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15<sup>th</sup> February 2003

Dear Sirs and Madam

**Re: Call for Submissions**

I hope you find the enclosed of interest and of use to the NMA review, though it is possible you might have already seen it. I enclose three chapters from my PhD thesis completed at the University of Melbourne last year. The thesis title was: 'Representations of History and Nation in Museums in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa'.

The thesis as a whole broadly examined museum development in the two post-colonial settler societies of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, investigating the evolution of new histories as museums seek to aid the construction of post-colonial national identities. A significant part of it focused on the new National Museum of Australia and Te Papa in Wellington, combining an examination of their history with an analysis of how they attempt to convey ideas of nation and national identity.

The three chapters I enclose relate directly to the National Museum of Australia and address the Review's terms of reference, specifically through examining and clarifying the aims and contents of the Museum and its exhibitions. **Chapter 4** looks at the history and development of the Museum, through the long history of proposals for a national museum since the nineteenth century, giving an understanding of why the present museum has developed as it has, until construction was approved in 1998. This includes the political debates and controversy that have surrounded the Museum during the last two decades, and the gradual development of the Museum's mission during the 1990s.

Due to the nature of the thesis, **Chapters 6 and 7** address the more recent developments of the NMA and Te Papa together and in direct comparison with each other. **Chapter 6** explores the development of their intellectual frameworks over the last few years, the controversy both internal and external this generated, and the motives behind individual exhibitions. It also examines the exhibitions at the time of opening, and particularly the public reaction they provoked and the reasons for it.

Unlike most current academic research, my thesis focuses especially on the non-indigenous experience and exhibitions. **Chapter 7** turns in greater detail to the non-indigenous history displays, the concepts behind them, and the ways they might contribute to an understanding of Australian and New Zealand national identity. This includes in depth discussion of the design processes, investigation into how the museums might be accused of 'trivialising' non-indigenous history, and opinion of both the successes and shortcomings of the exhibitions.

The whole thesis can be found in the NMA's Research Library, Melbourne University's library, and the research library at Te Papa. You are very welcome to publish/quote any part that might be appropriate. Should you wish to contact me the best initial route is probably through the email address above. Otherwise, please contact me at the UK address above until March, after which I will be at the South African address below, when I take up an Andrew Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at Rhodes University.

I very much hope my work is of value to the review process, and I look forward with interest to the Review's outcome.

Yours faithfully



**(Dr) James M. Gore**

From March 2003:   c/o History Department  
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## CHAPTER FOUR

### **The Challenge of a National Museum for Australia, c.1820 – 1998.**

The National Museum of Australia opened in Canberra in March 2001 to celebrate the Australian centenary of Federation. Billed as a national museum of social history, it is based on a tripartite concept inter-relating the long sweep of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, Australia's history and society since European settlement in 1788, and the interaction of people with the environment. Conceived by a national inquiry into museums and national collections in 1975, and formally established by an act of parliament in 1980, for over twenty years the National Museum of Australia was constantly delayed and almost shelved completely, due to political manoeuvring, the economic climate and fierce debate over its site and ultimate form. It was not until 1998 that the Coalition Government finally committed funds to the construction of a national museum to celebrate Federation.

The new museum is rightly seen as a 1970s Whitlam Government initiative, and in particular the culmination of efforts by various successive governments and groups to bring Australian history to the forefront of national consciousness. As Tony Bennett has commented of the proposal to finally establish a museum in 1975, it was evidence of a clear commitment to the production of a 'centrally co-ordinated national past';<sup>1</sup> a commitment to situate the nation in its own past rather than one rooted to European histories, as illustrated by the emergence of 'new' histories in the 1960s and 1970s. More generally, it can also be seen as further evidence of the continuing evolution of museum theory and methodology. There had, however, been calls for a national museum in Australia for over a century, with varying degrees of success. Since the late nineteenth century, as the federation movement began to gain momentum, there have been a number of different proposals put forward for the establishment of an Australian national museum. Before this too, a number of museums were established in the Australian colonies that can be seen as proto-national in orientation, though as this

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<sup>1</sup> T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: history, theory, politics*, London & New York, 1995, p.143.

chapter shows these museums were more indicative of a desire to establish the individual colonies than to be representative of a comprehensive Australian 'nation'. For over a century, the issue of a national museum in Australia has been one in dispute, and especially the form it might take.

This chapter examines the history of the National Museum, focusing on the different types of museums proposed, with particular emphasis on the discussion concerning the inclusion of the human history of Australia. Ian McShane has highlighted four distinct periods in which proposals for an Australian national museum have been in debate.<sup>2</sup> This author believes this can be widened to as many as seven periods, each reflecting the broad development of museums that has been identified in the previous two chapters. The first period is from around 1825 to 1860, when two museums that aspired to be national were established and another was proposed; broadly indicative of inter-colonial rivalry and the desire to illustrate the progress the colonies had made since European settlement. The second period is that from the late nineteenth century to about the First World War, as museums sought to endorse the federal movement, while the third, the inter-war period, saw three different proposals of zoology, ethnology and history put forward for a national museum, illustrating the changing functions gradually taking place in all major Australian museums. The fourth period is roughly between 1955 and 1970, when museums slowly began adjusting to the post-colonial era and the growing interest around the world in history, and proposals reflected this, including the first real proposal for a Museum of Social History. The fifth era includes the decade leading up to the ultimate establishment of the museum in 1980, while the sixth is between 1980 and 1998, a period when ill fate and disputes constantly hampered the museum's development, representing the growing role of history and museums within the political and cultural life of the country. The final period takes us from 1998, when federal expenditure for the construction of the National Museum of Australia was finally approved, to its opening in 2001.

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<sup>2</sup> I. McShane, 'Building a National Museum of Australia: A History', *Public History Review*, vol. 7, 1998, pp.75-88. The first of the four periods McShane explores is between 1820 and 1860, when museums were outlets for inter-colonial rivalry. He then moves to the latter half of the nineteenth century, as museums sought to support Federation, and then the inter-war years and the three proposals of zoology, ethnology and history. The final period he examines encompasses the years from around 1960 to the early 1990s, as museums and proposals for a national museum reflected the gradual adjustment to the post-colonial political and cultural era.

This chapter examines the first six of these periods, focusing on the developing nature and role of a national museum, as designs moved from national museums of natural history, to ethnology, and finally to that of history, and illustrating why it took Australia so long to establish a national museum. Museums in Australia had existed from the early nineteenth century, yet their focus for much of this time had been largely on natural history, science and technology, and to a certain extent, the indigenous populations. During the twentieth century, their emphasis slowly changed and this is reflected in the evolving and diverse views about the form of a national museum.

### Colonial or National?

Between 1825 and 1860, there were three museum proposals which aspired to be national, all arising from the activities of Philosophical Societies. Two of these came to fruition: the Australian Museum that came into existence in 1827, and the National Museum of Victoria, which was established in 1853. Both were founded as colonial natural history museums, representative of the colony and the Empire. The use of *Australian* and *National* in museums at this time can be considered as proto-national in orientation.<sup>3</sup> However, the term 'national' was not used the same way in colonial Australia as it is today, and so it is important to be aware that these early proposals had different motives to the others discussed in this chapter. Tim Bonyhady has discussed the use of 'national' in colonial Australia:

Far from suggesting that these lands were significant for all Australians, 'national' indicated that they were of colonial importance, just as 'national parks' were 'colonial parks', 'national galleries' were colonial galleries, and *The National Game*, as Arthur Streeton titled one of his paintings of 1889, was the Victorian game.<sup>4</sup>

By the time the National Museum of Victoria opened, the use of *Australian* and *National* was largely indicative of a desire to establish independent colonies of the empire, and can also be seen to symbolise a certain rivalry between New South Wales and Victoria, illustrated by the fact that the establishment of the National Museum of Victoria was just two years after Victoria's separation from New South Wales. This

<sup>3</sup> McShane, 'Building...', p.76.

<sup>4</sup> T. Bonyhady, 'The Stuff of Heritage', in T. Bonyhady & T. Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney and the Public Intellectual*, Carlton South, 1997, p.147.

rivalry can also clearly be seen in the establishment of art museums later in the century. The opening of the National Gallery of Victoria in 1861, for instance, was followed by the National Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1874, the National Gallery of South Australia in 1879, and the National Gallery of Queensland in 1895.<sup>5</sup>

These early 'national' museums, therefore, were not indicative of representing the separate Australian colonies as a comprehensive 'nation': a concept that was only occasionally invoked throughout the nineteenth century. As explored in Chapters One and Two, when searching for national identity, non-indigenous Australians identified as much with their homelands and the Empire than with the strange land in which they resided. Consequently, the appropriation of 'national' by these museums and art galleries was generally an assertion of the individual autonomy of that particular colony. This can also be seen in the third proposal for a 'national museum' in this period: the unsuccessful bid by the Royal Society of Tasmania for a National Tasmanian Museum.<sup>6</sup> As early as 1856, the Royal Society of Tasmania called for 'a sum ... as may be adequate to the erection of so much of a building, for the purposes of a National Museum'.<sup>7</sup> By 1857, plans for a National Tasmanian Museum had been designed by Francis Buther and presented to the Colonial Treasurer. No initial action was taken however, and in late 1857, the Secretary of the Royal Society, Joseph Milligan, wrote to the Colonial Secretary making it clear that in a new country, museums could 'exert an influence upon education, intellect, taste, and national feeling, beyond all power of calculation'.<sup>8</sup> He went on to state:

Although, therefore, the Tasmanian Museum may be considered as having already attained a magnitude and character which entitle it to take rank as a useful National Institution, it is for the rising generation and for *posterity* that the foundation of a great

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<sup>5</sup> M. Anderson & A. Reeves, 'Contested Identities: Museums and the Nation in Australia', in F.E.S. Kaplan (ed.), *Museums and the Making of "Ourselves": The Role of Objects in National Identity*, London & New York, 1994, p.92. These local jealousies were also acknowledged by the report into Australian Museums by the Carnegie Corporation in 1933. See S.F. Markham & H.C. Richards, *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia*, London, 1933, p.37.

<sup>6</sup> The Royal Society of Tasmania had been established in 1841. See Royal Society of Tasmania, 'History of the Royal Society of Tasmania, with portraits of the President, Council and Secretary', Hobart, 1895, in *Science Pamphlets*, vol. 3, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to the Colonial Secretary from Joseph Milligan, Secretary of the Royal Society of Tasmania, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1856. Published in Royal Society of Tasmania, *Report of the Royal Society of Tasmania for the year 1856*, Hobart, 1857, p.17.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to the Colonial Secretary from Joseph Milligan, Secretary of the Royal Society of Tasmania, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1857. Published in Royal Society of Tasmania, *Report ... for the year 1857*, Hobart, 1858, p.18.

work has been laid, as it is by them that its rapidly increasing advantages will be principally enjoyed.<sup>9</sup>

In 1858, the Society finally received practical recognition of its claims, gaining a grant of £3000, conditional on a further £1300 being raised.<sup>10</sup> By the next year, however, the Government had decided that it was unable to grant suitable land and offered the Society rooms under the Supreme Court instead. Despite its continued appeals, the Royal Society was forced to move under the Court in 1861, effectively ending the calls for a National Tasmanian Museum.<sup>11</sup> Another example of the desire to assert the individual autonomy of the colony, is in a brief report on the Tasmanian Museum in 1894, where it comments on the museum being 'made national by Act of Parliament in the session of 1885', where what really had happened was the museum had been given to the Colonial Government of Tasmania by the Royal Society.<sup>12</sup>

### **Federation and the new 'National' Capital**

The period leading up to Federation and through to the First World War saw four distinct proposals for a comprehensive national museum, representative of all the colonies, including the first recognition that the history of the Australian 'nation' should comprise part of such a museum. The first was by the New South Wales Premier Henry Parkes, who in 1887, as part of the celebrations to mark the centenary of colonial settlement, launched an architectural competition for the design of a Memorial State House. Sometimes known as a National Palace, it was to be Sydney's Centennial Park's 'crowning glory' intended 'for the education of the soul of citizenship'.<sup>13</sup> Parkes is somewhat responsible for a new era of historical writing in Australia, as to mark the

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Royal Society of Tasmania, *Report ... for the year 1858*, Hobart, 1859, p.18. The Tasmanian proposal is also significant as it was based on the relatively recent phenomenon of using visitor numbers as an indication of the museum's performance as an institution for public instruction, demonstrating, for example, the jump in visitor numbers from 1,096 in 1855 to 6,014 in 1859. See Royal Society of Tasmania, *Report ... for the year 1859*, Hobart, 1860, p.21.

<sup>11</sup> One of the reasons for this failure was that the appeals had been directed to the Governor Henry Fox Young, who had several years earlier withdrawn from active politics as a result of being criticised by the Colonial Office - for restricting the Legislative Council's right of inquiry into the management of the convict department. See McShane, 'Building...', p.77, and Young, Sir Henry Edward Fox, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 6, 1851-1890, pp.452-253.

<sup>12</sup> F.A. Bather, 'Some Colonial Museums', reprinted from 'The Report of the Museums Association 1894', in *Science Pamphlets*, vol. 3, State Library of Victoria, p.196. S.F. Markham & H.C. Richards, *Directory of Museums and Art Galleries in Australia and New Zealand*, London, 1934, p.37.

<sup>13</sup> A.W. Martin, *Henry Parkes: A Biography*, Melbourne, 1980, p.370.

centenary celebrations his government funded the transcription of original sources in London and a new official history of Australia.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the National Palace was to consist of a 'repository for historical manuscripts, a gallery for statuary and works of art, and a mausoleum'.<sup>15</sup> As Eric Irvin has described, there was to be:

A Museum ... where shall be deposited, as they can be collected, all books, documents, maps, printed or written matter, and reliques as may be illustrative of the historical, material, and industrial stages of the Colony's progress, and of the various aboriginal races of Australia, their customs, languages, and ethnological characteristics.<sup>16</sup>

Authorised, but not begun in time for the celebrations, the building unfortunately never took shape. The project had been controversial from the beginning, and at any rate almost all the designs proposed were too costly.<sup>17</sup> By the time Parkes was replaced as Premier in 1891, the project had been completely buried.

This emphasis on 'paper' material within museums is another illustration of the continuing neglect of actual historical material objects, discussed in Chapter Two. Another example is a proposal put forward in Sydney for a Federation Arch in 1901, to mark the arrival of Federation. Designed along similar lines to Parkes' celebratory idea of a museum containing historical records, a temporary arch had already been constructed and it was now suggested this be replaced with a permanent archway memorial. Like its predecessor, the proposal failed, but it is worth noting the proposed historical component of the Arch. As the *Sydney Mail* described at the time:

It is proposed to make the arch completely represent the whole of the federal history, and the arch will exhibit portraits in bronze of the most prominent of the promoters of the federal union ... the arch will contain five spacious rooms, the smallest of which will be 18ft by 20ft, with a staircase and lift approach, and can be utilised for the purpose of a museum of historical records and curios.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> B.H. Fletcher, 'History as a Moral Force: George Arnold Wood at Sydney University, 1891 – 1928', in S. Macintyre & J. Thomas (eds.), *The Discovery of Australian History, 1890 – 1939*, Carlton South, 1995, p.18. Also see B. H. Fletcher, *Australian History in New South Wales, 1888 to 1938*, Kensington, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Martin, *Henry Parkes*, p.370.

<sup>16</sup> E. Irvin, *Sydney as it might have been*, Sydney, 1974, p.55.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, pp.65–66.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.79.



Once Federation was achieved, it is perhaps not surprising that proposals began to swing towards the establishment of a national museum in the planned new national capital. The first of these was suggested by Arthur Woodward, Director of the Art Department at the School of Mines in Bendigo. In a paper presented to the Library Association of Australia's Third General Meeting in 1902, he proposed a museum, to be sited wherever the new federal capital was to be, consisting of 'departments of Archaeology, Paintings, Prints and Drawings, and a Library' as well as 'an Australian and natural history department'.<sup>19</sup> Woodward also noted the rivalry that existed, and would continue to exist, between the state museums, and subsequently declared:

Unless the spirit of magnanimity and patriotism dominates the people of Australia, and those who represent them on the management of such institutions, and those who are in possession of rare and choice specimens, I fail to see how it can ever be possible for a National Museum of Australia to become possessed of a great number of articles, particularly of articles that have an Australian historic interest. The natural home for the latter, now that we are one nation with one destiny, surely would seem to be a National Museum of Australia.<sup>20</sup>

One final scheme put forward in this period was that of Walter Burley Griffin in his design for the national capital, which had been chosen to be Canberra in 1908.<sup>21</sup> Griffin's design reconciled the 'city beautiful' and 'garden city' concepts, two independent architectural movements that had little in common.<sup>22</sup> As part of a recreational area on the northern side of the lake, he planned 'Public Gardens including Zoo, Museums, Theater, Stadium, Casino, Opera, Plant House, Gymnasia and Baths'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A.T. Woodward, 'A Plea for a National Museum', in Library Association of Australia, *Transactions and Proceedings at the Third General Meeting, held at Melbourne, April 1902*, Melbourne, 1902, p.94. Interestingly, Woodward proposed that the museum should be called the National Museum of Australia – the only time that name is really mentioned until the mid-1980s

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.93.

<sup>21</sup> Canberra was chosen in 1908, but it was not until 1927 that it became the seat of Government. Until then, the Federal Parliament sat in Melbourne.

<sup>22</sup> The 'city beautiful' movement had had its genesis in the United States and was primarily concerned to correct the lack of civic design in city building. The movement had been dramatised and given direction by a 'Great White City' exhibition in Chicago, Griffin's home city, in 1893. The 'garden city' concept came from England and was born in the 1890s out of concern for the housing conditions of the working people. See National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), *The Future Canberra*, Sydney, 1965, p.13.

<sup>23</sup> Australian Archives Commonwealth Record Series (hereafter AA CRS), A1818/2, Federal Capital Design No. 29 by Walter Burley Griffin, Original Report, Copy A.

They were to be the actual 'showplaces of the city',<sup>24</sup> and the museums were to be of natural history, archaeology, plastic arts and the graphic arts.<sup>25</sup>

Australian history did not feature directly in Griffin's design, though as McShane points out, archives and relics were to be stored in the Capital Monument proposed for Capital Hill.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, some argue his entire plan was geared towards the nurturing of a distinctive national type. Christopher Vernon, for example, points towards Griffin's determination to cultivate native plants and trees in the design, and to name suburbs and streets in Canberra after Australian fauna.<sup>27</sup> At any rate, like its predecessors, Griffin's plan for a type of Australian national museum was soon given up, largely due to the following years of war and economic crisis.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Inter-War Years – History, Zoology and Ethnology**

The period after the First World War saw a number of proposals for the establishment of national museums in Australia. The diverse nature of these proposals indicate the developing character of museums in Australia, as the traditional emphasis on natural history was increasingly challenged by the 'new' fields of history and ethnology. It was also a period when these proposals began to gain a wider measure of support and to a certain extent success. The first of these was the Australian War Memorial, established in 1919, 'as a storehouse for the records of the war, a museum for its relics, and a temple in which to honour its victims'.<sup>29</sup> Though it did not officially open in Canberra until 1941, the Australian War Memorial was the first true Australian national museum as well as the first attempt in a museum to materialise Australian history.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> K.F. Fischer, *Canberra: Myths and Models: Forces at work in the formation of the Australian capital*, Hamburg, 1984, p.27.

<sup>25</sup> AA CRS, A1818/2, Federal Capital Design...

<sup>26</sup> McShane, 'Building...', p.79.

<sup>27</sup> C. Vernon, 'A legitimate art distinctive of Australia and Australia alone: the Griffins' contribution to the formation of an Australia Landscape Design Ethos', *Landscape Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1997, p.17.

<sup>28</sup> Fischer, *Canberra*, p.30. Griffin's main ideas which remained are the major elements of the road network and the emphasis on the perspective effect of avenue, axis and vista.

<sup>29</sup> K.S. Inglis, C.E.W. Bean, *Australian Historian: the John Murtagh Macrossan Lecture, University of Queensland, 24 June 1969*, St. Lucia, 1970, p.27. The collections of the Australian War Memorial opened in temporary quarters in Melbourne in 1922, before being moved to Sydney in 1924. Also see P. Stanley, *A Guide to the Australian War Memorial*, Sydney, 1986; D. McCarthy, *Gallipoli to the Somme: the story of C.E.W. Bean*, Sydney, 1983; and M. McKernan, *Here is their spirit: a history of the Australian War Memorial, 1917 – 1990*, St Lucia, 1991.

<sup>30</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, pp.139-140.

The Australian War Memorial was examined in an earlier chapter, so there is little need to discuss it in any detail again here. It is worth highlighting, however, that its founder C.E.W. Bean, in proposing a museum and memorial to those who died in the Great War, also proposed another national museum, effectively a museum of human history:

There will be a national museum also – a museum which will trace the history of our race from the dim ages when it began to loom up in history somewhere in the Danish flats and around the lakes of Ireland – then through the Roman period and the Middle Ages of England – and so on to our time. This and other buildings will be in the federal capital; possibly a University of Australia.<sup>31</sup>

This proposal did not lead to anything, but it is important to recognise the significance of the Australian War Memorial itself. Through the Memorial, Australia was now seen as having a material history worth preserving and also upon which to distinguish a separate nation. This history remained one which was enmeshed in the longer histories of Europe, but it was now possible to identify Australia as having played an individual part in these histories. The First World War provided a basis upon which non-indigenous Australians could create a national ideal, which relied on a ‘real’ history, similar to those histories upon which the nations in Europe were built.

Despite clearly being a national institution though, the Memorial was not representative of the nation in the way a national museum is expected to be today. Tony Bennett has described how ‘the nation is curiously de-centred in the Memorial in the sense that its major references are constantly to Australia’s participation in a history taking place elsewhere – in Europe and the Middle East’.<sup>32</sup> Many of the collections were, and continue to be, illustrative of Australia’s connection with Europe rather than as a separate nation. For example, William Longstaff’s painting *The Menin Gate at Midnight*, referring to the Menin Gate dedicated to those Commonwealth soldiers whose bodies could not be recovered for burial, can be seen as continuing to reflect a colonial attachment to the Empire. Equally the Memorial can not be seen as a ‘museum of Australia’ as its collections were limited in their scope, largely relating to the country’s involvement in conflict, with little attention paid to actual Australian society.

<sup>31</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *In Your Hands, Australians*, London, 1918, p.60.

<sup>32</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p.140.

During the 1920s, there were two other proposals for national museums. The first of these was for a National Museum of Zoology, the only one for which a building was actually constructed – illustrating the continuing prevalence of natural history as the prominent function of museums. It was pioneered by Dr William Colin MacKenzie, a Professor of Anatomy at the University of Melbourne and the founder of Healesville Sanctuary. MacKenzie's experience in orthopaedics and treating war wounds had convinced him of the need of studying the comparative anatomy of Australian fauna in order to apply it to medical science. Hence, returning to Melbourne in 1918, after three years in England, MacKenzie took residency in a house in St. Kilda Road, converting part of it into a laboratory and museum, which from 1919 he called the Australian Institute of Anatomical Research.<sup>33</sup>

In 1923, MacKenzie offered the large collection of specimens he had amassed to the Australian Government, and in October 1924 the National Museum of Zoology came into existence by the *Zoological Museum Agreement Act 1924*.<sup>34</sup> The National Museum was to consist of MacKenzie's collection, with MacKenzie himself as the first Director. Once funds were available it was to be housed in Canberra, but in the meantime was to remain in Melbourne and Healesville.<sup>35</sup> In discussing the Agreement Act, MacKenzie had highlighted the scientific importance of preserving 'zoological' specimens:

we recognise that many of our animals that were common twenty years ago are becoming increasingly rare, and within a short period of time will have completely disappeared, never to be recalled ... the most urgent plea for the preservation of our fauna, viz., its importance for a correct understanding of the human body in health and disease.<sup>36</sup>

Through the Agreement Act, land had also been reserved in Canberra for the establishment of the National Museum of Zoology, and in 1925, a notice was erected on

<sup>33</sup> 'MacKenzie, Sir William Colin', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10, 1891 – 1939, pp.306-308.

