their minds to new ideas, the world around them, history and other cultures. Children enjoy museums as places where they can fantasise, explore and learn in ways that are more engaging than they experience in more formal settings, such as school. The challenge for museums is to use the elements that families value, the ways they interact with museums, and how they operate as extremely effective learning units to apply these principles, not only to the development of future exhibitions and programs but also the ways they plan for other group visitors to museums.

Footnotes

¹ J Falk and L Dierking, *Learning from Museums: visitor experiences and the making of meaning*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, 2000.

² For a comprehensive list of references see L Kelly, G Savage, J Griffin and S Tonkin, *Knowledge Quest: Australian families visit museums*, Australian Museum, Sydney, 2004, and L Kelly, *Visitors and Learners: adult museum visitors' learning identities*, University of Technology, Sydney, 2007.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends*, Canberra, 2007.

⁴ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, p. 110.

- ⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Directory of Child and Family Statistics*. Canberra, 2000
- ⁶ In Ron Strahan (ed.), *Rare and Curious Specimens: an illustrated history of the Australian Museum 1827–1979*, Australian Museum, Sydney, 1979, p. 151.
- ⁷ George Hein of Lesley College, Cambridge, MA, was instrumental in highlighting the application of constructivist learning principles in museum exhibitions: see George E Hein, *Learning in the Museum*, Routledge, London, 1998.
- ⁸ J Falk, T Moussouri, and D Coulson, 'The Effect of Visitors' Agendas on Museum Learning', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1998, p. 40.
- ⁹ K Rubenson, 'Adults' Readiness to Learn: Questioning Lifelong Learning for All', paper presented at the Australian Association for Educational Research, Sydney, 2000.
- ¹⁰ L Kelly *et al*, *Knowledge Quest*.
- ¹¹ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, p. 93
- ¹² G Leinhardt, C Tittle, and K Knutson, 'Talking to Oneself: diaries of museum visits', in G Leinhardt, K Crowley and K Knutson (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah 2000, pp. 103–133; for other references see Kelly, *et al*, *Knowledge Quest*, and Kelly, *Visitors and Learners*.
- ¹³ Kelly, *Visitors and Learners*.
- ¹⁴ Kelly, 2007 Interview Transcript 3.2: From an interview with an adult visitor discussing their approach to learning.
- ¹⁵ L Kelly and P Gordon, 'Developing a Community of Practice: museums and reconciliation in Australia', in R Sandell (ed.), *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 153–174 .
- ¹⁶ Australian Museum Audience Research Centre, *Early Childhood Program Evaluation Report*, ms, Australian Museum, Sydney, 2006.
- ¹⁷ Kelly *et al*, *Knowledge Quest*.
- ¹⁸ These and the following specific comments result from a study of families visiting an exhibition at the Australian Museum, *Uncovered: Treasures of the Australian Museum* (2004). The exhibition dealt with why, how and what the Museum had collected by detailing the stories, images and voices behind some of the most important discoveries of the previous 175 years. It also explained why collections were so important and outlined past, present and future Museum scientific research; for further details see Kelly, *Visitors and Learners*.
- ¹⁹ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, p. 95.
- ²⁰ S Stanton, 'Museums, Families and Cultural Models', *Visitor Studies Today!*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1999, pp. 6–9.
- ²¹ K Ellenbogen, 'Museums in Family Life: An Ethnographic Case Study', in G Leinhardt, K Crowley and K Knutson (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah 2002, pp. 81–101.
- ²² D Ash, 'Negotiations of Thematic Conversations About Biology', in Leinhardt, Crowley and Knutson (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, pp. 357–400.
- ²³ L Puchner, R Rapoport and S Gaskins, 'Learning in Children's Museums: is it really happening?' *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2001, pp. 237–259.
- ²⁴ L Dierking, 'Historical Survey of Theories of Learning', in G Durbin (ed.), *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning*, HMSO, London for GEM, Group for Education in Museums, 1996, pp. 21–24; J Diamond, 'The Behaviour of Family Groups in Science Museums', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1986, pp. 139–154.
- ²⁵ P McManus, 'Families in Museums', in R Miles and Zavala (eds), *Towards Museums of the Future: new European perspectives*, Routledge, London, 1994.
- ²⁶ J Fienberg and G Leinhardt, 'Looking Through the Glass: reflections of identity in conversations at a history

museum', in Leinhardt, Crowley and Knutson (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, pp. 357–400.

²⁷ Stanton, 'Museums, Families and Cultural Models'.

²⁸ Leinhardt, Tittle and Knutson, 'Talking to Oneself', p. 91.

²⁹ D Anderson, B Piscitelli, K Weier, M Everett and C Tayler, 'Children's Museum Experiences: identifying powerful mediators of learning', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2002, pp. 213–231.

³⁰ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*.

³¹ Blue Moon Research and Planning. *Qualitative study for Australian Museum Forward Plan*, ms, Australian Museum, Sydney, 1998.

Lynda Kelly is Head of Audience Research, Australian Museum. Her interests include audiences, evaluation, museum learning and how to measure it, social media and Web 2.0, organisational change and development. She has worked in the human relations, education and executive management areas of the Australian Museum and contributed to numerous public exhibition programs.

Cite as: Lynda Kelly, 2011, 'Family visitors to museums in Australia', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/LKelly_2011.html
ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6