<sup>34</sup> AA CRS, A1928/1 695/2, Australian Institute of Anatomy. Transfer of the control and administration to the Department of Health.

<sup>35</sup> MacKenzie had been building up Healesville since 1920. It officially opened to the public as the Sir Colin MacKenzie Sanctuary in 1934, and Healesville exists today as one of the pre-eminent wildlife sanctuaries in Australia to see native fauna.

<sup>36</sup> AA CRS, A1/15 1926/3284, General Staff File, National Museum of Zoology.

the site declaring the museum to be 'the only one of its kind in the world'.<sup>37</sup> MacKenzie himself described the site as 'a magnificent one',<sup>38</sup> but unfortunately the museum had a low priority in the Canberra building programme, and site development was non-existent until the museum's control was transferred from the Department of Home and Territories to the Department of Health in 1928.<sup>39</sup> Building was finally completed in 1930 and the museum opened in 1931 under the different name of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, renamed by the *Australian Institute of Anatomy Act 1931*.<sup>40</sup>

By the time the Institute opened, MacKenzie had gathered a small staff of six, including a histologist, osteologist and taxidermist. There was also a single curator, but as Margaret Anderson and Andrew Reeves have pointed out, the other staff took precedence and the transfer between departments in 1928 can be seen as the end of MacKenzie's attempt to establish a national museum.<sup>41</sup> The Institute effectively became purely a body of scientific research and study.

Nevertheless, at times there were suggestions to broaden its scope. In 1927, for example, the Historical Society of Victoria suggested to the Federal Capital Commission that the Federal Government purchase a collection of Australian tokens and currency of the late Dr Yelland of Victoria for the museum. Not surprisingly, the reply was that it did not lie within the scope of the National Museum of Zoology, and a Mr. Binns, the Assistant Librarian at Parliament House, actually affirmed that he knew of no Commonwealth body that would be interested in the collection.<sup>42</sup> Some of the lectures presented by the Institute, however, did go beyond the scope of medical science. For instance, the Institute received an amount of £402 from Chinese residents in Australia 'for the purpose of arranging an annual lecture to improve the cultural relationship between Australia and China'. It also received an amount of £607 from

<sup>37</sup> AA CRS, A1928/1 695/3 Section 1, National Museum of Australian Anatomy, reservation of site at Canberra and transfer to Canberra. Secretary, Home and Territories Department, to Acting Secretary, Federal Capital Commission

<sup>38</sup> W.C. MacKenzie, 'Australia Fauna and Medical Science', in *Royal Society of Tasmania Papers and Proceedings*, 1925, p.208.

<sup>39</sup> AA CRS, A1/15 1928/1458, Transfer to Department of Health.

<sup>40</sup> AA CRS, A432/86 1931/1837, Australian Institute of Anatomy Bill. MacKenzie had suggested it should be called the National Institute of Anatomy. See AA CRS, A1928/1 695/2, Australian Institute of Anatomy. Transfer of the control and administration to the Department of Health.

<sup>41</sup> Anderson & Reeves, 'Contested Identities...', p.95.

<sup>42</sup> AA CRS, A1/15 1929/8574, Proposed exhibits: National Museum of Zoology. The Secretary, Department of Home and Territories, to the Hon. Secretary, Historical Society of Victoria, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1927.

Miss C. MacKenzie for an annual lecture dealing not only with the history of medical science but the history of man.<sup>43</sup>

The other proposal for a national museum in Canberra during the 1920s was for a national museum of ethnology, a discipline that had been growing in stature in both museums and universities since the turn of the century. This was largely due to the commitment of Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, the Chair of the new Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. He was especially motivated by the potential of studying the Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and by his belief that they would soon disappear.<sup>44</sup> In 1927, Radcliffe-Brown submitted a proposal to the Minister for Home Affairs and Territories, highlighting his particular concern over 'the rapidly disappearing peoples and cultures of Australia',<sup>45</sup> and the need for a museum to prevent what little material there was being sent to Europe or America:

If such an ethnological museum is ever to be established at all some steps must be taken immediately. Every year it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain specimens illustrating the life and cultures of the Australasian peoples. The native people themselves are dying out or are ceasing to make or use the things they formerly had. Moreover there is at the present time a very great demand for such specimens in Europe and America, so that any which are available quickly find their way to museums in those continents. Every delay, therefore, will add considerably to the difficulty and cost of making a representative collection.<sup>46</sup>

The proposed museum was initially to focus on the indigenous people of Australia, Melanesia and Polynesia, but as Radcliffe-Brown wrote, 'it might ultimately be expanded to cover all peoples and ages of the world, as any complete museum of ethnology must do, and so illustrate the whole history of civilisation'.<sup>47</sup> The proposal at first found strong support within the Government, aided by Radcliffe-Brown's connections to the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Australian National Research

<sup>43</sup> AA CRS, A432/86 1934/1812, Agreement with Donors.

<sup>44</sup> See for example A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes*, Melbourne, 1931, and *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses*, London, 1952.

<sup>45</sup> AA CRS, A1/15 1932/514, National Museum Canberra – Establishment of. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown to G.B. Cooke, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1928.

<sup>46</sup> AA CRS, A458 AJ120/6, Federal Territory National Museum of Ethnology. Professor A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The Need for a National Museum of Ethnology', August 1927.

<sup>47</sup> AA CRS, A1/15 1932/514, National Museum Canberra – Establishment of. Memorandum on The Need for a National Museum of Ethnology.

Council's 'hearty endorsement'.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, in initial Cabinet discussions in 1927, the idea of a national museum was widened so that it served 'as a repository not only for articles of ethnological interest, but also for articles of historic interest and articles Australian in character and of considerable intrinsic value'.<sup>49</sup> This illustrates an early realisation of the need to preserve historical artefacts, including those Australian in nature. A Cabinet Paper went on to discuss suitable exhibits already in the Commonwealth's possession, such as 'the last coach used by Messrs. Cobb & Co., the compass used by the late David Lindsay in all of his explorations in Australia, the inkwell, mallet, pen and plans used in connection with the first auction sale of leases at Canberra'.<sup>50</sup>

In September 1927, Cabinet affirmed the principle of the establishment of such a museum in Canberra.<sup>51</sup> The Government, however, had also yet to properly sort out the situation with the National Museum of Zoology. To clear up the matter the Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, appointed a committee of inquiry headed by A.C.D. Rivett, the Chief Executive of the new Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). In the subsequent report in 1928, the recommendation again went back to the emphasis on a museum of natural history. Nevertheless, the report was enthusiastic about the long-term possibilities of a broader museum, to be called the Commonwealth Museum, and referring to the Institute of Anatomy stated:

such a place might very well be constituted as the first unit in the Commonwealth Museum, self-contained and with its own Keeper or Curator, but destined in course of time to take its place in the group constituting the whole Museum.<sup>52</sup>

The Rivett Committee's report took a long-range view of the development of a museum of ethnology or history, emphasising collection development rather than an immediate building plan. In fact it stressed the recommendation 'that steps be taken at once to

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* A.J. Gibson, Secretary of the Australian National Research Council to the Prime Minister, S.M. Bruce, 29<sup>th</sup> February 1928.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* Minister for Home and Territories, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1928, Cabinet Paper, 'Establishment of National Museum at Canberra', Cabinet Agenda No. 27/17383.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* Cabinet Paper – Suggested Establishment of National Museum at Canberra.

<sup>51</sup> AA CRS, A6006/5 1927/09/06, Suggested Establishment of National Museum at Canberra, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1927.

<sup>52</sup> AA CRS, A458 AJ120/6, National Museum of Ethnology – Federal Capital. A.C.D. Rivett, Report of Committee appointed to advise on the general question of a national museum at Canberra, October 1928, p.4.

ensure systematic collection' of material, particularly that which 'is likely to become extinct or rare as the years pass'.<sup>53</sup> It is quite possible, had this advice been taken, that museums more recently would not have such a deficiency of historic material. As it was, having given support to the Institute of Anatomy, the Commonwealth Government seems to have ignored all other suggestions.

Another point regarding the Rivett Committee's report worth highlighting, is that of its choice of name for a museum. The reason for the selection of Commonwealth Museum was that it 'expresses just what the museum is designed to be, and avoids possibility of confusion with existing institutions already described as "National" or "Australian"'.<sup>54</sup> In 1929, the report was circulated for comment to museums and societies around the country. Both Directors of Tasmania's two main museums, and the Royal Society of Tasmania, criticised the choice of Commonwealth Museum, and highlighted the outdated use of both 'National' and 'Australian' by Melbourne and Sydney. The Royal Society of Tasmania felt:

that such a name would be useless outside Australia, and that as it is hoped that the Canberra institution will be world famous in the future, such a title as 'The Australian National Museum' should be given to it. The time appears to have arrived when the name 'Australian Museum' for the Sydney institution should be altered to 'The New South Wales Museum', and 'The National Museum' at Melbourne altered to 'The Victorian Museum' as both the above suggested titles are far more appropriate than the ones at present in use, and would clear the way for a more satisfactory title for the Commonwealth Museum at Canberra, which latter institution should certainly have the word 'Australian' incorporated in its title.<sup>55</sup>

The call for a National Museum of Ethnology therefore failed, but it is significant as it provoked the first real discussion concerning a comprehensive national museum in Australia. As to the reasons why it failed in comparison to MacKenzie's museum of zoology, McShane points to the difference in personal connections. He notes that it is possible MacKenzie treated Prime Minister Bruce in a London hospital during the

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<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>55</sup> AA CRS, A458 AJ120/6, Federal Territory, National Museum of Ethnology. Secretary, Royal Society of Tasmania, to the Assistant Secretary, Prime Ministers Department, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1929. For a summary of



war.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, a letter from the renowned anthropologist A.C. Haddon to the Ministry for Home and Territories may have hurt Radcliffe-Brown's bid. Haddon wrote that starting a museum in Canberra 'would be a great mistake' and instead they should 'strengthen the Sydney Museum as the centre of anthropological introduction'.<sup>57</sup> Whatever the reasons, the two proposals are important, both in raising awareness over the possibilities of a comprehensive national museum, and in illustrating the growing belief that ministerial agencies could shape society from above, by creating an evolutionary process which could aid 'the emergence of "a new nation"'.<sup>58</sup>

### **Social History and Aboriginal 'History'**

During the 1930s, due to depression and the outbreak of war, discussion of a national museum generally disappeared, and it was not until the 1950s that interest again emerged, along with new and different kinds of museums opening around the world as the post-colonial era arrived. In 1955, for example, Professor M.L. Oliphant, President of the Australian Academy of Science, wrote to the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, requesting that the Institute of Anatomy be returned to its original purpose that had been outlined in the Rivett Report, as 'the nucleus of an Australian National Museum'. He also asked that land in its neighbourhood be reserved for the establishment 'of a national museums centre similar to the museums in South Kensington and the British Museum'.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, the request was generally ignored by both the Prime Minister and the Director-General of Health, who insisted that the Institute should continue with its present tasks.<sup>60</sup>

During the post-war period, growing historical ferment began to see local history museums opening everywhere and, significantly, 1955 also saw the first proposal to

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all the responses from museums and societies to the Rivett Report, see AA CRS, A9778/4 M1/M/71/5, National Museum. Establishment of a Commonwealth Museum at Canberra.

<sup>56</sup> McShane, 'Building...', p.82.

<sup>57</sup> AA CRS, A1/15 1932/514, National Museum Canberra – Establishment of. A.C. Haddon to Mr. Carrodus, Ministry for Home and Territories, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1928.

<sup>58</sup> N. Brown, *Governing Prosperity: Social change and social analysis in Australia in the 1950s*, Melbourne, 1995, p.7. Also McShane, 'Building...', p.82.

<sup>59</sup> AA CRS, A1658/1 151/1/1 Part 1, Australian Institute of Anatomy, General File. Prof. M.L. Oliphant, President of the Australian Academy of Science, to the Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1955. Interesting to note that the neighbourhood Oliphant was discussing was the Acton area, the site of the new National Museum of Australia.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* Memorandum from the Director General of Health, to the Secretary, Prime Ministers Department, February 1956.

establish a National Museum of Social History, to be located in Sydney. In a paper presented to the Royal Australian Historical Society, Eric W. Dunlop, a Senior Lecturer in History at the Teachers' College in Armidale, began by illustrating the absence of history in Australian museums:

Of our leading museums two are purely technological, one zoological, and the other a museum of classical antiquities; so that, although our city is in the 168<sup>th</sup> year of its history, and has a museum dating back nearly 130 years, it still has no major historical museum.<sup>61</sup>

Dunlop went on to acknowledge the growing number of historical and folk museums around the world, which have 'proved an exciting and unexpected attraction to the general public, and is undoubtedly helping to develop a sense of historical perspective and a love of the past in people'.<sup>62</sup> In regards to Australia, he highlighted Vacluse House as being one of the few examples, but of representing a very small, and not very typical part of Australian history. Instead, he pointed to York Castle Museum in England, as presenting a 'pretty complete picture of various aspects of the daily life and work of ordinary men and women of bygone times'.<sup>63</sup> Dunlop accepted it was likely that these types of museums would at first develop locally in Australia, but argued:

there is an urgent need to found a national museum in Sydney in which a serious attempt is made to portray the national social story. ... Its value to schools would be ever so much richer than that of the small local museums, as there would be no phase of our social history which it could not illustrate. Similarly, its situation would ensure that it would reach the majority of the public, as well as attracting more tourists than would otherwise be possible.<sup>64</sup>

The types of museum that Dunlop was discussing were generally what are today often known as folk museums, comprising miscellaneous collections of everyday life, rather than exhibitions designed around the broader and more ordered definitions of social history which are used in museums at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>61</sup> E.W. Dunlop, 'Movement towards a Museum of Social History', *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings*, vol. 41, Part 4, 1955, p.174.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p.175.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p.176.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, pp.184-185.

Nevertheless, his proposal is significant, as it is one of the first to clearly put forward the case for a national museum of Australian history.

The interest in a broadly-based national museum in Canberra was revived by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) in 1958, when its report to the Government discussed the use of Capital Hill, and suggested that 'the area should be devoted to a National Centre which would have as its theme the development of Australia and its contribution to civilisation'.<sup>65</sup> The idea was for a series of pavilions each dedicated to a particular aspect of Australian culture, illustrating 'the history, natural resources and economic development of the country and its territories; its native life and customs ... and other significant features of the Australian way of life'.<sup>66</sup>

This proposal was given further endorsement by the establishment of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1961, whose first Principal, A.D. Trendall, set about attracting the interest of the Government.<sup>67</sup> The National Centre was conceived by the NCDC 'as being symbolic of Federation', and 'an integral part of the Parliamentary Triangle'.<sup>68</sup> In addition, comparing it to the Australian War Memorial, the Commission believed 'the National Centre would attract even greater sentiment and could develop as a symbol of the nation'.<sup>69</sup> However, in an attempt to get it approved, by 1962, both the NCDC and the Institute of Aboriginal Studies had reduced the proposal to two main buildings, to hold Aboriginal Art and a selection of paintings from the National Collection.<sup>70</sup> Reports from NCDC continued to discuss a National Centre consisting of a series of major museums accommodating the Australia of both pre and post 1788, but significantly they had stopped pushing for them.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup> NCDC, *Planning Report covering the 5 Years Period, 1959–1964*, Canberra, 1959, p.10.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> McShane, 'Building...', p.82. Also see AA CRS, A463/32 1966/4745, Establishment of a National Centre, Capital Hill, Canberra. For more on the early history of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies, see D.J. Mulvaney, "'A Sense of Making History": Australian Aboriginal Studies 1961–1986', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, 1986.

<sup>68</sup> AA CRS, A5819/2, Vol. 4, Agendum 153, National Centre Decision 965. NCDC, 'The Parliamentary Triangle and Capital Hill', March 1962.

<sup>69</sup> AA CRS, A463/32 1966/4745, Establishment of a National Centre, Capital Hill, Canberra. R.B. Lansdown, Secretary & Manager NCDC, to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1961.

<sup>70</sup> AA CRS, A5819/2, Vol. 4, Agendum 153, National Centre Decision 965. A Report on the Development of Canberra for the Five Year Period July 1962 – June 1967.

<sup>71</sup> See NCDC, *The Future Canberra*, esp. p.40.

In any case, Government support for an expansive National Centre was always difficult. In 1962, for example, the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department wrote, 'it is not to be assumed that the Government will approve it ... there are issues of public presentation and timing, apart from the issues of design and finance'.<sup>72</sup> One thing that was agreed upon, was that a National Gallery of Australian Art should be the first building planned and built. To this end, Robert Menzies took a 'Gallery only' plan to Cabinet in May 1965.<sup>73</sup> The plan was accepted and by the end of 1965, any plans for a National Centre, and consequently national museums of history, were abandoned.

One final model for a national museum was that proposed by Professor W.E.H. Stanner in 1965, when he suggested a Gallery of Southern Man in an article in the *Canberra Times*. Though once again not acted upon, the proposal is important not only because it shows a changing view of the role of a national museum, but because it illustrates the evolving function of museums in Australia as a whole. Stanner envisaged a museum in a modern sense – not consisting purely of rows of traditional glass cases and artefacts:

Let me make it clear what the Gallery would not be. ... No rows of dull exhibits. No glass-cases of curiosities. No skulls and skeletons. No labelled snippets of this fact and that. No twilight gloom and sepulchral calm. It would be a world away from anything of the kind. Certainly, it would be a place of scrupulous and exact learning, open to all the scholars of the world. But at the same time it would be, perhaps even primarily, a place of animate display where the public mind and heart could both be stimulated.<sup>74</sup>

Stanner's article is especially significant, however, because it was an early academic challenge to the conventional representation of indigenous peoples, anticipating John Mulvaney's later opposition to traditional European claims. When Mulvaney declared in 1969, 'The discoverers, explorers and colonists of the three million square miles which are Australia, were its Aborigines', it effectively changed the face of Australian historical writing.<sup>75</sup> Whereas in the past the indigenous population was regarded as primitive, without history, and comprising part of the natural history of Australia, there

<sup>72</sup> AA CRS, A463/32 1966/4745, Establishment of a National Centre, Capital Hill, Canberra. Memorandum, E.J. Bunting, Secretary, Prime Minister's Department to J.F. Nimmo, Department Secretary, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1962.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* E.K. Sinclair, 'The National Art Gallery', May 1965. Also see AA CRS, A5819/2, Vol. 21, Agendum 846.

<sup>74</sup> W.E.H. Stanner, 'Gallery of Southern Man for Canberra', *Canberra Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1965.

<sup>75</sup> D.J. Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia*, London, 1969, p.12.

was a growing recognition of their triumph in conquering the harsh environment of Australia, and their subsequent place in the human history of the continent. Stanner's article, though often ignored, can in many ways be seen as an indication of how museums, and particularly a national museum, were going to develop during the succeeding decades. He laid out a model for a museum, which put the indigenous population firmly in the forefront of Australian history, rather than as a prologue to it:

Everyone loves a good story, and one of the world's best stories could be told about Australia. Told properly, and continually filled out by new discoveries, it could appeal to every generation afresh. It has nothing to do with Cook or Parkes; with Sturt or Leichhardt; with the Colonies or Federation; with rum, wool or gold; with Eureka or Anzac. Its subject is older, grander and more full of meaning than any of them. It is the story of the discovery, mastery and enrichment of the continent by the aborigines, and it makes one of the most splendid tales of its kind that any country in the world can offer.<sup>76</sup>

### **A Museum of Australia**

The period after 1970 saw the route towards a national museum rapidly change, and finally saw the establishment of an Australian national museum. The 1970s brought with them a significant increase in interest in the re-development and establishment of national museums around the world. To a large extent this was due to the formation of new independent nations, and especially in the case of museum development, due to the new challenges to traditional ideas of national identity, brought about for example, by increased migration and the acknowledgement of indigenous cultures.

It was only a matter of time before attention again turned towards a national museum in Australia. At the official opening of a Museums Association of Australia seminar in 1971, H.B.S. Gullett highlighted the great need for 'an Australian "Mount Vernon" as we are singularly short of our own history. To remedy this lack should be a national duty and strong pressure is needed on the Commonwealth Government to bring about a solution.'<sup>77</sup> Also in 1971, the Council of the Museums Association, at its General

<sup>76</sup> Stanner, 'Gallery of...'

<sup>77</sup> H.B.S. Gullett, 'Official Opening of a Museum Association of Australia Seminar, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 11-14 October 1971', *Kalori: Quarterly Newsletter*, no. 42, December 1971, p.6.

Meeting, resolved to pressure the Government for the establishment of a 'Museum of Australian History and Culture'. A letter was subsequently sent to the Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, emphasising the urgent need for such a museum. The Minister replied, however, 'that while there was generally support for the concept, construction of such a museum would have to take its turn in the programme of Public Works and he could not see any prospect of an early commencement'.<sup>78</sup>

The situation began to change once the Labor Party under Gough Whitlam came to power in 1972. Whitlam himself had a strong commitment to the arts in general, and acknowledged that vast areas of the Australian national heritage 'had deteriorated or been lost entirely'.<sup>79</sup> He had also been influenced to an extent by Robert Boswell who, when Deputy High Commissioner in London in the late 1960s, had urged Whitlam to push for the establishment of an equivalent of the Smithsonian Institution in Canberra.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, the Whitlam Government established the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections in 1974, under the chairmanship of Peter Pigott, to look at 'museums and collections nationwide in Australia and to make recommendations for a national program aimed at realising certain objectives'.<sup>81</sup>

There is little need to examine in detail the recommendations of the Pigott Report, as these were discussed in Chapter Three, except to reiterate its proposals for a Museum of Australia in Canberra:

Essentially a museum of man and the Australian environment, it should consist of three themes or sections, each linked intellectually and physically to the other at appropriate points. We believe that one theme should embrace the environment... Another theme or section should cover Aboriginal history stretching over some 40,000 years. A third linked theme should cover the history of the Europeans in Australia.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> 'Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Museums Association of Australia', published in *Kalori: Quarterly Newsletter*, no. 45, February 1973, p.38. Following this, Mr Willis, Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, suggested that as the Commonwealth had purchased Billabong Park, a small historical and transport museum in Canberra, that this museum could form the nucleus of a new national historical or colonial museum. Nothing appears to have come of the idea.

<sup>79</sup> G. Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government, 1972 – 1975*, Ringwood, 1985, pp.573-574.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p.574.

<sup>81</sup> T.D. Nicholson, 'Museums in Australia 1975: A Review', *Curator*, vol. 18, no. 4, December 1975.

<sup>82</sup> 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, Canberra, 1975, para.12.6.

In proposing a museum focusing on Aboriginal history rather than anthropology, on the Australian environment, and on 'Australia's recent history',<sup>83</sup> the report was suggesting that museums could be receptive to differing versions of the past. Central to the report's three main themes, 'Aboriginal man in Australia; European man in Australia; and the Australian environment',<sup>84</sup> was the interaction between them. As McShane points out, this suggests 'a concern to find points of unity between black and white history in Australia',<sup>85</sup> and can be interpreted as a legacy of Stanner's proposal for a Gallery of Southern Man. McShane continues: 'At no other time in Australia has a public institution been established on the basis of an argument about Australian history.'<sup>86</sup>

The publication of the Pigott Report provided the impetus supporters of a national museum needed, and the Federal Government began to slowly respond to the suggestion of a Museum of Australia in Canberra. Finally, in an address to the Museums Association of Australia conference in early 1979, the Minister for Home Affairs and the Capital Territory, R.J. Ellicott, declared that he 'would strongly support the establishment of a Museum of Australia in Canberra'. He went on to say, 'it is inevitable that a National Museum will be established in our National Capital and I believe it is really only economic factors that will delay its development and construction'.<sup>87</sup> Ellicott introduced the Museum of Australia Bill in early 1980, and in the Second Reading, emphasised the traditional lack of Australian history in museums and its importance in providing the basis for national identity. Consequently, the new museum would be unique from the other major museums in Australia:

This Bill provides for the establishment of a national museum of Australian history. Its establishment will fill a gap in the array of institutions charged with the preservation of our cultural heritage and will demonstrate to the world the pride that we have in our country. As a nation we have been somewhat diffident in expressing an interest in our history and our culture. ... This museum will provide that opportunity and will, I hope, prove to be a national focus for all Australians.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, para.12.9.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, para.2.11.

<sup>85</sup> McShane, 'Building...', p.84.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> R.J. Ellicott, 'The Future of the Museum Movement in Australia', *Kalori: Journal of the Museums Association of Australia*, no. 56, June 1979, p.8.

<sup>88</sup> Museum of Australia Bill, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, *Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives (Hansard)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1980, p.1639.

The museum Ellicott proposed was almost entirely along the lines of that recommended five years earlier in the Pigott Report, emphasising the importance of the three themes, and he went on to echo the Pigott Report by saying that these should not be three separate themes, but must be 'inter-related and complement each other'. He also illustrated the changing museology of the time by insisting that the indigenous peoples should develop the Aboriginal Gallery themselves, so that 'in effect, Aboriginal people are invited to explain to the world their history and the richness of their culture'.<sup>89</sup>

All parties unanimously supported the Bill, and a Museum of Australia was finally established. However, it took over fifteen more years for any physical construction to begin, despite Australia having been an independent nation for 79 years, and despite the calls for an Australian national museum stretching back into the nineteenth century. Ironically, during the debate on the 1980 Bill, Barry Cohen stated that the Labor opposition wanted an assurance that the museum would not be 'quietly shelved or postponed to some distant date in the future'.<sup>90</sup> Yet, it is the Labor Party which perhaps hold much of the blame for the many delays and problems that have befallen the National Museum since 1980.

### **The National Museum of Australia – Early Developments and Political Turmoil**

The *Museum of Australia Act 1980* initiated steps to appoint a Director of the museum and the preparation of an acquisitions policy. It also provided for the appointment of an interim council with a brief to report to the Government within two years on the location, establishment and development of the Museum of Australia, including a program of construction and costs.<sup>91</sup> An inquiry was soon underway, with the Interim Council joining with the NCDC to investigate the suitability of twelve possible sites – including the Acton Peninsula where the new museum is situated today. In June 1982, the Interim Council held a conference on Australian History in Canberra to provide a professional basis for their recommendations, and in December published their report entitled *The Plan for the Development of the Museum of Australia*. Shortly afterwards, in March 1984, the NCDC published the site inquiry's conclusions in which

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.* Also see 'Museum of Australia Bill', *Kalori: Quarterly Newsletter*, June 1980, pp.12-13.

<sup>90</sup> Museum of Australia Bill, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, *Parliamentary Debates*, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1980, p.536.

<sup>91</sup> L. Ryan, 'The Museum of Australia: a report on a conference', *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, no. 31, June 1982, p.23.



Yarramundi Reach, the same site recommended by the Pigott Report, was seen to be 'the most suitable location for the Museum of Australia'.<sup>92</sup> The Interim Council had endorsed the recommendation and, in an attempt 'to make a break with the accepted tradition of museum buildings, to build a truly modern museum', envisaged 'a mixture of low-profile buildings, courts and open spaces; where buildings do not dominate their environment but blend with it, and are designed to suit the Australian themes reflected in their contents'.<sup>93</sup>

The Interim Council's vision for a Museum of Australia was close to that proposed in 1975, in that all the galleries should be inter-related and that it was to be 'a museum about Australia; a museum with which every Australian can identify. It will tell of the past, present and future of our nation – the only nation which spans a continent. It will tell the history of nature as well as the history of the Australian people.'<sup>94</sup> It is worth commenting here on the name of the museum. The 'Museum of Australia' was initially proposed mainly because of the recognition that the two largest State museums, the Australian Museum and the National Museum of Victoria, both had continent-wide names and that the use of 'Australian' and 'National' in the title of the new museum might cause confusion. Controversy had surrounded the proposed name since 1975 however, with many proponents arguing that a museum designed to truly encompass the entire natural and human environment of the nation should be entitled in some way as *National*. J.M. Powell at Monash University, saw the name Museum of Australia as being 'scarcely proper' for a museum which was for the first time to fully allow for the creative participation of geographers and other specialist academics, who had traditionally been excluded from the museum sphere.<sup>95</sup> The name was finally changed to the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in 1985 by the *Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (No. 2) 1985*, in order to conform 'with the naming policy of other national cultural institutions such as the National Library of Australia' and to 'reduce confusion with the Australian Museum in New South Wales'.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> NCDC, *Selection of a Site for the Museum of Australia*, Technical Paper 39, Canberra, 1984, p.29.

<sup>93</sup> Museum of Australia, Interim Council, *Report of the Interim Council: The Plan for the Development of the Museum of Australia*, Canberra, 1982, p.12.

<sup>94</sup> Museum of Australia, Interim Council, *Report*, p.2. Also see J.M. Powell, 'A proposed Australian National Museum', *Australian Geographical Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, October 1983, p.292.

<sup>95</sup> Powell, 'A proposed...', p.293.

<sup>96</sup> Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. 2), 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, *Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives* (Hansard), 16<sup>th</sup> October 1985, p.2170. The National Museum of Victoria had by this point already become just the Museum of Victoria.

The Council's report laid out a concept for a 'living' museum to be developed over seven years, recommending an appropriate opening date as being 1990: 'a date close enough to the end of the Bicentenary year to sustain the momentum of that event during the intervening year'.<sup>97</sup> The suggestion for this moderate development was largely due to the recognition of the difficult economic climate at the time. Minimal initial costs were proposed for 1983 and 1984, with most of the expenditure used to create new jobs, including employment of Aboriginal Australians, and to begin the development of an extensive acquisitions policy.<sup>98</sup> However, despite the recommendation for the gradual evolution of the NMA for an opening in 1990, successive governments in the 1980s deferred any construction of permanent facilities. Then, in 1988, following a review into the Commonwealth's involvement in the museum sector, the Labor Government agreed to shelve the construction of a museum for at least another five years.

The Council's report in 1982, nevertheless, succeeded in raising the NMA's profile and was responsible for initiating, if not a physical presence, its development in other aspects, including the formation of a solid staff base and the extensive development of collections. In terms of management, Dr Don McMichael was appointed as the first Director in February 1984, while Andrew Reeves, an archivist and labour historian, joined the NMA as its first Curator in June of the same year.<sup>99</sup> Shortly after his appointment, in a paper presented to the Museums Association of Australia, McMichael acknowledged the impact that the establishment of the NMA would have 'on museums generally and museological professions in particular, in Australia'.<sup>100</sup> He went on to highlight that museums had traditionally lacked the foresight to collect contemporary historical materials, and that at the new museum 'we see ourselves as having a responsibility to try and collect contemporary material'.<sup>101</sup>

The most consequential way in which the NMA began to develop during the 1980s, was through the building of its collections. In the context of this thesis, this is particularly

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<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>98</sup> See *Muse News*, June 1983, p.9.

<sup>99</sup> See *Muse News*, March 1984, p.11, and September 1984, p.7.

<sup>100</sup> D.F. McMichael, 'How will the Museum of Australia address social history?', in Museums Association of Australia. Victorian Branch, *Museums: a new lens on history? Victoria's social history in a museum context. Papers given at a seminar in November 1984, organised by the Museums Association of Australia Inc., Victorian Branch*, Melbourne, 1984, p.15.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p.21.

pertinent in the case of the National Historical Collection. The 1982 report emphasised that the National Historical Collection existed 'more in name than in fact', and was 'a disparate and uncoordinated collection of historical material in the possession of the Commonwealth Government'.<sup>102</sup> It then went on to propose an acquisitions policy which, for the first time in an Australian museum, put the emphasis firmly on Australian history since 1788.<sup>103</sup> Attention was also to be paid to the collecting of material culture in fields traditionally ignored by museums, such as social history, 'especially domestic, workplace, sport, entertainment', the political development of the Australian nation, and the history of ethnic populations. It emphasised that objects related to particular events or actions by notable persons should be balanced by ordinary objects of daily life, and that it would 'avoid overemphasising a dominant or powerful culture at the expense of peripheral cultures'.<sup>104</sup>

As a consequence, collecting for the NMA began in earnest and has continued ever since. This can be seen in the attempts to fulfil one of the main points of the NMA's Charter, that it 'will reflect the development of the Australian nation in all its cultural diversity'.<sup>105</sup> Representing a clear commitment to a pluralistic view of Australian history, this has been a major component of the museum's research and collecting programs. The realisation had emerged that in order to represent the nation properly as a national museum, it was necessary to collect and portray the experience of all Australians, past and present, rather than a single homogeneous historical view as practised throughout many of the major museums' histories. As Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki, an advisor to the NMA and member of the Interim Council, has explained, a 'National Museum with a strong commitment to ethnic heritage collections will thrive to the extent that Australians recognise it for what it is – one of the manifestations of the common heritage of us all'.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Museum of Australia, Interim Council, *Report*, pp.45 &49.

<sup>103</sup> It also made clear that undue emphasis should not be put on objects made or used before 1900, recognising that objects made in recent years were of equal importance. See Museum of Australia, Interim Council, *Report*, p.70. There was also separate emphasis on the development of the collections on Aboriginal History and Natural History.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, p.70.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>106</sup> J. Zubrzycki, *Ethnic Heritage: An essay in museology*, Canberra, 1992, p.41. Also see J. Zubrzycki, 'National Museum of Australia', *Muse News*, Summer 1987, pp.2-3.

By 1986, it was estimated that the NMA held nearly 200,000 objects, either on loan or in its repositories.<sup>107</sup> Despite still being small compared to the collections of the major state museums, the number is impressive considering the time-scale and that collections in 1980 were largely made up of the National Ethnographic Collection, consisting of around 20,000 objects, of which only about 1,000 were of Australian origin.<sup>108</sup>

In 1983, Bob Hawke's Labor Government had agreed in principle to the concept presented by the Interim Council, and indeed had set aside some land at Yarramundi, but had given no timetable for the NMA's construction or completion. Hence, notwithstanding the opening of a visitor centre on the Yarramundi site in 1986, allowing public access to limited aspects of the collection, the Government's decision to defer any construction for a further five years in 1988 seemed to indicate that a permanent home for the NMA to house and exhibit its collections was still a distant dream.<sup>109</sup>

The decision did revive advocates for the museum and renew calls for the construction of a permanent building. The Coalition opposition declared their commitment to the NMA in September 1988, with an Arts Policy stating:

The Coalition Parties are committed to the Museum of Australia and wish to see it built and grow to be a pre-eminent national collecting institution and significant tourist attraction for the A.C.T. We will give a clear financial commitment to the Museum for the next five year period, redefine its future building programme and require it to stress its particular role in relation to the preservation of our Aboriginal cultural heritage.<sup>110</sup>

The early 1990s saw a number of calls for the construction of a museum, including by the NMA's Acting Director, Kaye Dal Bon, who saw it as providing a unique

<sup>107</sup> A. Hill, 'Building a National Collection', *Heritage Australia*, vol. 5, no. 2, Winter 1986, p.20.

<sup>108</sup> Museum of Australia, Interim Council, *Report*, p.49.

<sup>109</sup> See D. O'Reilly, 'Warehouse of dreams', *The Bulletin*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1988, pp.36-41. The decision to defer was largely due to the economic climate at the time. In fact, it is quite possible that any future possibility of a permanent museum building might have been scrapped altogether had it not been for around \$20 million spent on planning and developing the collections since 1980. For some discussion on the significant impact the decision had on the National Museum, including the effects it might have on staff and the existing collections, see the debate by the Estimates Committee, 'Department of the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories: Program 7 – Cultural heritage and Information: Subprogram 7.7 – National Museum of Australia', 18<sup>th</sup> October 1998. Available at the Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>110</sup> Liberal Party of Australia, Arts Policy: Liberal and National Parties of Australia, Fyshwick, ACT, 1988, p.6.

opportunity to push 'outwards the boundaries of a museum experience'.<sup>111</sup> Margaret Anderson also saw the continued need for a 'people's museum', that could give 'a vision of Australian history and culture: which can explore *Australian* myths rather than imperial myths: which can reflect on the diversity of experience which has built Australian culture'.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Donald Horne envisaged a national museum as 'an essential part of Australia's nation building', through which:

We could be reminded of chauvinist stereotypes of a manufactured single identity. But we could also be encouraged to look at things that would remind us of some of the ways in which we are different from each other – in region, in religion, in social class, in gender, in ethnicity, in attitudes – and this could be the most realistic of all ways in which we could wonder about ourselves as Australians, especially if we could also contemplate the coherence and resilience of our society as well.<sup>113</sup>

During the early 1990s, the NMA itself continued to develop its functions and intellectual framework in the hope that it might soon become a physical reality. The publication of *Understanding Our Country*, for instance, laid out the museum's objectives, stressing that it would be a vital stimulus to an understanding of the nation, 'providing essential clues to answering the great question: Who are we?'.<sup>114</sup> In 1993, the museum's situation finally seemed to be improving when, in its *Distinctly Australian* statement, the Labor Government at last appeared to pledge support for its development:

Labor will proceed with the development of the National Museum of Australia, with a Commonwealth contribution of \$26 million over four years. ... In partnership with other national, state, regional and local collecting institutions, the museum will address issues of national concern from a national perspective. Concurrently, over four years,

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<sup>111</sup> K. Dal Bon, *Why we need a national museum: occasional lecture to NSW Branch of the Museums Association of Australia, Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> March 1990*, p.5, National Museum of Australia (NMA) Research Library.

<sup>112</sup> M. Anderson, 'On recovering the 'vision splendid': National museums and the lessons of the past', in D.F. McMichael (ed.), *Australian Museums: collecting and presenting Australia: proceedings of the Council of Australian Museums Conference, Canberra, 21-24 November 1990*, Melbourne, 1991, p.94. Also see Anderson & Reeves, 'Contested Identities...', p.120.

<sup>113</sup> D. Horne, 'A National Museum: an essential part of Australia's nation building', *Museum National*, vol. 1, no. 2, June 1992, p.3. Also see D. Horne, *Ideas for a Nation*, Sydney, 1989, esp. pp.125-126.

<sup>114</sup> National Museum of Australia, *Understanding Our Country: the vital role of the National Museum of Australia*, Canberra, c.1992, p.5., NMA Research Library. For further development plans at this time see BIS Shrapnel et al., *Rediscovering Australia: report on the strategic plan for the National Museum of Australia. Prepared for the Council of the National Museum of Australia, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1992*, Canberra, 1992. NMA Research Library.

there will be a staged development of the museum's site at Yarramundi including exhibition, education and conservation facilities.<sup>115</sup>

In the August 1993 Budget, the Keating Government subsequently committed \$3 million for preliminary design work on a national museum at Yarramundi Reach and pledged \$26 million towards its construction, conditional on the private sector providing the remainder of the anticipated \$60 million total cost. The Budget Papers the same year restated this 'in-principle agreement', while also emphasising the importance of collecting material on topics such as women – 'neglected by historical researchers and under-represented in its collections'.<sup>116</sup>

The main outcome of this was that the process of choosing an architectural firm to design the NMA on the Yarramundi site was initiated.<sup>117</sup> The problems were not over however, and in November 1993, everything was again put on hold over new uncertainty over the Yarramundi site. The National Capital Planning Authority had rejected a proposal for a private-sector housing development on the Yarramundi site, which had been intended to help raise some of the necessary private-sector funding. Instead, attention was re-directed towards the Acton Peninsula, for the first time since the planning survey in 1982, with a concept that saw a combination of the museum development and private-sector housing.<sup>118</sup>

The idea of shifting any potential museum development from Yarramundi provoked a range of views, from those who saw it as an ideal site to those, like Professor Ralph Elliott, who believed it would 'be crazy to put the National Museum on Acton Peninsula'.<sup>119</sup> At any rate, during the next year the arguments became largely superfluous as the Government moved to change the entire concept of the NMA. The main opposition to the three inter-related gallery idea, which had existed since the 1975 Pigott Report, came from no less than the Prime Minister, Paul Keating.

<sup>115</sup> Australian Labor Party, *Distinctly Australian: The Future for Australia's Cultural Development – Australian Labor Party Cultural Policy 1993 Election*, Canberra, 1993, p.17.

<sup>116</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Budget Paper No. 1, 1993–1994*, p.3.143. Also *Women's Budget Statement 1993–94, Budget Related Paper No. 4*, Canberra, 1993, p.39.

<sup>117</sup> J. Gardiner-Garden, *The National Museum of Australia – the history of a concept*, Current Issues Brief No. 21, 1996-97, Canberra, 1997, p.4.

<sup>118</sup> I. Davis, 'Moves to shift museum site to Acton', *Canberra Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1993, p.1.

<sup>119</sup> M. Bachelard, 'Visions splendid for Acton Peninsula's fate', *Canberra Times*, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1993, p.14.

In June 1993, a two-day forum was held by the NMA. Concerned with the presentation of Australia in museums, it produced a discussion paper in which it emphasised the 'extraordinary indifference to the establishment of a national museum, so that Australians have no museum where they can go and think seriously about themselves, and visitors have nowhere which offers them a comprehensive presentation of the society they are visiting'.<sup>120</sup> Early the following year, Jack Thompson, President of the Friends of the National Museum of Australia, urged the Prime Minister to give his official sanction to the museum, otherwise the raising of the necessary funds from private sources would be impossible. He also added that if there was not a museum or gallery of Aboriginal art by 2000, 'it would show that Australians were either too ashamed or not adult enough to acknowledge the true and extraordinary history of the country's indigenous peoples'.<sup>121</sup> Despite these pleas, at the opening of the new National Portrait Gallery in the Old Parliament House in March 1994, Keating expressed his own attitude towards the construction of a new museum:

It can always be said, and often with irresistible logic and passion, that we need one more gallery or museum. One more place to put our heritage on show. It may have reached the ears of some of you that I have sometimes resisted this logic and this passion. It is true. I have not always been persuaded that another huge and hugely expensive building on the banks of Burley Griffin ranked high among the things we need for a better life ... I have become a convert to the National Portrait gallery. The more so because it is not going to be left sitting in Canberra locked up in yet another massive mausoleum.<sup>122</sup>

Keating did not envisage the new National Portrait Gallery as being a conventional museum, or 'mausoleum', as the works on display were all on loan from public and private collections, so it was opening up works rarely seen elsewhere, and because it would offer all its exhibitions for loan to other venues throughout the country. However, the Prime Minister's reference to a new national museum being yet another 'mausoleum' surprised many, as the vision for the NMA had always been quite the

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<sup>120</sup> National Centre for Australian Studies, *Museums: An Argument with Their Own Society – discussion paper and proposals for action following a forum conducted by the National Museum of Australia in association with the 'Ideas for Australia' program*, Clayton, 1994, p.17.

<sup>121</sup> 'Actor tells PM to stand up for museum', *Canberra Times*, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1994, p.4.

<sup>122</sup> P.J. Keating, Speech at the opening of the National Portrait Gallery and inaugural exhibition 'About face: aspects of Australian portraiture', Old Parliament House, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1994. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.apf.gov.au](http://www.apf.gov.au).

opposite. The original concept, for example, envisaged a museum where the buildings were neither large nor monumental, where much of the museum was based outside, and where the displays were moving, interactive, and designed to portray living Australians. Keating's opposition to the museum was evident as early as 1991 however, when he expressed his feeling that: 'I think Australia is getting museumed-out. There's so many of them and I think we're running the risk of not doing any of them well.'<sup>123</sup>

In 1994 and 1995, debate surrounding the NMA was brisk, and indeed Keating's policy almost changed the direction of the museum's development for good. In August 1994, the Centenary of Federation Advisory Committee, chaired by Joan Kirner, recommended a number of national infrastructure projects to be completed by 2001, including the 'National Museum proposed by the Government of the ACT and many community organisations'.<sup>124</sup> At the beginning of October, however, the Arts Minister Michael Lee put forward a plan whereby the entire museum would be abandoned and its Aboriginal collection transferred to the South Australian Museum.<sup>125</sup> In the face of angry opposition from Aboriginal groups and supporters of the NMA the proposal was soon rejected, but there continued to be considerable concern that the Government might still scale down the concept for the museum, with many of the collections going to other institutions and travelling exhibitions.<sup>126</sup>

It was not long before the confusion surrounding the NMA's future was resolved when, in October 1994, the Government released its cultural policy statement *Creative Nation*, which effectively abandoned the three-gallery concept that had been the basis for the museum since its foundation. The statement saw the NMA's central role as providing 'Australians with a range of static and travelling exhibitions and education programs including CD based multi-media and broadband services', as well as developing interactive multi-media resources, electronic exhibitions and pilot information databases'. Of the original plan of three permanent inter-related galleries only the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia remained, to be co-located with the Australian Institute

<sup>123</sup> Quoted by P. Ward, '2001: Our museum odyssey', *Australian*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1992, (Features) p.3.

<sup>124</sup> Centenary of Federation Advisory Committee, 2001. *A Report from Australia: A report to the Council of Australian Governments by the Centenary of Federation Committee*, Canberra, 1994, p.80.

<sup>125</sup> K. Scott, 'Cabinet set to scuttle construction of national museum', *Canberra Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1994, p.1.

<sup>126</sup> K. Scott, 'Museum about-face, but no assurance on its future', *Canberra Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1994, p.1. Also K. Scott, 'Govt must fund museum: letter', *Canberra Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1994, p.4.



of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in a new building on the Acton Peninsula.<sup>127</sup> The Government's decision attracted widespread criticism.<sup>128</sup> As the editorial of the *Canberra Times* described:

The Government has chosen to ignore the pleas of the Aboriginal community and all supporters of the museum that it retain its original role which incorporated the settlement of all Australians, Aboriginal and otherwise, on the continent itself. Instead, it has chosen to separate the Aboriginal component in the planning of a so-called Gallery of Aboriginal Australia and so deny the symbolic integration of Aboriginal and later settlers implied in the original concept. This was a serious mistake and we have not heard the last of it ... All it really means is that the saga of the NMA continues, despite the best (or worst) efforts of Paul Keating and Michael Lee.<sup>129</sup>

The 1975 Pigott Report had emphasised that to 'open the museum with only an Aboriginal section or an Environment section would endanger or destroy the concept'.<sup>130</sup> Unsurprisingly, prominent historian John Mulvaney, long-time advocate of the NMA and member of the Pigott Inquiry, fiercely criticised *Creative Nation* and the decision to build a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia alone, declaring that the 'cultural diversity of modern Australia merited better than a version of cultural apartheid'.<sup>131</sup>

Whatever merits the *Creative Nation* policy statement possesses, the dismemberment of the National Museum seriously undermines the Government's claims to encourage both the expression of national identity and to foster reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians. ... Australia now will have the dubious honour of being the only major country without a national museum in its national capital.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy*, October 1994, Canberra, 1994, p.76. Also available online at [www.nla.gov.au/creative.nation/contents.html](http://www.nla.gov.au/creative.nation/contents.html).

<sup>128</sup> The Coalition opposition also published their cultural policy in October 1994, entitled *The Cultural Frontier*, in which they made no mention at all to the National Museum, perhaps surprisingly as it had been a Coalition Government who had founded the Museum of Australia in 1980. See J. Gardiner-Garden, *The Coalition's and Governments's cultural policy statements: background and analysis*, Current Issues Brief No. 24, 1994. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>129</sup> Editorial, 'Mostly good news in artful statement', *Canberra Times*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1994, p.14.

<sup>130</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Museums in Australia 1975*, para.12.11.

<sup>131</sup> J. Mulvaney, 'Dismembered museum deserved better', *Canberra Times*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1994, p.4.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.* For further discussion concerning the criticism surrounding *Creative Nation*, see A. Bennie, 'Wanted: a home for our history', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1994, p.17; A. Bennie, 'More to museum than meets the eye', *Age*, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1994, p.20; and D. Griffin, 'Why should our national museum be languishing?', *Age*, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1995, p.18.

Despite the controversy, it seemed that the future of the NMA had been decided. In April 1995, it was announced that the Commonwealth and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) had agreed to a land swap, exchanging the Commonwealth's Kingston foreshore on Lake Burley Griffin for the ACT's Acton Peninsula. According to the Minister of Arts, the deal would go a long way to fulfilling the commitments announced in *Creative Nation*, and that the Commonwealth Government would 'clear the site of existing buildings and provide up to \$3 million for infrastructure work for the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia'.<sup>133</sup> Then, in July, the National Capital Planning Authority began calling for expressions of interest in designing both the Gallery and AIATSIS.<sup>134</sup>

The Labor Government's policy of abandoning the tripartite museum concept had begun to be implemented. Further confirmation came in August, with the publication of the National Museum's Corporate Plan for 1995 to 1998. Laying out the plan for the development of the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia on Acton, it envisaged the use of Old Parliament House and the Sydney's former Customs House to hold exhibitions of social history and form part of the National Museum's outreach program.<sup>135</sup> The editorial of the *Canberra Times* reflected widespread feeling towards the plan:

The grand vision and concept of the Museum of Australia is suffering the death of a thousand cuts ... This week, publication of the museum's 1995-98 Corporate Plan seems to accept that Yarramundi is to be abandoned. Instead, the museum will concentrate on travelling exhibitions, creating electronic products to deliver knowledge of the museum's collection to the nation, and the political museum at Old Parliament House. It is a misguided emphasis. These are desirable adjuncts to a museum; they are not the real thing. ... It seems the original vision will have to wait until there is a new prime minister. In the meantime, any pre-emptive plans to put the Aboriginal gallery on Acton should be shelved.<sup>136</sup>

The publication of the Corporate Plan re-ignited the public debate surrounding the NMA and the separation of Aboriginal and non-indigenous heritage. The Friends of the

<sup>133</sup> M. Lee, Minister for Communications and the Arts, Agreement clears way for design work to begin on Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, Press Release, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1995. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>134</sup> Gardiner-Garden, *The National Museum of Australia*, p.7.

<sup>135</sup> National Museum of Australia, *National Museum of Australia Corporate Plan 1995 – 1998*, August 1995, Canberra, 1995, p.1.

<sup>136</sup> Editorial, 'Museum has two powerful foes', *Canberra Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1995, p.16.

National Museum of Australia, for example, renewed their calls for the construction of the entire museum at Yarramundi. Vice-President Winnifred Rosser declared that they had 'taken off the gloves' in the battle, and criticised Paul Keating's 'tokenism' in separating the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia from the National Museum: 'He is effectively saying its ok to have a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, but the rest of the National Museum of Australia has no value in our history.'<sup>137</sup> Des Griffin, the President of Museums Australia, was equally ferocious in his criticism, especially over the separation of the Aboriginal Gallery, the basing of social history in Old Parliament House, and the apparent total abandonment of the environment gallery.

It is quite outrageous to exclude Aboriginal culture from a national museum. That's appalling, because it misses an obvious opportunity for reconciliation ... And putting Australia's social history in the old Parliament House misses the point that history is really made by the mums and dads, by ordinary Australians. In making this decision, the Government has acted against its own policies for reconciliation, One Nation, understanding of the environment and the cultural links between Aboriginal and other Australians.<sup>138</sup>

Aboriginal Australians also made it clear that they felt the move to build a separate Gallery of Aboriginal Australia was a step back from reconciliation. Political activist Norma Flint declared: 'We do not see the provision of an Aboriginal ghetto on Acton Peninsula as reconciliation. We love the concept of the inclusion of the museum at Yarramundi Reach, and see that as a much better example of reconciliation.'<sup>139</sup> Others also rejoined the calls for the three-gallery museum at Yarramundi. Jerzy Zubrzycki, for instance, stressed the unique opportunity Yarramundi Reach could provide for the nation, while noting that Australia belonged to a tiny minority of countries that did not have the 'political will, pride and resources' to fund a national museum.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>137</sup> N. Mapstone, 'Museum friends slate 'tokenism'', *Canberra Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1995, p.5.

<sup>138</sup> J. Cribb, 'Plan to break up museum cultural apartheid: academics', *Australian*, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1995, p.2. Griffin had criticised the plan to represent social history in Old Parliament House as early as March. See Griffin, 'Why should...', p.18.

<sup>139</sup> G. Cooke, 'Indigenous peoples exploited over Acton site: activist', *Canberra Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1995, p.3.

<sup>140</sup> J. Zubrzycki, 'Museum changes fatal blow to splendid vision', *Canberra Times*, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1995, p.21. Also see J. Kershaw, 'Minister's advice contradicted', *Canberra Times*, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1995, p.21.

The furore surrounding the Corporate Plan and *Creative Nation* led to the issue of the NMA becoming an important, if not central, factor in Federal election policies in 1996. In January, Keating reaffirmed his commitment to a separate Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, pledging \$12 million over three years to extend exhibition areas at Old Parliament House for the National Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and the Australian Archives; allowing 'the museum to develop exhibitions which are specifically designed to explore Australia's social, political and constitutional history'.<sup>141</sup> In a new development, Keating also announced that there would be a national competition to design a facility at Yarramundi, which would focus on environmental history 'in conjunction with bodies such as the CSIRO, the Australian Heritage Commission and Greening Australia'.<sup>142</sup> This new facility however, though part of the National Museum 'network' like the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, was essentially also to be a separate entity, and it is probable that had the Labor Government been returned to power in 1996, Australia would still be no closer to gaining a single unified national museum.

As it was, the Federal Coalition was elected to form the government in 1996, pledging the construction of a three-themed national museum. Before moving to examine this policy, it is important to briefly reflect on the attitudes of the Coalition and Labor parties towards history, as these highlight the highly sensitive political nature and role in society of both the NMA and Australian history during the 1990s. In hindsight, for instance, it is perhaps surprising that it was the Coalition who finally committed to a fully integrative museum along the lines of that proposed in 1975. Keating is generally seen to have been far more interested in history, using it throughout his ministry for political manipulation and to push forward his designs for a reconciled and multicultural Australia. As Graeme Davison has described, possibly 'no modern Australian prime minister has uttered the word "history" as frequently as Paul Keating':

At Kokoda, where he kissed the ground on which the Diggers died, at Redfern, where he sought a historic act of reconciliation with Aborigines, at Winton where he reflected on 'Waltzing Matilda' and the class struggle, at Canberra's National War Memorial, where he presided over the burial of the Unknown Australian Soldier, and at Corowa,

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<sup>141</sup> P. Keating, National Museum of Australia: statement, Press Release, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1996. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

site of the 1893 Federal conference, where he pledged himself to the cause of an Australian republic, Keating sought to place himself in the path of history.<sup>143</sup>

In contrast, John Howard, the leader of the Coalition and Prime Minister since 1996, sought to promote more traditional notions of history. Where Keating tried to install a critical view of Australian history, Howard, unashamedly a monarchist and conservative leader, essentially tried to promote a unified Australia by dismissing the ugly realities of the past such as the stolen generations of Aboriginal children, emphasising instead what white Australians had achieved during their history. This is perhaps no better illustrated than by Howard's stance on Aboriginal history, and his continual refusal to offer a formal apology to the Aboriginal population for the injustices enacted on them since European settlement. It is perhaps strange, therefore, that the Keating Government stood against a unified national museum of history, which even Aboriginal groups saw as a tool for reconciliation, while conversely Howard supported the building of a museum designed to address all aspects of Australian history, which inevitably would critically address some of the 'unpleasant' aspects of history which he often tried to overlook.

To a large extent, the reason for the Coalition support for the NMA in 1996 can be attributed simply to the need to offer an alternative position to Labor. Indeed, this is implied in their policy where it is highlighted that their commitment to the museum is 'in stark contrast to our political opponents'.<sup>144</sup> However, this support for the National Museum was also a mark of consistency. It had been a Coalition Government which had established the Museum of Australia in 1980 and only once since then, in 1994, had the party failed to include this commitment within its arts policy.

### **A Firm Commitment**

It is fortunate for the fate of the museum, therefore, that the Howard Coalition was elected to Government in March 1996. Their Arts policy stated:

The Coalition is committed to the construction of a fully-fledged national Museum in Canberra. We will provide \$15.5 million over three years for this purpose. This is in

<sup>143</sup> G. Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, St. Leonards, 2000, pp.2-3.

<sup>144</sup> Liberal Party of Australia & the National Party of Australia, *Policies for a Coalition Government: for all of us*, Melbourne, 1996, p.29.

stark contrast to our political opponents who promised to build a National Museum before the 1993 election and then reneged on their promise.<sup>145</sup>

The Coalition's policy sought to re-unify the NMA on its original Canberra site at Yarramundi, pledging an initial \$1.5 million for initial site investigation, followed by \$7 million in each of the two subsequent years to build a 'modest' museum.<sup>146</sup> Senator Richard Alston, the Coalition's arts spokesperson, rejected the plan for a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia on Acton emphasising that a unified museum was 'an important part of the reconciliation process to integrate Aboriginal history into the mainstream of Australian history'.<sup>147</sup> Winnifred Rosser, who had been scathing in her criticism of the 1995-1998 Corporate Plan, welcomed the proposal by saying 'it is what the friends have been fighting for all these years', and made it clear that the modesty of the proposal gave her more faith that it might come to fruition: 'If they said they were promising \$65 to \$100 million to build it, I'd think, "Hang on, this is real pork barrelling". \$1.5 million to start on the site – that is a beginning.'<sup>148</sup>

The Coalition's policies, however, also received their fair share of criticism. The new ACT Labor Senator Kate Lundy, for example, felt that the amount of money proposed would only be able to build a 'glorified barn' and that \$150 million was a more realistic figure,<sup>149</sup> while the Arts Editor of the *Canberra Times*, Robert Macklin, also questioned the need for another site investigation:

For \$15.5 million these days you get a bit of site clearing, a couple of well appointed out-houses and maybe a barbecue. And the first year's funding, \$1.5 million, is for 'site investigation'. Now if any site in Australia has been thoroughly investigated it's Yarramundi Reach. It's had more investigations than Whitewater and every time it's come up trumps.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.* Also see Liberal Party of Australia & the National Party of Australia, *For Art's Sake, A Fair Go!*, Canberra, 1996.

<sup>146</sup> M. Bachelard, 'Liberals pledge united museum', *Canberra Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1996, p.1.

<sup>147</sup> H. Musa, 'Libs promise \$15m for national museum', *Canberra Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1996, p.8.

<sup>148</sup> Bachelard, 'Liberals pledge...', p.1.

<sup>149</sup> R. Peake, 'Museum money will buy a barn: Lundy', *Canberra Times*, 27<sup>th</sup> May 1996, p.3.

<sup>150</sup> R. Macklin, 'The major parties' funds for the National Museum', *Canberra Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1996, p.14.

A pertinent point perhaps, but regardless of the criticism, the election of the Coalition Government to power seemed to signal a new era for the NMA. In August 1996, the Canberra press hailed the appointment of Jim Service, a prominent arts patron and businessman, as head of the Museum Council, and the reappointment of Dr William Jonas as Director, as representing 'the first positive moves for the development of the museum in almost half a decade'.<sup>151</sup> In the August 1996 Budget, the decision to return to a unified museum concept seemed to be confirmed by the cancellation of its proposed presence in Sydney's Custom House.<sup>152</sup> At the same time, the \$1.5 million was officially allocated 'for the establishment of, and the provision of research facilities and administrative support services for, the Advisory Committee on New Facilities for the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies'.<sup>153</sup>

Despite Yarramundi Reach being the Coalition's 'preferred' site,<sup>154</sup> the new Advisory Committee was also to consider the possible sites of Acton Peninsula, Kings Park, and the Parliamentary zone foreshores, between the National Science and Technology Centre and the High Court. Subsequently, the committee concluded that Acton, by offering the 'most advantages', was the first choice for the new National Museum, followed closely by Yarramundi.<sup>155</sup> Though recognised as a highly desirable site with the most potential for further expansion, Yarramundi was not considered to be as attractive to possible sponsors, while the fact that it was the site furthest from the City and other cultural institutions would mean that it would 'not easily attract visitors other than those who are specifically interested in visiting the NMA'.<sup>156</sup> The central position of Acton, on the other hand, was seen as advantageous both in terms of attracting sponsorship and visitors, while the total costs of the project were seen to be

<sup>151</sup> Editorial, 'Howard committed to museum', *Canberra Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1996, p.8. Jonas had originally been appointed Director under the Labor Government, but had been unable to take up the post due to ill-health.

<sup>152</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Portfolio Budget Statements 1996/97, Communications and the Arts Portfolio*, August 1996, Budget Related Paper No. 1.2, p.33.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p.23. Also see R. Alston, Minister for Communications and the Arts, New development phase for National Museum of Australia, Press Release, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>154</sup> Bachelard, 'Liberals pledge...', p.1.

<sup>155</sup> Advisory Committee on New Facilities for the National Museum of Australia, *Report by the Advisory Committee on New Facilities for the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, Canberra, 1996, p.73. Jim Service, the head of the Museum Council, chaired the Advisory Committee. The report was made public in January 1997.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

substantially less than at Yarramundi. On the presentation of the Committee's report, Prime Minister John Howard subsequently announced in December 1996 that the Federal Government would immediately provide \$750,000 so that design work could begin for the NMA on Acton Peninsula. Acknowledging the long debate over the site, Howard declared: 'Not everyone will agree with the recommendation of the committee or with the government's decision. But I think the essence here is to get on with it. To make decisions and move forward.'<sup>157</sup> Senator Alston, the Minister of Arts, also commented on the decision:

After thirteen years of procrastination, hot air and attempts to gazump the establishment of the National Museum, this Government has moved quickly to secure the Museum's future ... This is an exciting development for Canberra and the whole country. It's time we had a National Museum of Australia where all the stories of our nation are told and our unique culture mix is explored.<sup>158</sup>

After over twenty years of lobbying for a national museum to be built at Yarramundi, it is not surprising that the Government's decision of Acton as the final site again aroused criticism from various commentators. John Mulvaney, in particular, considered that the museum's potential had been 'diminished'.<sup>159</sup> While commending the 'adoption of the tripartite environmental, indigenous and latecomer themes', he pointed to the 1982 Interim Council's report which envisaged a site that allowed 'for centuries of expansion, exterior exhibitions, cultural performance areas and sympathetic landscaping'.<sup>160</sup> David Ride, another member of the 1982 Interim Council, also questioned the development of the NMA on Acton, by considering how the original concept 'requiring broad acres, native vegetation and open vistas, can be accommodated in a contained site (that could be as small as 11 ha), limited by heritage listed buildings and plantings'.<sup>161</sup>

The Advisory Committee's report, nevertheless, marked the first real moves towards the construction of a three-themed museum. After its publication, moves towards the NMA becoming a physical presence on Acton Peninsula came about more rapidly. In March

<sup>157</sup> B. Nicholson, 'PM on Acton: get on with it', *Canberra Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1996, p.1.

<sup>158</sup> R. Alston, Minister for Communications and the Arts, Government delivers on National Museum commitment, Press Release, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1996. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>159</sup> J. Mulvaney, 'A diminished vision of the National Museum', *Canberra Times*, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1996, p.11.

<sup>160</sup> J. Mulvaney, 'Museum needs to look centuries on', *Canberra Times*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1997, p.9.

<sup>161</sup> D. Ride, 'Economic reasoning is difficult to understand', *Canberra Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1997, p.10.



1997, for instance, the land swap agreement between the Commonwealth and the ACT Government was confirmed, exchanging the Acton Peninsula for the Kingston foreshore.<sup>162</sup> In the May Budget, the Government subsequently allocated \$7 million for design development.<sup>163</sup> An ongoing Commonwealth Government commitment to fund the construction of the National Museum was also announced, the indicative cost of which was seen to be \$133 million, to be provided through the newly established Federation Fund.<sup>164</sup> The following month saw the launch of a design competition to find an architect for the museum, which was to open on the 1 January 2001 'as the flagship of the Commonwealth's contribution to the Centenary of Federation celebrations'.<sup>165</sup>

The National Museum of Australia finally seemed to be moving from an idea to physical reality. In October, Ashton Raggatt McDougall of Melbourne was announced as the winning design team, out of seventy-six entries,<sup>166</sup> and the plan was subsequently referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration. Then, in the 1998 Budget, the Government confirmed the allocation of total funding of \$151.9 million for the project, to be met mainly from the Federation Fund, comprising \$133 million for capital works and \$18.9 million for one-off establishment costs.<sup>167</sup> Finally, early in July 1998, following the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Parliament approved the proposal and authorised the plan to proceed, with construction scheduled to commence in October 1998.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>162</sup> W. Smith, Minister for Sport, Territories and Local Government, Acton/Kingston land swap agreement, Press Release, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1997. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>163</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Budget Measures 1997-98, Budget Paper No. 2*, Canberra, 1997, p.27.

<sup>164</sup> R. Alston, Minister for Communications and the Arts, Commonwealth committed to National Museum construction, Press Release, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1997. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>165</sup> R. Alston & J. Howard, National Museum/Institute design competition, Press Release, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1997. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>166</sup> R. Alston, Winning architectural team announced for National Museum and AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) development in Canberra, Press Release, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1997. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au). For details of the winning design see R. Weller, 'Weaving the axis: The Australian National Museum, The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and the ACT Cultural Centre, Acton Peninsula, Canberra, ACT', *Landscape Australia*, vol. 20, no. 1, February/April 1998, pp.10-17. Also D. Jackson & M. Keniger, 'Radar: Museum of Australia', *Architecture Australia*, vol. 87, no. 1, January/February 1998, pp.12-13.

<sup>167</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Budget Measures 1998-99, Budget Paper No. 2*, Canberra, 1998, pp.1-19.

<sup>168</sup> Public Works Committee: Approval of Work, *Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives* (Hansard), 1<sup>st</sup> July 1998, pp.5788-5790. The Parliamentary Standing Committee did raise a number of issues that it was concerned about however, particularly in relation to the design competition process and proposed contractual arrangements. As a result, the Committee recommended that it be provided with regular reports detailing the progress of the project. See Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public

## Conclusion

After over twenty years of debate over the form of the National Museum of Australia, its physical presence finally became a reality, with construction officially beginning on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1999.<sup>169</sup> In many ways, especially in terms of the implementation of the three integrated themes, the museum was to follow the lines proposed by the original report of the Interim Council in 1982. The Director of the NMA, Dr William Jonas, in reporting to the Joint Committee on Public Works in December 1997, laid out how he envisioned the National Museum, reflecting many of the new ideas and developments that had been pervading museums in recent years:

The National Museum of Australia is a social history museum. ... What we are interested in and what we are charged with doing is telling the wonderful story of Australia. We are telling that through three themes; the social history of the last 200 or so years; indigenous peoples' history and cultures, and people's relationship with the environment. We want to tell that story by integrating those three themes and using whatever methods are at our disposal to best tell those stories, remembering that, as a museum, objects and collections of objects are still our primary way of telling those stories. We are going to tell those stories and make them accessible to as many of Australia's population as we can through exhibits of objects, using all of the various forms of technology which are now at our disposal.<sup>170</sup>

The fact that in some respects the new museum was not to follow the original plan, principally in terms of the site and the use of large open spaces, is not surprising, especially after twenty years of controversial debate. To some extent, this was due to the general changes and professionalisation within the museum sector that were explored in the Chapter Three. The decision to build the NMA at Acton rather than Yarramundi, for example, was due largely to economic considerations. This was not just because of the cost of construction, but also because of the need to be 'visible' and positioned centrally within Canberra in order to attract the greatest number of visitors, illustrating a global

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*Works, Report relating to the proposed new facilities for the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, Canberra, 1998.

<sup>169</sup> P. McGauran, Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation, Acton Peninsula – history in the making, Press Release, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1999. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

<sup>170</sup> Joint Committee on Public Works, Joint Committee on Public Works: New facilities for the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: Discussion, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1997. Australian Parliamentary website, [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

trend where museums increasingly find themselves having to compete with other heritage and tourist 'attractions'. The choice of the smaller site of Acton was also determined to some extent by the growing emphasis on technology and communications media in museums, the idea being that the museum could reach far more people through these new interpretative methods.<sup>171</sup>

In November 1998, despite construction having been approved and about to begin, John Mulvaney again spoke out against the new plans for the NMA. Suggesting it had become a Disneyland tourist facility, he said: 'Their idea is to tell the story of Australia. The idea we had [in 1975 and 1982] is that there was no such single story'.<sup>172</sup> This is an important final point that should be made. Opening in 2001, as a flagship for the Centenary of Federation, there was the danger that the National Museum would inevitably succumb to representing an accepted version of Australia's past, one which was based around familiar icons and myths, that essentially tells the visitor what it means to be Australian, whether it be an outcome of overcoming the environment, a product of war, or as part of a multicultural society. This would run counter to the original concept proposed in 1975 and 1982, as well as the diverse traditions of museum proposals since the nineteenth century that this entire chapter has identified.

The most significant aspect, nevertheless, is perhaps that the National Museum finally became a physical reality at all. The ultimate establishment of a museum based on the inter-relation of the environment, Aboriginal history, and Australia's history since 1788, reflects the diverse traditions of these developing museum proposals, as well as the important role of history and national identity in Australia at the end of the twentieth-century. The National Museum of Australia has the potential of successfully representing the Australian nation and people if, rather than explaining, it probes and *explores* the many contested interpretations of Australian 'identity'. As the later discussion shows, however, debate and controversy continues to surround the NMA since its opening early in 2001, especially over its representations of the non-indigenous population's history and 'problematic' national identity.

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<sup>171</sup> At the same time, proposals for a smaller museum than that planned for Yarramundi had been reinforced by a number of theme-specific museums with a national focus opening up since the late 1980s, such as those concerned with migration, maritime history and motor transport.

<sup>172</sup> M. Hogarth, 'New row erupts over museum', *Age*, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1998, p.6.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa – Design and Outcomes, Success and Failure.**

During the 1990s, both Australia and New Zealand finally achieved new national museums. Construction of a new museum in New Zealand was given the green light in May 1992, and in July the National Museum and National Gallery merged together, as the *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act* came into effect. Building began in July 1993. In July 1998, the National Museum of Australia (NMA) was given approval to proceed. Later that month, the local Ngunnawal people performed a smoking ceremony to cleanse and purify the site on Acton Peninsula,<sup>1</sup> and construction officially began in March 1999.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas during the preceding years both national museums had focused on building their collections, they now had to concentrate on developing the concepts and framework for the permanent exhibitions of the new institutions. This chapter provides a broad overview of the intellectual and built environment of the two new museums, focusing on the factors that can be seen as significantly shaping their final opening exhibitions, and particularly their representation of histories.

Reflected at the heart of both institutions were the issues that had been building in importance over the prior decades. In particular, the need to be representative of the cultural identity of both the indigenous populations and more recent settlers is central to both the NMA and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). Both museums were primarily established as instruments of national identity, structured around concepts integrating the three themes of the land and environment, indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Necessary because of the sickness and death that occurred in the Canberra hospital that previously occupied the site. See 'Smoking ceremony – a cleansing process', in *Elements: update of Acton Peninsula construction project – National Museum of Australia and Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, August 2000, p.2, National Museum of Australia (NMA) Research Library.

<sup>2</sup> The NMA used a method of project alliancing, a world first for a building project of this size, that aimed to deliver a cost-effective outcome in a set period through the project owner and contractors sharing risks and rewards. The project owner in this case was the Commonwealth. For more on this, see

history, and non-indigenous history, with even their architecture designed to reflect ideas of the nation. Whilst there are various similar developments in both museums there are also notable differences, and consequently this chapter to a certain extent looks individually at the two museums. Te Papa differs in one important respect, in that it integrates New Zealand's national art collection within many of its exhibitions. An understanding of the intellectual framework of both museums is essential in order to appreciate how they attempt to convey notions of nation and national identity.

The discussion also explores the exhibitions at the time of the museums' respective openings in 1998 and 2001 – and especially the public reaction and controversy they have provoked – to provide a background to the non-indigenous history exhibitions that will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Seven. This reflects debates concerning museological developments around the world, as well as the specific social and political situation in Australia and New Zealand and the difficulties involved in defining national identities at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Conflict and tension are conspicuous in the reaction to the two national museums, both in the years before and after their opening, and are in many ways indicative of their prominent position as national museums, as well as illustrating the perceived success and failure of the museums in representing different segments of society.

### **Indigenous Representation**

The experiences of the indigenous populations are fundamental to any understanding of post-colonial settler identity, especially as non-indigenous people increasingly have to come to terms with the legacies of colonialism.<sup>3</sup> The political and social climate that exists in Australia and New Zealand, particularly in terms of the prominence given to indigenous rights and history, effects the museums in all their operations. The architecture and almost half of the galleries of each museum are concentrated on indigenous culture. Biculturalism in New Zealand, for example, permeates every aspect

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Australian National Audit Office, *Construction of the National Museum of Australia and Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> On a broad level too, many non-indigenous people include aspects of indigenous culture within their own identifying symbols and ideas of 'Australia' and 'New Zealand', such as the *koru* on Air New Zealand – a fern leaf commonly used in Maori art.

of Te Papa's mission, concept and development, from its establishment as a 'bicultural museum' by the *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992*.

As explored in Chapter One, concerning broader debates about nationality and nation, it is the indigenous pressure in the political and cultural arena that has led to many of the cracks appearing in non-indigenous national identity. The greater awareness of indigenous people within the history and identity of both Australia and New Zealand has led to some insecurity over non-indigenous people's own place and role in society. This is apparent in debates surrounding both museums, with claims that the emphasis on Aboriginal and Maori history and culture has created an imbalance between indigenous and non-indigenous representations. This in turn has led to a perception among some critics that the role of the non-indigenous majority is being marginalised or ignored in the identity of the nation.

From its establishment, Te Papa made it a point to attempt to follow its bicultural policy strictly, especially by ensuring that Maori history was no longer marginalised or told from a European point of view. As early as 1990, the National Museum's Assistant Director James Mack, stressed 'we would like to become Maori-centric instead of Euro-centric'.<sup>4</sup> Criticism concerning this 'Maori-centric' policy emerged when the museum opened an exhibition in November 1992, entitled *Voices He Putahitanga: A Social History of New Zealand Aotearoa*.

*Voices* was the first attempt to adapt the new museum policy of combining the disciplines of all departments within one exhibition, integrating materials from natural history, colonial history, Maori culture and European art collections. As Rosemary McLeod has said, the exhibition 'was designed to follow policy to the letter'.<sup>5</sup> Costing NZ\$1.4 million and headed by a curatorial team of four men and four women, of whom four were Maori and four Pakeha, it was designed as a prototype for the large-scale, multi-media exhibitions planned for Te Papa's opening in 1998. Aiming to move clearly away from traditional museum practice, it put the focus squarely on Maori representation, as well as incorporating women's stories and making the interpretative material suggestive rather than explanatory: offering 'a collision of voices, perspectives

<sup>4</sup> B. Dreaver, 'Museum targets Maoris', *Dominion*, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1990.

<sup>5</sup> R. McLeod, 'The Mighty MoNZ – Artless at Heart?', *North & South*, October 1994, p.79.

and values'.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the exhibition was an early move towards the post-modern interpretation that figures strongly in Te Papa today, as instead of offering a single story or viewpoint, the exhibition presented a multitude of different stories and views, encouraging visitors to actively debate and consider different ideas.

*Voices* was received with condemnation almost from its opening, the main criticism surrounding the over-representation of Maori culture. In March 1993, it was reported that many Maori staff at the museum had been barraged with racist comments, while entries in the visitors' book included items such as 'bring back the interesting exhibitions, there's more to life than Maoris', 'where has New Zealand's museum gone, it's now the Maori museum', and 'filled with Maori junk, it's a kiss and make up to the natives'.<sup>7</sup> In a damning report early in 1994, two Wellington art consultants, Mary and Jim Barr, stated that the exhibition failed to develop a bicultural model and the exhibition polarised Pakeha and Maoris. They described *Voices* as failing 'at all levels to come to grips with the Pakeha contribution to New Zealand or the relations between the two cultures as anything but destructive and exploitative'.<sup>8</sup> Other non-Maori museum professionals around the country echoed the discontent. James Mack said the exhibition was a failure and should be abandoned, while Dunedin Public Art Gallery Director John McCormack called it flawed.<sup>9</sup> An article in the *Evening Post* summarised the general feeling towards the exhibition:

The experimental *Voices* exhibition at the National Museum is promoted as providing a new perspective on Maori and Pakeha history. Putting it charitably, its format is peculiar. ... The museum's corporate plan aims at biculturalism, but the \$1.4 million exhibition polarises the races. Some of its judgements are highly subjective, if not offensive. Maori are shown to have introduced kumara [sweet potato], but the Pakeha contribution is represented by rabbit pelts. Questioning of *Voices* is doubly important, given the exhibition is designed as a prototype for the new Museum of NZ due to open on the waterfront in 1998. ... The unsatisfactory echoes of *Voices* should not be lost on the new museum.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> J. McCormack & R. Leonard, 'Voices He Putahitanga', *Midwest Three*, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Radio New Zealand, 'Good Morning New Zealand', Interview with Jenny Harper, Acting Chief of Museum of New Zealand, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1993. Transcript in Te Aka Matua Library (Te Papa).

<sup>8</sup> A. Finnegan, 'Voices of doom haunt museum exhibition', *Evening Post*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1994.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* By this point, James Mack was no longer employed by the museum.

<sup>10</sup> 'Listening to critics', *Evening Post*, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1994.

In response to the criticism, the museum commissioned its own independent peer review. The subsequent report stated that while *Voices* should stay open, it should be significantly revamped. Perhaps surprisingly, the report was as critical of the Maori presentation as that of the Pakeha, declaring that the exhibition did not tell a clear and connected story and the standard of written Maori was unsatisfactory. The museum immediately moved to act on the report, undertaking a NZ\$50,000 refit, while re-emphasising that *Voices* 'was only ever intended to be used as a laboratory for ideas for the new museum'.<sup>11</sup> When the exhibition reopened, however, it continued to be surrounded by controversy.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the development process, critics of Te Papa were more vocal and apparent than the supporters. It also came under constant attack over its cost and central government funding, particularly from Aucklanders pointing to their larger population and tourist base as being good reason for greater funding for the Auckland Museum, and even reason for New Zealand's flagship museum to be situated there.<sup>13</sup> The museum, though, did move to defend its position. In regards to *Voices*, Sir Wallace Rowling, Chairman of the Project Development Board, accused the critics of ignoring 'the ground-breaking work done ... or how much had been learnt',<sup>14</sup> while Chief Executive Cheryl Sotheran hailed the exhibition as a success as an 'experimental exhibition'.<sup>15</sup> The controversy surrounding the representation of Maori culture over that of European, however, was not only confined to the *Voices* exhibition but encompassed the perceived activities of the entire museum, and indeed this criticism has been ongoing. Of particular concern to many, was the decision to take the Elgar collection of European colonial furniture off display and into storage, prompting one reader of *The Dominion* to write that he considered the Elgar collection as 'part of my cultural heritage, just as the museum's fine collection of Maori taonga is part of the cultural

<sup>11</sup> A. Finnegan, 'Report damns museum show – museum acts on damning report', *Evening Post*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1994; and 'Exhibition to be revamped after damning review', *The Press*, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1994.

<sup>12</sup> See 'Revamped exhibition "like looted department store"', *Otago Daily Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1995.

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion see, for example, J. Ellis, 'The Old and the New', *Strip* (Auckland), November 1995, pp.30-31; 'National Museum could become a white elephant', *Gisborne Herald*, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1994; M. Henderson, 'Auckland director rails against Te Papa's glitzy displays', *Sunday Star Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1999; J. Chamberlain, 'Museum Wars – Behind the scenes at the museum', *North & South*, April 2000, pp.47-54; and J. Gibb, 'Museum of NZ funding success shows Otago request "reasonable"', *Otago Daily Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1994.

<sup>14</sup> 'Sir Wallace hits back at Museum critics', *Daily Post* (Rotorua), 14<sup>th</sup> July 1994.

<sup>15</sup> 'Revamped exhibition...'.



heritage of this country's tangata whenua'.<sup>16</sup> The museum did attempt to alleviate some concerns, by appointing specialists such as Jock Phillips, the Government's Chief Historian, to develop the Pakeha history exhibits – described by Cheryl Sotheran as an appointment of someone 'abundantly qualified to produce something both authoritative and lively'.<sup>17</sup> Sotheran also spoke out in response to accusations that the museum was 'Maori-centric', declaring: 'we certainly represent the European, British and all the other culture diversity of New Zealand very, very fully'.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, disquiet over the perceived marginalisation of all things European surrounded Te Papa throughout the 1990s, indicative of the insecurity surrounding non-indigenous national identity, and illustrated by an editorial in *The Dominion* in 1996:

For all their assurances, it becomes clearer by the day that the \$280 million taxpayer-funded museum should be renamed the Maori and Pacific Islands Museum of New Zealand. Vast spaces are devoted to the Maori and Polynesian view at the expense of the European perspective. Old favourites such as the Elgar collection on European migration, which have delighted generations of children, are to be stored or broken up. ... The problem is the overwhelming predominance of the Polynesian theme, to the virtual exclusion of things European, in spite of the overwhelming more significant influence of later migration.<sup>19</sup>

Alongside this debate over the representation of Pakeha culture, there was also continuing concern amongst Maori over the representation of their own culture. Despite Te Papa's commitment to both biculturalism and the involvement of Maori people, concerns were being raised over how this was being achieved. In 1994, for example, noted academic Nicholas Thomas considered that Te Papa's bicultural approach essentially construed 'Maoriness in terms of its difference from Pakeha'. Thomas noted that by emphasising aspects such as the environmental nature of Maori culture, which was perceived to be missing in Pakeha society, Te Papa was potentially marginalising most Maori who lived in towns and cities.<sup>20</sup> Paul Tapsell, in his 1998 thesis 'Taonga: A

<sup>16</sup> D. MacLennan, Letter to the Editor, *Dominion*, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1996. The Elgar collection had been one of the first 'historical' collections displayed in the National Museum, and had been on show since the 1960s.

<sup>17</sup> C. Sotheran, 'Show and tell under the scaffolding', *Dominion*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1996, p.9.

<sup>18</sup> 'Museum will balance cultures, MPs told', *Waikato Times* (Hamilton), 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Editorial, 'Museum runs off the rails', *Dominion*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1996.

<sup>20</sup> N. Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, Ringwood, 1994, pp.184-186.

tribal response to museums', also details problems concerning the museum's development of biculturalism, as well as many of the concerns of various Maori tribes over issues such as the name of the institution.<sup>21</sup> Tapsell highlights the confusion that arose over the governing concept of *mana taonga*, which Te Papa claimed to be an inclusive concept that allowed tribal groups and cultures from around New Zealand to interact with and make decisions over museum-held taonga. However, this created confusion especially over the particular rights and role of the *tangata whenua*, the tribe Te Ati Awa in Wellington, on whose land the museum actually stood. The phrase *mana taonga* had no cultural precedent. Nor did the name *tongarewa*, which was a conversion of the name *kuru tonga rerewa*,<sup>22</sup> and as Tapsell describes, by using such expressions the museum 'paternalistically affirmed its nationhood role of educating wider New Zealand about what it thinks it means to be Maori'.<sup>23</sup> The debate concerning the Maori development of the museum, therefore, was largely concerned with the way it was adapting to its role as a bicultural institution, unlike the criticism over the way Pakeha history was being represented.

There were similar concerns and insecurities, albeit to a lesser extent, in regards to the NMA over its representation of both non-indigenous and indigenous history. This was especially the case once the museum opened. Unlike Te Papa, during the development stages most of this concern arose from the National Museum Council. The Council's role had traditionally been to make the major decisions regarding the museum, rather than get involved in the day-to-day administration and development. A few months before the NMA's opening, however, at least one member of the Museum Council effectively created an ideological struggle within the museum, over how Australia tells its stories and how those who have shaped the nation are represented.

In October 2000, David Barnett, Prime Minister John Howard's biographer who had been on the Council since early 1999, wrote a five-page memo to the chairman, Tony Staley. Barnett essentially saw the NMA, like Te Papa, as focusing too much on

<sup>21</sup> P. Tapsell, *Taonga: A Tribal Response to Museums*, D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1998. For a summary of the issues and debate surrounding the name *Te Papa Tongarewa* see especially Appendix Six, pp.291-299.

<sup>22</sup> Broadly, this was the name of ancient taonga; a mythical greenstone that was prized for its incredible power and beauty.

<sup>23</sup> Tapsell, *Taonga*..., p.298. For more on the Maori development of Te Papa see Tapsell's thesis, esp. pp.156-217.

indigenous history in its effort to acknowledge past injustices, to the extent that it marginalised and even insulted the contribution of non-indigenous settlers to the nation. Objecting to the labelling and presentation of a range of the proposed exhibits, describing some as 'Marxist rubbish' and 'claptrap', he accused the museum of reworking 'Australian history into political correctness'.<sup>24</sup> In effect, Barnett wanted the museum to exhibit 'a tidier past' with less emphasis on controversial aspects of Australia's history such as the Aboriginal 'stolen generations', the exhibition of which he described as 'a victim episode ... there is no balance here'.<sup>25</sup> Barnett wanted the NMA to follow a more traditional style of representation:

The exhibits invite ridicule, but worse than that, they can invite outrage. ... I would have thought a national museum in the national capital might have managed interesting exhibits dealing with the founding fathers and telling us who past prime ministers have been and something about them without being egregious.<sup>26</sup>

On a general level, this type of outspoken criticism evidently brings into question the role and influence of the Museum Council, especially when members are seen to be closely affiliated with a particular government standpoint. In this case Barnett could be seen to be representing the Howard Government's line of not dwelling on so-called 'black-armband history', particularly in terms of Aboriginal affairs, focusing instead on the present rather than the past.<sup>27</sup> On another level, Barnett's desire to present a more celebratory, 'feel-good', and static interpretation of history clearly runs counter to the entire philosophy of developing a challenging and entertaining museum, and of encouraging debate and presenting Australia in all its diversity, which must of course include different and sometimes conflicting views.

In any case, in response to David Barnett's memo, Tony Staley consulted respected historian Graeme Davison at Monash University, who determined that the

<sup>24</sup> The David Barnett Memo, written by David Barnett to Tony Staley is available on the *Sydney Morning Herald* website, at [www.smh.com.au/news/0106/06/text/features21.html](http://www.smh.com.au/news/0106/06/text/features21.html)

<sup>25</sup> L. Martin, 'PM's man wants museum to exhibit tidier past, say critics', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2001. Also see M. Doherty, 'Museum denial', *Canberra Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2001.

<sup>26</sup> The Barnett Memo, *Sydney Morning Herald* website.

<sup>27</sup> Howard's stance on history was discussed in Chapter Four. Briefly, a monarchist and conservative leader, Howard essentially tried to promote a unified Australia by dismissing the ugly realities of the past such as the stolen generations of Aboriginal children, emphasising instead what Australians have achieved during their history. This is perhaps best illustrated in his attitude to Aboriginal history, and his

overwhelming majority of the labels were satisfactory and based on sound scholarship. Davison also stated that it was not 'the role of council to be intervening in the detailed execution of policy', and that if the museum was to create every exhibit and label to 'be acceptable to every visitor then the result will be a very bland museum'.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, despite David Barnett's concerns, the museum opened in 2001 with its exhibitions and labelling unchanged from those developed by the exhibition teams.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, while the discussion in this chapter and the next focuses on non-indigenous history and identity, the exhibition of indigenous experiences is crucial to the framing of these identities. As these debates show, it creates insecurity over how the non-indigenous populations are being represented as part of the nation. As will also be evident, this influence pervades every aspect of the museums' developments, contributing to the challenge the museums confront in being 'national', and illustrating the problematic nature of non-indigenous national identity.

### Intellectual Framework

Since its formal establishment in 1980, the NMA's primary intellectual framework has rested upon the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage, Australian history and society since 1788, and peoples' interaction with the Australian environment. During the 1990s, this concept gradually began to be developed further,<sup>30</sup> and in March 1997 the NMA produced a five-year corporate plan that identified the objectives and strategies necessary for museum programs, which would be 'illuminating for Australia and the world what it means to be Australian'.<sup>31</sup>

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continual refusal to offer a formal apology to the Aboriginal population for the injustices purveyed on them since European settlement.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in J. Morgan, 'Howard's man: "These people are not my heroes"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2001. Also see K. Windschuttle, 'How not to run a museum', *Quadrant*, vol. XLV, no. 9 (September 2001), pp. 11-19.

<sup>29</sup> In regards to the Barnett Affair, also see J. Morgan, 'The right men for the museum', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2001, and J. Morgan, 'Barnett appointment "the worst since Caligula's horse"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2001.

<sup>30</sup> As early as 1992, for example, a report titled *Rediscovering Australia* put forward some possible interpretative approaches that could be used, including an inter-related approach, where each theme was integrated to provide insight on the others. See BIS Shrapnel, Museum Studies Unit, Sydney University and Horwarth Services, *Rediscovering Australia: report on the strategic plan for the National Museum of Australia. Prepared for the Council for the National Museum of Australia, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1992*, Canberra, 1992, NMA Research Library.

<sup>31</sup> National Museum of Australia (NMA), *National Museum of Australia Corporate Plan, 1997 – 2002: approved by NMA Council March 1997*, Canberra, 1997, p.2.

Also in 1997, the museum produced its first public statement about programs to be presented in the new building on Acton Peninsula. Laying out the concepts behind the museum development, the statement elaborated on the multidisciplinary and integrated nature of the museum organisation, whereby the three main themes are 'embedded in the staff organisation of the Museum, and find expression in every program the Museum undertakes':

The National Museum's integrated view of the three themes places the activities of humans in the context of Australian environments and examines Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures alongside and together with examinations of Australian histories. Indigenous knowledge and spiritual understandings of the country will be placed alongside non-Aboriginal scholarship. The Museum will present the voices of different cultural groups and promote a range of interpretations of Australian history. The interdisciplinary approach will create a new productive dialogue and fresh perspectives about the history of Australia.<sup>32</sup>

One of the principal concepts behind the NMA's development was an exploration of Australian national identity, and there was always recognition of the problems involved with attempting to construct any single interpretation of identity: 'we are not trying to tell the story of Australia'.<sup>33</sup> The museum emphasised it aimed to represent the nation's diversity, recognising that this diversity undermined attempts 'at creating a seamless characterisation of national identity', while also acknowledging that 'this diversity also provides a rich opportunity for the museum to explore the variety of forms of expression of identity over time and in different locations'.<sup>34</sup>

In the immediate years prior to its opening, the NMA sought to further develop the integration of different disciplines, by identifying primary topics that would intersect to best create an understanding of Australian history, society and environments. In March 1999, the document *Defining Ourselves* was produced, laying out the NMA's vision of

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<sup>32</sup> NMA, *National Museum of Australia Council Planning Day, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1997: Program Plan Number 1 – Draft 1. An overview of programs to be presented for opening on 01/01/01*, Canberra, 1997, p.10, NMA Research Library. Also see NMA, *Updated Concept Paper, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1997*, NMA Departmental File, 99/0152, NMA on Acton – Architectural Competition, NMA Research Library.

<sup>33</sup> NMA, *Updated Concept Paper*, p.3.

<sup>34</sup> NMA, *National Museum of Australia Council Planning Day*, p.11.

‘exploring the past, illuminating the present and imagining the future’.<sup>35</sup> *Defining Ourselves* put forward the three overlapping themes of Land, Nation and People – themes that would exist throughout the NMA, and which would be touched upon regularly by many of the different exhibits.

These themes were based on the idea that ‘Australianess’ was most often defined through a relationship with Australia as a land, as a nation, or as a group of people.<sup>36</sup> ‘Land’, for example, was described as interpreting the frames of reference through which Australians have perceived the Australian environment, how they have used and misused the productive capabilities of the land, and how the Australian environment has shaped human settlement and society. Through the theme of ‘Nation’, the NMA would provide a forum for the consideration of national identity by interpreting the forms, symbols and ideas of nationhood, and identifying popular perceptions and expressions of national identity, whilst through ‘People’ lived experience would be focused upon, as a way of bringing historical personas, events and movements to life:

The Museum seeks to present history in a democratic light so that ordinary and extraordinary Australians, rich and poor, indigenous and settler, colonist and recent arrival, bush and town dweller are represented. Our aim is that every visitor will find elements of their own inheritance and life experience in the Museum.<sup>37</sup>

While these themes were not to be presented specifically or individually, they would also not be dealt with in a chronological manner. The entire museum was designed thematically, based around the concepts inherent in the inter-related themes, making it easier to tell cross-disciplinary stories. To achieve this, the NMA was designed around a combination of traditional object-rich exhibits and the use of innovative multi-media experiences. Media and technology were used, to ‘enhance stories, to personalise the museum visit, and to tell a much larger story than the physical space permits’.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> NMA, *Defining Ourselves*, March 1999, NMA Research Library. Also in NMA, *Interim Design Development Submission*, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1999, submitted by Anway & Co. Inc., Amaze Design & DMCD Inc., NMA Research Library.

<sup>36</sup> NMA, *Conceptual Design – 100% Submission*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1999, NMA Research Library.

<sup>37</sup> NMA, *Defining Ourselves*.

<sup>38</sup> NMA, *Conceptual Design – 100% Submission*.

*Defining Ourselves* also re-emphasised the idea of 'identities', rather than any one single interpretation of identity, arguing that some of the exhibits must be confrontational over aspects of the past. In other words, despite clearly being a museum celebrating Australia as a nation, the NMA was careful not to take this so far that it glossed over crucial aspects of history: 'Rather than avoiding controversy ... [the museum] must be more adept at channelling public discourse into productive and authoritative explorations that challenge curators and other museum staff to address questions that are meaningful to the public.'<sup>39</sup>

In terms of its intellectual framework, it is important to finally highlight that the NMA, in being a forum for the nation, was designed as a 'national museum of social history': social history being defined in the broadest terms as the interaction of people's lives and the factors affecting those lives. Many of the concepts upon which the museum is based reflect the changes in museology and historiography that had been occurring during the two previous decades. Significantly, for example, the NMA highlighted its multi-disciplinary approach of combining 'traditional' history, such as economic and political history, with the 'new' social histories developed since the 1970s such as migration and urban history, along with 'the more recent innovations of environmental history and personal history'.<sup>40</sup> The museum also emphasised the relevance of the past to contemporary and future circumstances, represented in the new institution's logo of 'Yesterday Tomorrow' and the vision 'exploring the past, illuminating the present and imagining the future', and prominence was put upon the importance of more recent contemporary history in contributing to an understanding of the nation. Consequently, on opening in March 2001, the NMA and all its exhibitions were geared towards representing aspects of Australia's diverse history and society, from its earliest indigenous origins up to and including the present day. As the official guidebook describes: 'The exhibitions interpret the past, but always with the future in view. The museum is a dynamic place, where Australians can look back on where they have been, and muse and debate on where they are headed.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> NMA, *National Museum of Australia: a museum for the new millennium*, Canberra, 1999, p.5.

<sup>41</sup> NMA, *Yesterday Tomorrow: The National Museum of Australia*, Canberra, 2001, p.5.

Te Papa also revolves around three conceptual areas: *Papatuanuku* – the earth on which we all live, *Tangata Whenua* – those who belong to the land by right of discovery, and *Tangata Tiriti* – those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty of Waitangi. The integrated nature of different themes and disciplines, however, aided by the positioning of the museum as a bicultural institution, can be seen to have a far more prominent and influential role in the organisation of Te Papa as a whole than in the NMA. The integration of the national art collection with the museum in New Zealand, in particular, can be seen to affect the entire philosophical and management structure of Te Papa.

Before the passing of the 1992 Act, the National Museum and National Art Gallery had been managed entirely separately, with individual Directors and Boards of Trustees. Their subsequent amalgamation signified, as Ian Wedde has described, that they no longer had ‘totally separate identities, both in the management sense and in the cultural one’, forcing widespread changes to their organisational structures.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, four new departments were created to have a high degree of inter-departmental and inter-disciplinary collaboration: departments of History, of Art, of Maori History and Art, and of the Natural Environment. Jane Archibald, writing for *The Press* in 1994, explained what this would mean in terms of the museum’s exhibitions:

The new museum is a combination of the former National Art Gallery and National Museum. Instead of segregating Maori and pakeha art and history, and consigning history and art to separate areas, all will be integrated into one in the new museum. An artefact may be placed alongside a piece of fine art if it helps to explain an element of the New Zealand story.<sup>43</sup>

The integration of the collections created an entirely different museum environment. New staff positions were introduced, such as marketers, project advisors and human resource advisors, in order to make the institution more commercially viable and able to fend for itself in the marketplace, while team based cross-department planning took the place of highly specialised or departmentalised approaches. As discussed later, this wide-scale amalgamation of the activities of traditionally separate professional activities

<sup>42</sup> I. Wedde, ‘Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa’, *Artlink*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1992, p.42. For a further comparison of the management changes during the early 1990s see J. Harper, ‘For the sake of your art’, *Dominion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1999.

<sup>43</sup> J. Archibald, ‘Museum takes shape amid controversy’, *The Press*, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1994.



provoked, and indeed continues to provoke, considerable controversy amongst both museum professionals and the public, largely due to a perception that it is to the detriment of the museum's role in scholarship, while also undermining the relevance of the collections. Similar controversy has surrounded the NMA, as the traditional curators became program managers and administrators with reduced management of the actual collections.

The inter-relation of the three conceptual areas within the actual exhibitions had been proposed as early as 1990, in an initial conceptual plan prepared by the American exhibition designer Ralph Appelbaum. It was envisaged that each section of the new museum would be representative of *Papatuanuku*, Maori and Pakeha settlers. The Natural Environment 'zone', for example, was to be located within the concept of *Papatuanuku* and subject to an ongoing exploration of both Maori and Pakeha relationships to the land.<sup>44</sup> In regards to the areas devoted to the human history of New Zealand, the concept developers also kept in line with this new interdisciplinary and unified collection mandate:

The three zones devoted to human studies – Maori Art and History, History, and Art – located on the upper level where the boundaries between them can remain fluid and encourage the exploration of cross disciplinary topics ... [can facilitate] an area of dialogue ... between Maori Art and History and the History Zone to provide for an extended presentation of New Zealand's bicultural history.<sup>45</sup>

This integrated concept has effectively remained the basis for the entire museum ever since and has been central to its role of 'a museum about national identity'.<sup>46</sup> In 1994, Rodney Wilson, Director of the Auckland Museum, explained clearly what the integration of previously separate collections could achieve:

The integration of previously separate displays is an unconventional museum attitude, and, doubtless, will be challenged by some conservative museologists. In simple terms,

<sup>44</sup> See B. Dibley, *Museum, Native, Nation: Museological Narrative and Postcolonial National identity Formation*, MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1996, p.21.

<sup>45</sup> Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (MoNZTPT), *Exhibitions Conceptual Plan: Draft*, Prepared by Ralph Appelbaum Associates Inc., New York, 1990, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) Archives, pp.9-10. Also see MoNZTPT, *Interpretative Plan: A Conceptual Framework for Exhibitions*, c.1990, Te Aka Matua Library, esp. p.17.

<sup>46</sup> S. Collins, 'Big bangs for "Disneyland"', *City Voice*, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1993.

what it means is that artefacts from different curatorial disciplines may be combined to enrich and extend the stories being told in the different displays. In some areas the integration will be less intensive than in others, but conceptually, where adjoining displays approach each other, increased integration could lead to almost seamless transitions from subject to subject.<sup>47</sup>

The principle of biculturalism permeated everything. Even the title of the museum, with its English and Maori components, reflected the aim that the museum would genuinely represent New Zealand's distinctive bicultural partnership, while the 1992 Act recognised the aims, aspirations and employment requirements of the Maori people, as well as the 'need for substantial involvement of Maori people as employees of the Board'.<sup>48</sup> As discussed in Chapter Five, the National Museum had been gradually implementing bicultural policies since the *Te Maori* exhibition in the mid 1980s. Its Corporate Plan for 1993–1994 went further to state: 'We will be a bicultural museum ... The Museum's mission determines that a partnership with Maori is essential.'<sup>49</sup> Thereupon, Maori artist Cliff Whiting was appointed as Te Papa's first Director of Maori Art and History in June 1993,<sup>50</sup> and in May 1994 the Museum Board agreed that the principles of the Treaty as developed by the Waitangi Tribunal should form the basis on which the museum developed its bicultural policy.<sup>51</sup> The museum subsequently produced a policy that stated that the museum would be 'a national museum that powerfully expresses the total culture of New Zealand', and emphasised 'the development of a bicultural museum which celebrates the mana [authority/prestige] of the two mainstreams of tradition and cultural heritage'.<sup>52</sup> Shortly afterwards, a language policy was also adopted where it was recognised that *te reo Maori* (the Maori language) was an official language of New Zealand, and consequently should be promoted in corporate documents, exhibitions and directional guides.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>47</sup> R. Wilson, *Into the Twenty-First Century: a review of civic museum services in Wellington*, Wellington, 1994.

<sup>48</sup> *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992*, 1<sup>st</sup> Schedule, Section 4, p.18.

<sup>49</sup> MoNZTPT, *Report of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa for the year ended 1 July 1993 to 30 June 1994*, Wellington, 1994, p.20.

<sup>50</sup> K. Russell, 'Making the museum "bicultural"', *City Voice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1993.

<sup>51</sup> MoNZTPT, *Report of the Museum ... year ended 1 July 1993 to 30 June 1994*, p.20.

<sup>52</sup> MoNZTPT, *Bicultural Policy*, 1997, Te Aka Matua Library. The policy also included representation of both Maori and Pakeha interests on the Museum Board.

<sup>53</sup> MoNZTPT, *Language Policy*, 1997, Te Aka Matua Library. Maori was adopted as an official language by the *Maori Language Act 1987*.

The intellectual frameworks of both the NMA and Te Papa, therefore, were based on similar concepts. Foremost, they were to explore national identity through the integration of indigenous history and culture, non-indigenous history, and the environment. The integration of these themes, however, was never straightforward, and the problems that this aroused should be considered in order to appreciate how these museums sought to represent the nation.

The debates that arose in both museums concerning the prominence of indigenous history and a subsequent perceived marginalisation of non-indigenous history were discussed earlier, reflecting the complex and problematic nature of post-colonial society. Other problems and controversy also emerged during the development stages that are important in illustrating what people perceive national museums to symbolise, as well as the political and public nature and role of museums in Australia and New Zealand. Much of this controversy is also indicative of the museum developments identified in previous chapters, most obvious through the use of new museological techniques in the NMA and Te Papa, which also highlights the growing contentious debate over the changing functions of museums.

The debate surrounding Te Papa has always been more vocal than the NMA. The main reason for this is most likely that Te Papa's development took place over a longer period. Critics had six years, between 1992 and 1998, to review and question the designs and programs of the new museum. In contrast, opening in 2001 after construction was finally approved in 1998, there was little time for publication of the NMA's proposed programs and subsequent reflection and censure. Yet on opening, the debate surrounding Te Papa continued to be far more prominent than the NMA. This can be attributed to a number of factors. As later discussed, for instance, Te Papa is regarded by many as an 'extreme' example of new museology; its theme-park type attractions drawing a great deal of scrutiny, especially over their perceived threat to the intellectual integrity of the museum. In contrast, the NMA's displays were generally considered more moderate and conventional, allowing less room for criticism of 'new' techniques. The debate can also be credited to the particularly problematic and sensitive bicultural nature of New Zealand. Finally, an important factor might simply be that a national museum had existed in New Zealand for over a century, and consequently there were greater expectations and comparisons to be made once Te Papa opened. This is in

contrast to Australia, where the eventual establishment of a national museum after over two hundred years of European settlement was in itself seen as an achievement.

### **Restructuring and Complications – Scholarship and Entertainment**

There are a number of internal factors that emerged during the development of both museums that can be seen to have had a direct influence on the final opening exhibitions: factors that succeeded in generating notable problems and controversy. For the NMA, this was to an extent due to the tight time frame. When compared to other recent major museum developments such as Te Papa, and the Melbourne Museum and the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, which took six and eight years respectively, the National Museum of Australia was evidently under considerable pressure from the start.

In order to advance the development process, in 1997 the NMA had brought in the American firm of Ralph Appelbaum Associates. Professional museum designers who had worked on museums around the world, including playing a major part in Te Papa's design, they were employed to work out a way to get from a standing start to a national museum in such a short period of time. Appelbaum's idea for the quick development of the museum was to base it around multi-media and the mass display of objects with standing interpretation.<sup>54</sup> They envisaged a type of 'subway experience', through which visitors would progress through a narrow entrance onto a mezzanine level overlooking a large area filled with objects. Apart from a number of safety problems that emerged, the entire rationale was problematic in that the development of large-scale multi-media exhibits could take considerable time, while the mass display of objects would likely cause problems in terms of conservation.<sup>55</sup> Market research had also shown potential visitors wanted 'objects with stories' – not just multi-media or stand-alone objects.

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<sup>54</sup> Ralph Appelbaum Associates Inc., *National Museum of Australia – Draft Interpretative Brief: Qualitative Aspects of the Visitor Experience, the Museum's Programming Strategies, and its Internal Culture*, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1997, NMA Research Library. Also see Ralph Appelbaum Associates, *Voicing Australia: Summary of Consultant's Summit, Canberra, 22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1997, Thematic and Conceptual Development Strategies*, NMA Departmental File, 98/238, NMA on Acton: Content Development Phase – Content Framework Documents, NMA Research Library.

<sup>55</sup> Thanks to Mike Smith, former head of the Land and People Program and now head of Research and Development at the NMA, for clarifying the issues surrounding Appelbaum's involvement in the museum's development.

At any rate, Appelbaum soon left the development process largely due to their tender being too expensive. They were replaced by the American design consortium Anway who, after an initial outcry over the reliance on foreign rather than Australian expertise, brought fresh ideas and outside views on how best to represent the nation.<sup>56</sup> Both Anway and Appelbaum, however, were at times accused of ignoring the ideas of the museum's curators. As the museum was organised by theme rather than individual discipline, in order to make it easier to tell cross-disciplinary stories, specialist curators effectively became exhibition administrators. Designated program managers, with little contact with the actual collections which came under the control of a separate collection management division, this contributed to a growing perception that the museum was neglecting its role of research and scholarship.<sup>57</sup>

Criticism concerning the neglect of research and scholarship has been even more outspoken in regards to Te Papa, largely because of the extensive organisational restructuring that took place since 1992. The decision to have every department and exhibition run by a multi-disciplinary team was seen as diluting the voices of scholars and experts, to the extent that the museum would 'be no more than a "Disneyland" experience that offers little in the way of scholarship or education'.<sup>58</sup> By amalgamating the different disciplines, Te Papa was seen as concentrating more on the development of exhibitions than on traditional roles of scholarship, as staff were moved away from their specialist areas into positions of administration and management. As a consequence of the restructuring, in October 1993 the museum's most senior scientist, Dr Alan Baker, left the museum after his job as head of the natural environment department was abolished, prompting the *Wellington City Voice* to highlight that 'there are now no scientists in the senior management of the museum'.<sup>59</sup> The perceived neglect of research was a problem, especially as one of the main functions of the museum, under the 1992 Act, was to 'conduct research into any matter relating to its collections or associated areas of interest'.<sup>60</sup> The criticism prompted a review in early 1994, looking at the role of scholarship in Te Papa. Published in July as *An Agenda for Scholarship*, its findings

<sup>56</sup> Mike Smith, Personal Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2001.

<sup>57</sup> These problems have begun to be addressed more recently with the appointment of Mike Smith as Director of Research and Development, aiming to ensure a steady influx of new ideas at the museum.

<sup>58</sup> P. MacLennan, 'Museum Scene shrugs off Disney image', *Leisure Manager*, Autumn 1995, p.6. Also see 'Museum rejects "Disneyland" jibe', *Sunday Star Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1994.

<sup>59</sup> S. Collins, 'Museum review worries scientists', *City Voice*, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1993.

<sup>60</sup> *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992*, Section 7, p.3.

strongly condemned the general insufficient quantity and quality of scholarship and research in the museum.<sup>61</sup> The report found, for example, that only two areas of the museum, natural sciences and archaeology, had a scale of research appropriate for a national museum, and even there it was functioning at only a basic level due to staff cuts. In terms of Pakeha history, Rosemary McLeod summarised the report's findings:

The general history department of the museum has a complete lack of research going on; European history has been virtually neglected. 'The material culture of the Pakeha is profoundly underrepresented ... such that the museum is neither fulfilling its fundamental statutory function ... nor is it capable of representing Pakeha history and culture,' says the report.<sup>62</sup>

The report provided impetus for the museum to examine its priorities, and in 1996 a new research strategy was developed entitled *Speaking with Authority*.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, Chief Executive Cheryll Sotheran spoke out in defence of the museum's role in scholarship, promising that underpinning each of the multi-disciplinary opening exhibitions would be 'a rigorous scholarship which, together with leading-edge display techniques, will make us world leaders'.<sup>64</sup> Ken Gorbey, Director of Museum Projects, also spoke out against those critical of the 'Disneyland' approach, accusing them of failing to grasp the relevance of modern technologies and their possibilities, in enhancing the emotional impact of exhibits and modernising the museum experience.<sup>65</sup>

The problems with scholarship and the criticism of its focus on entertainment stemmed from Te Papa's aim to be customer focused, commercially viable, entertaining and, essentially, 'un-museum like'. The museum's vision statement clearly laid out its position, stating that 'it encompasses the vision of a competitive, commercially responsive customer focused organisation that occupies a leading role in the national

<sup>61</sup> MoNZTPT, *An Agenda for Scholarship: scholarship and research in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa*, Wellington, 1994.

<sup>62</sup> McLeod, 'The Mighty MoNZ...', p.78. Also see S. Collins, "'Disneyland' plans alarm scientists', *City Voice*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1994.

<sup>63</sup> MoNZTPT, *Speaking with Authority: scholarship and matauranga at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa – a strategy*, Wellington, 1996. The report recognised that the institution was undergoing huge changes, and defined four themes that would help focus research in the future: Becoming Aotearoa New Zealand – the natural forces that created New Zealand; the peopling of New Zealand – the *tangata whenua* and *tangata tiriti* and their interactions; life in New Zealand; and the museum serving the community – research undertaken in order to serve the community better.

<sup>64</sup> Sotheran, 'Show and tell...', p.9.

<sup>65</sup> MacLennan, 'Museum Scene...', p.6.

and global recreation and leisure market place'.<sup>66</sup> Indicative of the growing need for museums to be competitive in the market place, it is a vision that has continued to provoke controversy, although it was most prominent at the museum's opening, especially over its treatment of art and the inclusion of virtual-reality rides.

Further fuelling the criticism was the decision to drop the title 'museum' altogether from the institution's name in order to give it a completely new brand identity. In a desire to challenge the image of dusty objects in glass cases that the word 'museum' traditionally implied, the museum announced in 1997 that its new brand name would simply be 'Te Papa', meaning 'Our Place', while its visual identity would be a stylised thumbprint. In a media release, Sotheran explained: 'Our Place refers to New Zealand and is friendly and informal and is a phrase which all New Zealanders are familiar with. It can also refer to our place in the world, our place in the Pacific, our place in time.'<sup>67</sup> The new brand, unsurprisingly, aroused much commentary and criticism mainly over the obvious move towards becoming a fully-fledged commercial business very different from a traditional museum.<sup>68</sup> Mary Varnham for the *Evening Post*, highlighted the museum's desire 'to join the latest American business craze and become a themed leisure brand',<sup>69</sup> while the same paper's editorial described the thumbprint logo as 'a clunker'.<sup>70</sup>

The restructuring of both Te Papa and the NMA in line with their conceptual plans therefore, aroused considerable debate. Such debate is particularly significant in discussions of 'nation', as they highlight a strong concern over how museums are representing their communities, their public, and their national identity. The furore surrounding the adoption of both 'Te Papa' and the thumbprint, for example, illustrates the concern not only over how the museum is 'marketing' itself to New Zealanders, but also over how it is representing New Zealand to the world.

<sup>66</sup> MoNZTPT, *Report of the Museum of ... year ended 1 July 1993 to 30 June 1994*, Wellington, p.6.

<sup>67</sup> 'Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa's new brand identity', Media Release, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1997, Te Aka Matua Library. Also see MoNZTPT, *The Brand Story: Why the need for change?*, Te Aka Matua Library, and B. Courtney, 'Museum splashes out on new name', *Dominion*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1997. For more on the thumbprint see V. Aldridge, 'Designing a nation's identity', *Dominion*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1997.

<sup>68</sup> There was also confusion over the meaning of 'Te Papa'. For more on this see Tapsell, Taonga..., especially Appendix Six, pp.291-299.

<sup>69</sup> M. Varnham, 'Our Place burned by a brand of the 70s', *Evening Post*, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1997, p.6.

<sup>70</sup> Editorial, 'Te Thumbprint: let's have another go', *Evening Post*, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1997.

## Architecture

One of the most contentious issues that has surrounded both museums throughout their recent histories is their architectural design. It is worth briefly exploring this if only to illustrate again the prominent position these museums are perceived to hold as representing the nation. The architecture of both the NMA and Te Papa attempt to convey many of the intellectual concepts evident within the actual museums' programs. For example, dominated by an orange arch-like band that symbolically describes a pathway through the site to align with Uluru in Australia's centre, the concept behind the NMA's design is that it embodies the 'vitality of Australia's evolving society' and enables the nation's stories to be told with vigour and imagination.<sup>71</sup> The architectural design also tries to avoid representing any single traditional image, largely being based on the museum's philosophy of presenting the stories of Australia, and acknowledging the diverse stories that exist. As architect Howard Raggatt has explained, it is based on the idea 'that this museum, as a social history museum, is a sort of tangle of stories'.<sup>72</sup>

Most significantly, in terms of the role they are perceived to hold as representatives of the nation, both the NMA and Te Papa have been regarded as not being 'monumental' enough to be national museums. Concerning the NMA, this debate emerged from continuing criticism over the choice of Acton Peninsula for the museum.<sup>73</sup> By this point, of course, the site of Acton had already been decided upon, largely due to the cost and potential to attract the greatest number of visitors, while the increased use of multimedia and other modern technology aided arguments that claimed a larger museum was

<sup>71</sup> NMA, *Building History – The National Museum of Australia*, Canberra, 2001, p.21, and NMA, *National Museum of Australia: a museum for the new millennium*, p.16.

<sup>72</sup> 'The Sunday Show', 774 ABC Radio, Interview with Howard Raggatt, architect of the National Museum of Australia, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2001. Also see A. Marx, 'Not what you'd expect of Canberra', *Courier Mail*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2001, p.M5; D. Reed, 'National masterpiece', *Age*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2001; and D. Mollison, 'Building has its own dynamic', *Canberra Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter Four. For example, John Mulvaney continued to raise concerns about the size of the museum and the lack of potential for expansion, while Peter Pigott, who has chaired the famous 1975 inquiry that led to the establishment of the museum, also declared the site to be far too small, though he did envisage it would receive higher visitation than any other Australian museum. See D.J. Mulvaney to Wilson Tuckey, Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Public Works, in Commonwealth of Australia, *Joint Parliamentary Committee on Public Works: New facilities for the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* (Hansard), 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998, pp.507-509, and R. Macklin, 'Despite flaws, mastermind tips bright future for national museum', *Canberra Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2000, p.1. Also see Radio 2CN, 'Afternoon with Rod Quinn', Panel Discussion on the National Museum, with John Mulvaney, Linda Young, Bill Jonas, Leon Perossean and Geoffrey Bolton, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1999, Transcript in NMA Departmental File, 98/0433, NMA on Acton: Content Development Phase – Content Framework Documents, NMA Research Library.



not necessary. The controversy was fuelled throughout the building's design process, however, by budgetary constraints that reduced the museum's exhibition space, by criticism from the Institute of Architects, and by unfortunate incidents such as the accidental death of a child during the demolition of the old Canberra hospital on the Acton site.<sup>74</sup>

The situation did not markedly improve when the winning architects, Ashton Raggatt McDougall, published their design. The architectural brief had emphasised that the museum should be a non-monumental building without, for example, a grand entrance with a great sweeping staircase like that of many traditional museums.<sup>75</sup> However, it is this anti-monumental nature of the final design that has received the most coverage and criticism, especially when compared with other new major museums around the world, such as the new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. The post-modern approach of the orange 'Uluru line', has been compared to something that belongs in a theme park,<sup>76</sup> while Stephen Frith, Professor of Architecture at the University of Canberra, has declared the design 'a major monument to lost opportunity' and laments: 'The capacity of buildings to embody the hopes and experience of a people is itself mocked in the National Museum'.<sup>77</sup> Tim Bonyhady, an art and environmental historian at the Australian National University, has also described the building as 'mediocre at best' and goes so far as to say: 'Perhaps no other major Australian public building attempts such crass symbolism'.<sup>78</sup>

Ashton Raggatt McDougall are known for their pastiche of other architectural designs. After opening, accusations emerged that Howard Raggatt copied parts from Daniel Libeskind's design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, in a symbolic attempt to draw parallels between the treatment of the Jews by the Nazis and the effects of white settlement on Australian Aborigines. This caused a good deal of furore, contributing

<sup>74</sup> The Institute of Architects claimed that the initial design competition did not satisfy the requirements of the international architectural profession. For more on various aspects of the controversy surrounding the design process, see C. Jackson, 'Museum revamp row', *Canberra Times*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1998, pp.1-2, F. Brenchley, 'The Curse of the National Museum', *The Bulletin*, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1999, pp.50-51, and T. Bonyhady, 'Lost in the loop', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2001.

<sup>75</sup> 'Innovative design for the new National Museum', in *Elements: update of Acton Peninsula construction project*, August 2000, pp.6-7.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, 'Part of a roller coaster? No, a grand conceptual plan', *Canberra Times*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2001, and I. Perlman, 'Museum for a PlayStation generation', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>77</sup> S. Frith, 'A monument to lost opportunity', *Canberra Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>78</sup> Bonyhady, 'Lost in the loop'.

especially to debates over intellectual property, and the 'politically-correct' nature and role of the national museum.<sup>79</sup> There was also evidence that Raggatt had used aspects of other buildings, including Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy near Paris. Such pastiche naturally raises questions over the role of the museum, including its architecture, and its position as a focal point for the nation's identity. As Stephen Frith has asked: 'What do the Villa Savoye and the Holocaust Museum unique to Berlin have to do with the story of Australia?'<sup>80</sup>

Te Papa has also been surrounded with controversy in regards to its architecture. Chapter Five briefly explored the debate over the site and initial plans that was initiated once Jasmax was selected as the winning architect in 1990. Such debate continued throughout the 1990s, both before and after Te Papa's opening, to the extent that one commentator surmised in 1998 that 'the impressive number of visitors to Te Papa is, perhaps, exceeded only by those with an opinion of its architecture'.<sup>81</sup>

The plan for the new museum was publicly released as early as May 1992 and, like the NMA, was designed to convey the intellectual concepts behind the entire museum. While the NMA's design aimed to reflect the diversity of stories that made up Australia, Te Papa's architectural design was based on the biculturalism that existed throughout New Zealand's society. As architect Pete Bossley explained, it was based around 'a bicultural gesture comprising two sections, one Maori and one European, linked together. The Maori section was more traditional in style and faced over the water. The European section echoed the grid patterns of streets.'<sup>82</sup> It immediately drew mixed views and considerable criticism, much of it reflecting, like the NMA, a concern that a national museum should be a 'monumental' representation of the country. For example, the Wellington press reported it had received public opinions ranging from 'it looks like a toilet', to 'it looks like a mouse exercise tunnel you'd find inside a cage'.<sup>83</sup> The *New Zealand Herald* commented that artists' impressions of the new building indicated that

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, P. Akerman, 'Museum is an originalimitation', *Sunday Telegraph*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2001, and P. Heinrichs, 'Museum a copy, claims architect', *Sunday Age*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2001

<sup>80</sup> Frith, 'A monument...'. Also see I. Perlman, 'House of Games', *Australian Financial Review*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2001.

<sup>81</sup> T. Honey, 'A question of design', *Evening Post*, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1998, p.18.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in M. Varnham, 'Museum of NZ – an opportunity lost', *Evening Post*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1992. For more on Te Papa's architecture see P. Bossley, *Te Papa – an architectural adventure*, Wellington, 1998, and W.J. Tramosch, 'Exact Imagining: The Museum as a Journey', *Museum News*, March/April 1998, p.47.

<sup>83</sup> A. Ots, 'Views mixed on museum design', *Evening Post*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1994.

it might be 'utilitarian to the point of being visually boring',<sup>84</sup> while Mary Varnham from the *Evening Post* stated that the exterior design 'is boring, says nothing about us as a country and should be sent back to the drawing board'.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile two separate architects, Ian Athfield and Roger Walker, respectively described the design as 'rather ho-hum' and an 'incredible lost opportunity'.<sup>86</sup> A consequence of this controversy, was that early in June 1992, the public relations firm Saatchi and Saatchi put forward their own design for the museum based on a paua shell, stating that, in terms of its position as a stage for the nation, the 'new national museum should be as important a piece of artwork as what is inside'.<sup>87</sup>

In response to the criticism, Sir Wallace Rowling, Chairman of the Project Development Board, stated that there was a focus on the inside of the museum 'because it was what went on inside that mattered most', and that due to physical and financial restraints any further redesign would kill the project altogether.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, by August 1992, public opinion did see small changes to the museum design in an attempt to make it more dramatic, such as the inclusion of an oversailing roof. The modifications were not enough to silence the critics, however, with Ian Athfield describing it as a 'new Levene's store', and Howard Grieve from Saatchi and Saatchi commenting that the design was still 'lifeless': 'There's no reason it should not be an Eiffel Tower or Sydney Opera House ... People won't look at this with awe but as another big, faceless, cold building.'<sup>89</sup> Calls for further redesign were ignored, however, and construction of the new museum began as scheduled in July 1993. The architecture of the museum has remained one of its most contentious issues though and many still feel the museum should have been built to a grander vision. Tommy Honey for example, head of interior design at the Central Institute of Technology, commented in 1998 that there is 'a large and unsatisfied public hunger for Te Papa to be an icon', to be as recognisable as the Sydney Opera House or Eiffel Tower.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Editorial, 'Think Big Reincarnate', *New Zealand Herald*, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1992.

<sup>85</sup> Varnham, 'Museum of NZ...'.  


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<sup>86</sup> A. Hubbard, 'Edifice Complex', *NZ Listener*, vol. 134, no. 2729, 18-24 July 1992, pp.30-33.

<sup>87</sup> S. Chetwin, 'Advertising men challenge museum design', *Evening Post*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1992. Paua – a New Zealand abalone.

<sup>88</sup> E. O'Leary, 'Redesign would "kill" museum – Rowling', *Evening Post*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1992.

<sup>89</sup> A. Finnegan, 'Museum design modified', *Evening Post*, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1992.

<sup>90</sup> Honey, 'A question...', p.18.

Problems and controversy, therefore, have surrounded both the NMA and Te Papa – influencing their development and reflecting perceptions of how and what a national museum should represent. In particular, such debates are important as they highlight the confusion over non-indigenous identity, as well as the concern over how these museums were going to represent that identity. In terms of changing museology, it is clear both museums made determined moves in their planning to apply new museological methods and adapt to the post-colonial environment. Yet, this has not been straightforward. To summarise, the moves by the NMA and Te Papa to implement more professional structures and to integrate different histories can be seen in museums throughout both countries, as can the perceived problems this has caused for the traditional museum role of scholarship. Alongside this, the greater use of new techniques, such as multi-media and other interactives, has contributed to general debate surrounding museums, such as over the possible neglect of education in favour of entertainment. Post-modern elements can also be drawn from the architecture of both museums, but the furore that they have aroused points to the growing discussion concerning post-modern interpretation and its conflict with traditional perceptions of museums and their role. Finally, conflict has arisen concerning the inclusion of different histories, especially over the museums' desire to properly represent indigenous history and culture. As will be discussed, these debates did not disappear after the museums opened, highlighting the complex and contentious nature of identity in Australia and New Zealand.

### **The Opening Exhibitions**

In order to provide some context for the subsequent discussion, it is useful to provide a brief descriptive overview of the permanent galleries that opened in 1998 and 2001.<sup>91</sup> This is particularly helpful in terms of the exploration of the non-indigenous exhibitions in the next chapter, remembering that both museums initially sought to integrate different disciplines and histories so that, in theory, each gallery was to some extent to reflect the three themes of the environment, indigenous, and non-indigenous history.

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<sup>91</sup> It is important to note that this thesis is concerned with the **opening** exhibitions that were designed to reflect 'Australia' and 'New Zealand' in 1998 and 2001. It is useful to aware, however, that since opening, various exhibits have been changed or replaced – especially in Te Papa.

Te Papa was designed around a populist approach, in the sense that it aimed to appeal and attract visitors who would not traditionally go to a museum. This is most clearly illustrated by the use of interactive technology throughout.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, the museum is based around celebrating New Zealanders, their achievements and national identity, designed to be, according to the guidebook; 'a mirror on their lives, a place where their stories are told, a place to lose yourself and to find yourself'.<sup>93</sup>

The museum exhibitions start on Level Two of the building, where the visitor is immediately confronted with the *Time Warp* area, the part of the institution which has contributed most to descriptions of Te Papa being like 'an amusement arcade'. Reflecting Te Papa's customer driven approach, here it is possible to have a go at virtual sheep shearing or a virtual bungee jump, there are rides for small children, and there are two virtual reality rides called 'Blastback' and 'Future Rush'. In 'Blastback' the visitor is hurled back to the beginning of time, where New Zealand is torn apart from the super-continent Gondwanaland, while 'Future Rush' takes the visitor on a fast-paced tour of Wellington in 2055.

The rest of this level is dedicated to the natural environment, or *Papatuanuku*, consisting of three main galleries: *Awesome Forces*, *Mountains to Sea* and *Bush City*. *Awesome Forces* examines the natural forces that created and transformed New Zealand, tracing the origin of the country back 100 million years to its association with Gondwanaland, and illustrating the break-up of the continents and the drift south of New Zealand to its current position. There is a wide range of interpretative techniques and experiences, illustrative of the use of technology and multi-media throughout the museum, such as large-screen projections, animation and a seismic encounter. *Mountains to Sea*, a less dynamic gallery, puts the spotlight on New Zealand's flora and fauna, covering a wide range of habitats and the plants and animals that live there, as the visitor moves through six different worlds: New Zealand's alpine, bush, freshwater,

<sup>92</sup> See 'Technology at the heart of museum project', *NZ Infotech Weekly*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1998, p.15.

<sup>93</sup> MoNZTPT, *Te Papa – Our Place: a souvenir*, Wellington, Te Papa Press, 1998, p.1. This is to the extent that even the restaurant that you encounter before even reaching the main foyer of the museum, called the Icon Restaurant, aspires to be a symbol of the country in terms of New Zealand gastronomy. See D. Burton, 'Introducing a new Kiwi Icon', *Evening Post*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998. For general descriptions of Te Papa's opening exhibitions see 'Te Papa – Opening the Nation's Treasure Chest', *Evening Post*, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1998, p.11; S. Campbell, 'Come on down and visit Our Place', *The Times* (UK), 20<sup>th</sup> June 1998, p.31; W. Gamble, 'Inside the MoNZter', *New Zealand Herald*, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1998, p.G3; and 'Getting a sense of national identity', *Sunday Star Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1999, pp.8-9.

coastal, open ocean, and deep-sea ecosystems. Linked to these natural environment exhibitions by a bridge is *Bush City*, an outside 'living' part of the museum, where visitors can gain a snapshot of the New Zealand landscape as they move amongst native trees, from a wetlands environment to a volcanic plateau.<sup>94</sup>

The majority of the museums' exhibits are on Level Four. *Mana Whenua*, the main gallery dealing with the Maori, occupies a large part of the space. Maori arts, language and culture are explored through a number of mediums, from the simple display of taonga (treasures) to extensive use of oral histories.<sup>95</sup> Adjacent to the gallery is Te Papa's marae (meeting place), central to which is the very modern-looking wharenui (meeting house), called Te Hono ki Hawaiki, referring to the connection with the ancestral homeland of Hawaiki in the Pacific. The first of its kind, *Te Marae* is designed to belong not only to Maori people, but to all the cultures in New Zealand.<sup>96</sup> In line with New Zealand's Pacific heritage, there is also a gallery examining the impact of Pacific Island cultures. *Mana Pasifika* explores the cultures of Pacific island communities in New Zealand today, especially those of Polynesia and Fiji, through their religions, clothes, music and histories.

On opening, Te Papa's main art exhibition, *Parade*, took up a large gallery on this level, utilising some of the collections of the old National Art Gallery. As discussed later, *Parade* was the part of the museum that generated the most controversy. Initially called *The Exchange: Art in New Zealand*, and designed to 'open up the definition of art', its focus is 'principally on Pakeha stories, acknowledging in many instances these stories will involve Maori and other perspectives'.<sup>97</sup> Illustrating the integration of different museum departments, the display integrates works of art, household objects, clothing and videos, in order to create debate over what constitutes art. Also arousing debate, perhaps intentionally, is the exhibition *Signs of a Nation – Ngā Tohu Kotahitanga*.

<sup>94</sup> For more information concerning *Bush City*, see S. Gaitanos, 'Worlds within worlds', *Landscape New Zealand*, January/February 1998, pp.21-29. The attraction that areas such as *Bush City* provide is gaining increased popularity within museums, illustrated by the incorporation of such a feature, known as the *Forest Gallery*, in the new Melbourne Museum that opened in 2000.

<sup>95</sup> See MoNZTPT, *Mana Whenua: the land, the people, the spirit that binds*, 100% Concept Design, January 1996, p.2, Te Papa Archives.

<sup>96</sup> M. Amery, 'Te Papa', *Southern Skies*, February 1998, p.38.

<sup>97</sup> MoNZTPT, *The Exchange: art in New Zealand, Concept Development*, no date, p.8, Te Papa Archives. Also see MoNZTPT, *Exhibition Fitout 'The Exchange': 90% Conceptual Design Cost Plan*, June 1995, p.2., Te Papa Archives.

Standing in the centre of the level, it explores the history of the Treaty of Waitangi. Underneath a giant replica of the Treaty, visitors can pause and listen to the voices of ordinary New Zealanders giving their opinions and interpretations of the Treaty, ranging from racist Pakeha views to militantly Maori.

The rest of this level is taken up with the Pakeha history displays, examined in more detail in the next chapter. *Passports* explores the stories of all the different people who have migrated to New Zealand, from the 1840s up to the present, through the objects and ideas that migrants brought with them. *On the Sheep's Back* focuses on how the wool industry has contributed to life in New Zealand, while *Exhibiting Ourselves* examines how New Zealanders have projected a sense of national identity through International Exhibitions and Expos.<sup>98</sup> The final permanent exhibit is the *Golden Days*, which re-emphasises the multi-media and innovative aspects of Te Papa, and which has become one of the most popular exhibitions in the museum. In a re-created junk shop, visitors sit on sofas or stools to watch a film, brought alive by moving objects, which celebrates New Zealand life through an array of ideas and emotions.<sup>99</sup>

The existence of an area such as *Golden Days* highlights the celebratory nature of Te Papa. A similar aim is evident in the NMA, and indeed the first stop on the way to the NMA's exhibition galleries is *Circa*, a revolving theatre that introduces the three central themes of land, nation and people. Through a series of images and voices, often intentionally nostalgic, it attempts to consider 'Australianess' as being defined through a relationship with Australia as a land, as a nation, or as a group of people.<sup>100</sup>

On leaving this introductory experience, visitors immediately find themselves at the first of the NMA's five permanent exhibition galleries. *Tangled Destinies: Land and*

<sup>98</sup> *Exhibiting Ourselves* was closed in 2001.

<sup>99</sup> Other areas of Te Papa include four discovery centres each with a different theme, such as 'NatureSpace' and 'PlaNet Pasifika'. There are also temporary exhibition galleries and the Te Aka Matua Library, a research library. This discussion, however, focuses on the museum's permanent exhibitions.

<sup>100</sup> NMA, *Conceptual Design – 100% Submission*. For general descriptive reviews of the new museum see, for example, S. Brook & S. Powell, 'The tracks of our years - a review special', *Weekend Australian*, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2001; J. Israel, '\$152m museum gives sneak peek into our psyche', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.2; G. Simmons, 'A capital spot to visit', *Sunday Mail* (QLD), 25<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.E10; 'National Museum of Australia – a special advertising feature', *Sunday Telegraph*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.T11; R. Atkey, 'Past revisited', *Perth Sunday Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.69; L. McMenemy, 'The way we were', *The Advertiser*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2001, p.M23; J. Szego, 'Museum offers tangled vision of Australia', *Age*, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.13; M. Frith, 'Making an exhibition of ourselves', *Sunday Age*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2001, Review p.7; and 'A museum for the nation', *Museum National*, vol. 9, no. 3, February 2001, pp.13-16.

*People in Australia* investigates the relationship between people and the land in Australia. *Tangled Destinies* brings together scientific and cultural history to explore how people have responded to the Australian environment over thousands of years. Described as ‘an exciting journey through the past, present and future of the Australian environment’,<sup>101</sup> it focuses on how the Australian continent has shaped the lives of those who have dwelled there, whether they be indigenous or non-indigenous.

The three main galleries dealing specifically with non-indigenous history and identity will be examined in more detail in Chapter Seven. Each of these attempt to explore the history of the nation in different ways. *Eternity: Stories from the Emotional Heart of Australia*, for example, the smallest permanent gallery in the NMA, seeks to explore the history of Australia through a range of ten emotions, such as Joy, Passion, Mystery and Separation, placing individuals and their experiences at the centre of the interpretation of Australian history.

The second gallery, *Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788*, then addresses Australian identity in terms of Australia as a settler society, moulded by the diverse visions and ideals brought to the continent during the last two centuries. It does this by exploring the migrant history of Australia from the convicts of the late eighteenth century to the refugees of the twentieth. Finally, *Nation: Symbols of Australia*, attempts to explore Australian national identity and history through a range of familiar national symbols. Inspired by Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’, whereby symbolic vocabulary is shared throughout a community, the gallery is divided between official symbols, such as the national anthem and flag, and symbols of popular culture, such as the kangaroo, the backyard and Australian slang.

*First Australians: Gallery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* is the fifth and final permanent gallery in the museum, exploring the stories and experiences of indigenous Australians - their diversity, spirituality, identity and survival. Through a variety of objects and personal stories, the gallery profiles some 40,000 years of indigenous heritage, before turning to history since European contact. There is also an open collection area where indigenous communities can both learn and share their knowledge with museum staff. Obviously the most politically sensitive gallery in the

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<sup>101</sup> NMA, *Yesterday Tomorrow*, p.12.



museum, it represents potentially contentious issues such as the history of frontier conflicts, land rights and reconciliation, without allocating blame or extensively representing 'black armband' history. There is clearly an emphasis on inclusion rather than confrontation and blame. As explained in 1999, the gallery was:

to encourage broad based understanding and acknowledgement of Australia's historical background to present day through issues that are creating uncertainty and tension in the present, including issues such as the stolen generations, land claims, deaths-in-custody and Indigenous health, and to consider how some of these issues might play out in the future.<sup>102</sup>

*First Australians* is rich in material culture and also, as part of a museum of social history, relies heavily on themes, storytelling and oral histories. The stories are largely told from an indigenous perspective, but not entirely, as the stories of European explorers, settlers and missionaries who related closely to Aboriginal people are also examined – highlighting the integrated nature of the museum. The gallery has certainly received criticism since opening, but also its share of praise, with the successful combination of historical and contemporary Aboriginal stories prompting one commentator to declare it 'the most vibrant display of indigenous culture this country has ever seen'.<sup>103</sup>

### **The Public Response**

When they finally opened, both museums were generally received favourably and were certainly resounding commercial successes. In the first month alone there were over 100,000 visitors to the NMA, while two million visited Te Papa in its first year.<sup>104</sup> Both museums, however, have been subjects of intense debate: debate that was expected and welcomed by Dawn Casey, the NMA's Director, who conceded that the museum 'could not talk seriously about Australian history and identity in the year 2001 without

<sup>102</sup> NMA, *Gallery of Aboriginal Australia: Indigenous Voices*, Prepared by D. Mundine, M. Bani, T. Baum, D. Kaus & C. Lane, February 1999, pp.7-8, NMA Research Library. Also see NMA, *Gallery of Aboriginal Australia – Interim Design Development Submission, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1999, submitted by Anway & Co. Inc., Amaze Design & DMCD Inc.*, NMA Research Library. The Gallery of Aboriginal Australia was renamed in 2000 to also acknowledge Australia's other indigenous group, the Torres Strait Islanders.

<sup>103</sup> S. McCulloch-Uehlin, 'Past the point of fresh turn', *Weekend Australian*, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.R21.

<sup>104</sup> M. Lane, 'Happy Birthday, Te Papa', *Evening Post*, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1999, p.1.

encountering sharp differences of opinion'.<sup>105</sup> Much of the comment applauded the two museums. Robert Macklin, for example, has described the NMA's galleries as being 'packed with fascination',<sup>106</sup> while an article in the *Canberra Sunday Times* explained:

The museum has adopted a wonderfully refreshing style in the way in which Australia's history is presented. It is more than a study of invaluable items that tell us something of our history. Opposed to the stuffed animals and still-life ceramics typical of many of the world's museums is the highly interactive approach adopted. There is a hint of theme park and of fun in the way exhibits are presented.<sup>107</sup>

Susan McCulloch-Uehlin has described the museum as 'rich in material culture, but also ripe with ideas',<sup>108</sup> while Tim Bonyhady, whilst critical of the architecture, regarded many of the exhibits as 'entertaining, interesting and imaginative'. Alluding to the long and difficult history of the National Museum, Bonyhady also commented that the museum 'looked worth many visits, a remarkable achievement for an institution that has been in disarray for most of its life'.<sup>109</sup>

Similar accolades were bestowed on Te Papa and there is little doubt that, in its positioning towards the traditional non-museum visitor and to children and families, the museum has achieved many of its goals. In October 1998, for example, the *Evening Post* described the people's verdict on Te Papa as 'overwhelmingly favourable', and commented that 'on busy days the museum's patrons seems to represent the entire demographic spectrum, from black T-shirts and tattooed forearms through to cashmere sweaters and Gucci handbags'.<sup>110</sup> Hamish McDonald, for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, described the museum as 'full of interesting spaces to explore', while historian Peter Franks declared Te Papa 'a worthy successor to the Dominion Museum'.<sup>111</sup> Reaction to

<sup>105</sup> D. Casey, 'History with a larrikin touch', *Daily Telegraph*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.20.

<sup>106</sup> R. Macklin, 'And the rest is (our) history', *Canberra Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>107</sup> 'Swing open the doors to a young nation's proud history', *Canberra Sunday Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2001. Also see A. Barclay, 'House of Treasures', *Daily Telegraph*, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.W21; K. Ingram, 'Our identity may be elusive but the search can be fun', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2001; D. Cronin, 'National Museum a treat for the senses', *Canberra Times*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2001; and R. Macklin, 'Museum to "change" ACT', *Canberra Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>108</sup> McCulloch-Uehlin, 'Past the point...', p.R21.

<sup>109</sup> Bonyhady, 'Lost in the loop'.

<sup>110</sup> Editorial, 'Te Papa: The people's verdict', *Evening Post*, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1998. Also see C. Sotheran, 'Crowds testament to Te Papa's success', *Evening Post*, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1998, p.20.

<sup>111</sup> H. McDonald, 'Playing with history', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1998; P. Franks, 'Te Papa: NZ's treasure house', *The Press*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1998, p.7.

the museum from overseas commentators was especially positive. Sophie Campbell, the reviewer for *The Times* in Great Britain, described Te Papa as 'a spectacular national space',<sup>112</sup> while Neal Becton, for the *Washington Post*, described it as 'a really cool virtual game room', before explaining:

Te Papa, which loosely translates to Our Place, manages to combine a natural history museum, a national history museum, a national archive, an art museum, a nature walk and a great hi-tech arcade. It may be one of the most ambitiously eclectic museums in the world, but it works. It threatens to put Wellington, a charming city of 200,000 that until now has not been a major tourist magnet, on many visitors' itineraries.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the evident popular success of both museums, however, there have also been a significant and vocal number of detractors, highlighting concern over the way these national museums are portraying the nation. Much of this concern surrounds the emphasis on new museum techniques, especially technology. In regards to the NMA, Peter Ward has summarised: 'it is an elaborate, theatrical stage for sometimes chimerical concepts of national identity and an astonishing range of high and low art, kitsch and ephemera. ... Taking all together, it's theme-park Australia.'<sup>114</sup> Such opposition has especially surrounded Te Papa, through the presence of its virtual reality rides, and its desire to be populist and to appeal to the ordinary visitor. Theodore Dalrymple, for example, has described it as 'an amusement arcade masquerading as a museum' and an example 'of the lowest common denominator turned into official cultural policy, and stands as a terrible warning to the rest of the world'.<sup>115</sup> Denis Dutton, a senior lecturer in the philosophy of art at the University of Canterbury and opponent of post-modern interpretation, has compared Te Papa to a junk shop, declaring the '\$300 million theme park' to be a 'national embarrassment', largely 'keyed to the attention span of a nine-year-old'.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Campbell, 'Come on down...', p.31.

<sup>113</sup> N. Becton, 'Te Papa – a virtual New Zealand', article reprinted in the *Evening Post*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1998.

<sup>114</sup> P. Ward, 'Enigmatic theme park', *Australian*, 9<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.39. Also see P. Ward, 'Triumph of trivialisation', *Australian*, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.39.

<sup>115</sup> T. Dalrymple, 'An amusement arcade masquerading as a museum', *New Statesman*, 12<sup>th</sup> February 1999, pp.32-33.

<sup>116</sup> D. Dutton, 'National treasure or dog's breakfast?', *The Press*, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1998, p.7. Also see D. Dutton, 'New national museum resembles a junk shop', *New Zealand Herald*, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1998, p.A15.

## Art in Te Papa

Since opening in 1998, however, much of the opposition to Te Papa has surrounded the museum's treatment of art, which resulted from the integration of the museum with the National Art Gallery and the subsequent inter-disciplinary collaboration. While not an issue in Australia, because of the long existence of the separate National Art Gallery in Canberra, it warrants some consideration because it has been the most controversial aspect of Te Papa. It also highlights some common concerns over the post-modern interpretation that has become increasingly prevalent in museums in both New Zealand and Australia.

The controversy surrounding art was given impetus by the furore surrounding one of Te Papa's first temporary exhibitions, *Pictura Britannica*, which contained a work by Tania Kovat entitled 'Virgin in a Condom'. A three-inch statue of the Virgin Mary sheathed in a transparent condom, it was met with hostility from religious communities. Graham Capill, the leader of the Christian Heritage Party, went as far to say, that while Te Papa seemed to carefully observe Maori spiritual values it ignored Christian values: 'It's increasingly clear that any faith or belief is acceptable in New Zealand, except for the Christian faith'.<sup>117</sup>

The commotion concerning *Pictura Britannica*, however, was only the beginning of the debate that has surrounded the museum's treatment of art. As mentioned earlier, much of this has revolved around *Parade*, the main art gallery at Te Papa's opening. By deploying the collections of the former National Art Gallery as illustrations in a series of narratives about New Zealand history and identity, *Parade* was a prominent example of the move to base all the exhibitions in a social and cultural history framework of visitor experience.<sup>118</sup> As Ian Wedde, the Curator of *Parade*, has explained, everywhere

<sup>117</sup> V. Francis, 'Virgin in a Condom provokes outcry', *Christianity Today*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1998, p.19. This provoked a 30,000 signature petition demanding the exhibit's removal. The museum refused, however, and the exhibit remained in place as planned until the end of April 1998. Also see A. Miles, "'Pictura Britannica' – Te Papa Museum, Tongarewa", *Artforum International*, vol. 36, no. 10, Summer 1998, p.144, and 'Controversy kept art in limelight', *Evening Post*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1999.

<sup>118</sup> See for instance, V. Fraser, 'Te Papa Tongarewa', *Art Monthly Australia*, no.110, June 1998, pp.13-16, and A. Hubbard, 'Modern History', *Sunday Star Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1998, Focus pp.1-2. It is worth noting that the original plan for art in Te Papa, was a traditional exhibition space providing 'a proper environment for display of national and international art treasures'. See S. Simeral, 'Excerpts from the Exhibitions Conceptual Plan: Ralph Appelbaum Associates Incorporated in collaboration with the Concept Development Team', *Museum Anthropology*, vol. 15, no. 4, November 1991, p.18.

in the museum 'art is in a cultural history frame'.<sup>119</sup> *Parade* brought together art works from the 1750s to the present day with household objects, artefacts, clothing, pieces of industrial design, signs and videos, presenting them in a thematic but roughly chronological form. The exhibition attempted to say 'where there are people, there is art' and then, by juxtaposing acknowledged works of art alongside 'everyday' objects, effectively asked the visitor to decide what actually is art. One example of this was the display of Colin McCahon's famous *Northland Panels* of 1958 next to a Kelvinator refrigerator made in 1959. The display, one that provoked strong reactions, asked the visitor to consider the value of two products from the same age that are normally divorced from each other, taking away the traditional idea of a work of art being an independent exalted creation.

This approach generated considerable contention amongst museum and art professionals around New Zealand, not only over *Parade* but also over the treatment of art throughout Te Papa. In other areas of the museum, for example, many art works were seen to lose their individuality and value by being placed purely as an illustration of an historical event, to the extent that they seem to simply become an extension of the running text. The display of Charles Blomfield's *The Terraces* (1885) to illustrate the story of the 1886 Mount Tarawera eruption, or William Allsworth's *Emigrants* (1844) to illustrate what wealthy migrants brought with them to New Zealand, are just two examples. Critics of the treatment of art in Te Papa have been numerous and also, significantly, often have very different viewpoints – highlighting the diverse debate surrounding museum interpretation. Jenny Harper, for example, the Head of Art History at Victoria University in Wellington and a former Director of the National Art Gallery, described *Parade* as taking a 'chaotic post-modern stance'.<sup>120</sup> In contrast, Rachel Kent, a writer for *Art Asia Pacific* and post-modern advocate, in describing the *Northland Panels* display, commented that 'instead of provoking comparisons or parallels, the result is laboured and conservative'.<sup>121</sup>

The controversy surrounding the art collection at Te Papa has ranged from criticism over the rate at which the former art gallery was integrated into the museum, the literary

<sup>119</sup> Ian Wedde, Personal Interview, 30<sup>th</sup> August 2000.

<sup>120</sup> J. Harper, 'Memo to Te Papa', *Museum National*, vol. 9, no. 4, May 2001, pp.22-25.

<sup>121</sup> R. Kent, 'Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa', *Art Asia Pacific*, Issue 20, 1998, pp.84-85. Also see R. Leonard, 'Papa's bag', *Artforum*, vol. 36, no. 5, January 1998.

rather than art historical backgrounds of some of the curators, the fact that a significant part of the collection remains in storage, the generally haphazard manner that the art works are deployed in the museum, and the perceived slurs to works of art usually treated reverentially. The approach taken by *Parade* was likened to that of the Museum of Sydney, which has been strongly condemned by some for taking a post-modern subjective role too far.<sup>122</sup> John McDonald, for example, a curator at the National Gallery of Australia, saw the refusal to attribute cultural and historical values to certain objects as the fundamental problem that pervaded the whole museum: 'A museum that refuses to make the most rudimentary value judgements and calls this "a radical idea" is a failure, no matter how many people stream through its portals'.<sup>123</sup> Jenny Harper has been especially outspoken over the representation of art in Te Papa. Harper believes that in its desire to be populist and 'unmuseum-like', to the extent that it even tries to avoid being called a museum,<sup>124</sup> Te Papa has succeeded in alienating a large number of traditional museum visitors: 'A core museum audience is profoundly unhappy with the art displays ... The museum too often becomes puerile in its effort to be populist.'<sup>125</sup>

These debates surrounding art at Te Papa were not only confined to *Parade*. Another opening exhibition, *Dream Collectors – 100 Years of New Zealand Art*, which opened as a temporary exhibition in Te Papa before travelling the country, received similar criticism through its method of juxtaposing colonial paintings with indigenous art.<sup>126</sup> Te Papa though, did attempt to respond to these criticisms. In late 1999, for example, in an attempt to put more of the art collections on show, a new exhibition entitled *What's New* opened displaying the museum's recent art acquisitions. Instead of lessening the attack, however, the exhibit seemed to only add to the many art critics who commented on Te Papa's lack of a comprehensive long-term display of art. Jenny Harper, for instance, described the new acquisitions in *What's New* as sitting 'like orphans', in that they are displayed without context, and subsequently tell the audience little of significance.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, *LOG Illustrated*, Spring 1998, p.38.

<sup>123</sup> J. McDonald, 'From there to Eternity', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>124</sup> Jenny Harper, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2000.

<sup>125</sup> Harper, 'For the sake...'

<sup>126</sup> J. King, 'Displaying our dreams – Te Papa's "Dream Collectors"', *Art New Zealand*, no. 91, Winter 1999, pp.71. Also see K. Webster, 'The big picture – our place, our art', *Art News* (Auckland), vol. 18, no. 1, Autumn 1998, pp.30-32.

<sup>127</sup> Jenny Harper, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2000. Also see W. McAloon, 'What a waste – What's New: the latest art at Te Papa', *Sunday Star Times*, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2000.

In early 2000, the controversy surrounding the treatment of art became a major issue, prompted by the announcement that Te Papa was facing financial crisis and was asking the Government for more funding.<sup>128</sup> This provoked many commentators to renew their condemnation of Te Papa, and call for the museum to justify its methods and any increase in government funding.<sup>129</sup> Significantly, the critics found a supporter in Prime Minister Helen Clark who declared that the museum treated art 'like an old fridge' and also, while acknowledging the popularity of Te Papa, said it was important for it to enjoy the respect of critics and the museum community: 'We have a responsibility overall to see the national museum and gallery stand up to critical scrutiny.'<sup>130</sup> In March 2000, therefore, Clark commissioned a review to investigate how the national art collection was presented, highlighting the important position Te Papa was seen to hold as a national institution. The review was to be undertaken by Dr Rodney Wilson, Director of the Auckland Museum, Chris Saines, Director of Auckland Art Gallery, and Des Griffin, former Director of the Australian Museum in Sydney. This provoked uproar amongst the Wellington arts community who saw the review, and especially the appointment of two Auckland directors who had been vocal in the past over the imbalance in Te Papa's funding, as an 'Auckland hatchet-job'.<sup>131</sup> The subsequent report however, published in July, surprised many in being mild in its criticism and recommendations. In brief, the report commended the work of Te Papa over the years, stating that the aspiration that it be 'a forum for the nation' had certainly been achieved, in terms of attracting visitors from the wide spectrum of society, and found that its central tenet that the exhibitions be multi-disciplinary in nature was generally successful. In regards to the art collections and *Parade* in particular, the report acknowledged recent efforts by Te Papa staff to improve the representation of art, and

<sup>128</sup> L. Haines, 'Cash crisis for NZ arts – Te Papa may be insolvent', *The Press*, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2000.

<sup>129</sup> See, for example, H. Keith, 'Let's have more museum and less McDonald's', *New Zealand Herald*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2000; F. Macdonald, 'Cultural Cringe', *NZ Listener*, vol. 172, no. 3117, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2000, p.7; A. Hubbard, 'Running out of puff? Should charity begin at Our Place?', *Sunday Star Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2000.

<sup>130</sup> B. Edwards, 'Te Papa treats art like an old fridge – PM', *Evening Post*, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2000. Also see V. Main, 'Populist view of museums' success not enough – Clark', *Dominion*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

<sup>131</sup> S. Beattie & T. Cardy, 'Te Papa review called "Auckland hatchet-job"', *Evening Post*, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2000, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Also 'Sparks fly over Te Papa review', *The News* (Westport), 27<sup>th</sup> March 2000; 'Outrage at "Hatchet-job" on Te Papa', *New Zealand Herald*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2000; and P. Barnao, '"Auckland bias" in Te Papa review team', *Dominion*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2000.

ould be implemented 'as a matter of urgency'.<sup>132</sup> It also highlighted  
 of many of the critics in recommending that

should, at all times, aim to respect and acknowledge the integrity of all  
 lections and collection objects. In particular, it should be recognised that  
 ave particular meanings and contexts of production, which remain unique  
 withstanding that these same works of art might usefully contribute to a  
 anding of other independent narratives within the Museum context.<sup>133</sup>

lcomed by Te Papa's administration, which pledged to work on  
 displays and to introduce new gallery space so that more of the  
 available to the public.<sup>134</sup> Late in 2000, a redevelopment began to  
 dditional exhibition space. Opening in October 2001, it included a  
 n called *Sightlines*, displaying extensive works from Te Papa's art

t that both the NMA and Te Papa are representatives of the new  
 that permeate museums around the world at the beginning of the  
 : developing along the lines of integrating collections, attracting  
 visitors, and experimenting with new display techniques. It is also  
 'these types of 'new museology' are sites of considerable contention,  
 ng being surrounded by controversy since their conceptual planning  
 s. This chapter has sought to provide a broad overview of the

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and Heritage, *Ministry for Culture and Heritage Report of Specific Issues  
 of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, prepared by Dr Des Griffin, Chris Saines  
 lson, June 2000*, Available from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage website at  
 e.govt.nz/publications/tepapa/, pp..19-20, 22 & 36.

ealand looks at ways of improving display', *Daily Post*, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2000. Te Papa  
 st in working with architect Ian Athfield, who had been scathing of Te Papa's  
 90s and whom, early in July 2000, had submitted a proposal to government  
 or the rehousing of the National Art Gallery. See S. Rendle, 'Rival plans for  
 iled', *Evening Post*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2000; B. Manson, 'Three ways to make art  
 4<sup>th</sup> July 2000; and M. Amery, 'Revisiting Our Place', *Sunday Star Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> July  
 ny Harper for clarifying these issues.  
 allery *Parade* was subsequently replaced in 2001 by *Made in New Zealand*, a  
 f New Zealand's visual and material culture, tracing the development of themes  
 nitecture and music.



ical development of the NMA and Te Papa, both to provide context examination of the non-indigenous exhibitions, and to illustrate the these national museums hold in the political and cultural arenas of

with a discussion of how the attention paid to indigenous history and NMA and Te Papa, had contributed to a growing concern that the relations were not being recognised within representations of the which concerns and controversy were actually accentuated once the continuing to highlight the problems with representing non- and identity. In particular, they are indicative of the way Aboriginal and Maori history play an important part in the contentious nature of non-indigenous identity.

Te Papa being 'Maori-centric', for example, an editorial in the *Dominion* overseas visitor were to ask where in Wellington they could find immediate answer would be 'the museum'. If, on the other hand, they New Zealand art, 'the answer would be "in storage at the museum" there is no permanent, comprehensive display at all'.<sup>136</sup> The perceived Maori and Pakeha representation, and especially the perceived Maori culture, is considered by some to exist throughout Te Papa. In instance, contrasts the 'highly sophisticated and successful Maori perspective' to the 'shaky, unclear presentation of Pakeha Gordon Campbell goes further to state that Te Papa fails to adequately of Pakeha New Zealanders:

Is this really 'Our Place'? The name seems premature, facile, while we are still unclarified as a nation. Behind the gizmos and several worthy displays, the exhibits do not reflect who we are now, but perversely. It showcases Maori confident of their place and Europeans who haven't a clue, lost as they are in mere nostalgia – as if the European tradition is now being rewritten by gender and race zealots

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is a fresh start', *Dominion*, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1999.

'New Zealand...', p.85. Also see S. Rees, 'Te Pakeha', *Metro*, no. 200, February

that most Europeans neither believe nor endorse. ... It is what this mess of a building, with all its shiny pretensions, best expresses.<sup>138</sup>

There have been similar accusations that the NMA trivialises non-indigenous Australian culture. Journalist Miranda Devine has been the most outspoken, comparing the museum to the abstract post-modernism of the Museum of Sydney, which has been strongly criticised since opening in 1995.<sup>139</sup> Stating that the underlying message of the National Museum 'is one of sneering ridicule for white Australia' she has described:

It is as if non-Aboriginal culture is a joke, all upside-down Hills Hoists and tongue-in-cheek Victa mowers. The museum is supposed to reflect the national identity. But all of World War II is dealt with in the small part of a display case that is not filled with Phar Lap's heart. That war gets less space than the proposed republic. ... The entire Anzac tradition is summed up by a bleached-out statue of a Digger, displayed as just another piece of drollery. ... The whole museum is a lie. To find the national identity, you would be better served going along to the porn museum which has also just opened just around the corner.<sup>140</sup>

Such criticism has especially been applied, as will be discussed in the next chapter, in regards to the *Nation* gallery and the choice of exhibiting symbols such as kangaroos and rotary washing lines as being representative of the nation. Alongside this is a concern over the lack of 'heroes' to be found in the museum. Nevertheless, the museum has not been short of support for its non-indigenous representations. Susan McCulloch-Uehlin, for example, has acknowledged that some might see the non-indigenous experience as being trivialised, but believes the museum has achieved a successful balance between display, education, scholarship and entertainment.<sup>141</sup> Caroline Turner, at the Australian National University, also believes that it has fulfilled its role as a modern museum in telling 'the story of ordinary people from the bottom up'.<sup>142</sup> The museum has also moved to defend itself, by making it clear that as a museum of social

<sup>138</sup> G. Campbell, 'Our Place in the world', *NZ Listener*, vol. 162, no. 3014, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1998, p.27.

<sup>139</sup> M. Devine, 'Colony's light site better left buried', *Daily Telegraph*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2001, p.29.

<sup>140</sup> M. Devine, "'The museum has adopted the left-wing position in every conceivable historical issue ... all you see is white interlopers, without a culture" – Trivial pursuit of our history', *The Advertiser*, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.30. Also M. Devine, 'A nation trivialised', *Daily Telegraph*, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>141</sup> S. McCulloch-Uehlin, 'Making an exhibition of ourselves', *Australian*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.13.

<sup>142</sup> M. Metherall, 'It's not kitsch, it's the story of Australia, say museum defenders', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

history it believes it should be about the Australians who make up everyday society. For example, Dawn Casey, the NMA's Director, has explained that 'the National Museum recognises that history is also ordinary people doing everyday things':<sup>143</sup>

Because the National Museum is a social history museum its chief subject is people. Some of the characters in our exhibitions are famous or prominent, others are unknown and even unexpected, but all contribute their story to the big themes of land, nation and people. ... Some visitors are delighting in the quirkiness and wit to be found here and there in our exhibition content and design. Others who expect a national institution must be solemn and austere may be offended and mistake humour for mockery. It isn't. A self-confident nation must be capable of looking at its own history in unusual and unsolemn ways. It's part of the national character to be irreverent – sometimes – and so are we.<sup>144</sup>

These debates surrounding non-indigenous history are especially pertinent now that the discussion moves to investigate in greater detail the non-indigenous galleries, as they point to the ways the museums are perceived to have interpreted their national histories – so they might contribute to an understanding of Australian and New Zealand identity.

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<sup>143</sup> D. Casey, 'A place in history even for our unsung heroes', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2001.

<sup>144</sup> Casey, 'History with...', p.20.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Non-Indigenous History and Identity in the National Museum of Australia and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.**

A great deal of the commentary surrounding both Te Papa and the NMA after opening has concerned their presentation of indigenous history and culture – indicative of the central role indigenous peoples are now seen to play both in museums and the nation.<sup>1</sup> However, when criticism has been directed at the museums it has often been towards their interpretations of non-indigenous history. In part, this perhaps reflects the emphasis by both museums on the presentation of Maori and Aboriginal culture, and even a reluctance by non-indigenous commentators to reflect on sensitive indigenous issues. Most importantly, however, it illustrates the highly problematic and contentious nature of non-indigenous Australian and New Zealand national identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Some of this debate concerns the representation of specific histories. Pru Goward, for example, who was appointed as Australia's new Sex Discrimination Commissioner in 2001, has raised questions over the representation of the role and contribution of women in the NMA. Pointing to the representation of women in domestic settings, such as in a 1950s kitchen display, and the Lindy-Azaria Chamberlain incident as just a 'quirky' episode in history, Goward has accused the museum's curators of not considering that women have made a contribution to Australian society.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, S. McCulloch-Uehlin, 'Past the point of a fresh turn', *Weekend Australian*, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.R21, which discusses the different approaches that the NMA, Melbourne Museum and South Australian Museum, take in representing indigenous culture in their exhibitions – which have all opened since 2000.

<sup>2</sup> P. Goward, 'Making an exhibition of ourselves', *Australian*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.13. Also S. Brook, 'Elite clash over museum for the ordinary', *Australian*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.3. Pru Goward, who is also a former head of the Office of the Status of Women, is married to David Barnett, the museum council member and John Howard's biographer who had been so critical over the NMA's direction during the developmental process.

As discussed in the previous chapter, much of the criticism concerned a perceived imbalance between the representation of non-indigenous and indigenous culture. This included accusations that both the NMA and Te Papa marginalise and trivialise the contribution of the non-indigenous population – especially significant as it points directly to how the museums are attempting to explore notions of non-indigenous national identity, and how successful they are perceived to be.

How then do the history exhibits in the NMA and Te Papa attempt to represent non-indigenous Australians and New Zealanders? This chapter examines in greater depth the history displays, the concepts behind them, and the ways they might contribute to an understanding of Australian and New Zealand national identity. It highlights the growing recognition within these museums that they should not attempt to present a single interpretation of what it is to be an ‘Australian’ and ‘New Zealander’, but instead should suggest and question possible interpretations. However, it also shows that adapting this recognition into the actual exhibitions is not straightforward, and that both national museums continue at times, however inadvertently, to prescribe their own definitive interpretations of the nation’s identity.

Due to the different nature of the galleries in both the NMA and Te Papa, it is necessary to look at them individually. However, despite their distinct outcomes, many of the exhibits were based on similar aims and concepts. For example, both museums try to explore non-indigenous national identity through the ideas that identity is based on a relationship with the land, that the two nations are immigrant societies, and that national identity is constructed. This illustrates the similarity in Australia and New Zealand of current notions of national identity, their comparable histories since European settlement, and the way museums now try to interpret these national histories.

The underlying concept to both the NMA and Te Papa was the inter-relation of the environment, indigenous and non-indigenous history, and this was to permeate throughout the galleries. This recognised that post-colonial non-indigenous identity is inextricably tied to the indigenous populations. Significantly however, the end results of both museums did not emulate the degree of integration that the intellectual frameworks were trying to convey. There is clearly a spatial distinction, for instance, between the non-indigenous and indigenous galleries. This is most noticeable in the NMA, where

the gallery *First Australians* exists on its own almost entirely separate territory. In Te Papa too, there is a clear division between the Maori and Pakeha galleries. Level Four is clearly in two halves with the central point being *Signs of the Nation*, the exhibition looking at the Treaty of Waitangi. This reflects the bicultural nature of both the nation and museum, but also precludes the possibilities for generating understanding of the common themes and links between the diverse histories and cultures. This integration of indigenous and non-indigenous history is also limited in the actual exhibitions. For example, there is minimal non-indigenous representation in the indigenous galleries. This is especially apparent in Te Papa. In the NMA too, however, although the *First Australians* gallery does go some way to exploring the experiences of early settlers and missionaries who had close relations with Aboriginal people, the stories involving non-indigenous people, such as conflicts and massacres, are often told only from the indigenous perspective. As will be evident in the subsequent discussion, reference is also made to the role of indigenous people in the non-indigenous displays in both museums. Yet, this often seems to be a token effort to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Maori presence without really attempting to explore the connections between the different cultures. Only by exploring these histories together, and their influences on each other, can post-colonial identity really begin to be explained.

### **'Tangled Destinies' in the NMA**

One exception to this is perhaps the gallery *Tangled Destinies: Land and People in Australia* in the NMA.<sup>3</sup> An exhibition that is one of the first of its kind in the world, it is also a type that was considered in the early planning stages of Te Papa, but never eventuated. A natural history gallery would not normally find a place in this discussion, but *Tangled Destinies* is not a natural history gallery in the traditional sense. Rather, it examines environmental history. Mike Smith, the curator chiefly responsible for *Tangled Destinies*, has described environmental history as being distinguished from natural history 'by an explicitly **historical** perspective which contrasts with the focus on ecology, systematics, or physical processes more usually adopted by natural history

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<sup>3</sup> Previous names for *Tangled Destinies* were *Australian Space and Time*, *Time Past: Time Present*, *Settling In* and *Links to the Land*.

museums'.<sup>4</sup> This type of integrative interpretative approach can be seen as indicative of new museological theory, by focusing on the inter-relation rather than compartmentalisation of different disciplines. It is essentially the primary theme of 'people's interaction with the environment' that was part of the structure of the National Museum as long ago as 1975, but developed to be approached by interpreting the natural history of the continent through the ways that knowledge of its human settlement has deepened and extended:

It also includes interpreting the frames of reference through which people have perceived the Australian environment, how they have used and misused the productive capacities of the land, and how the Australian environment has shaped human settlement and society.<sup>5</sup>

The philosophical basis of *Tangled Destinies* is the three levels of analysis recognised by environmental historian Donald Worster: the history of the natural environment, the reciprocal interactions of people, the land and biota, and the values, laws, myths and ideas that shape these interactions.<sup>6</sup> Put simply, the gallery is about the interactions between land and people in Australia, and it is possibly the best example of the museum's brief to integrate the different disciplines.

Essentially to reflect an Australian identity based upon a relationship with the land, the gallery has a central narrative of 'response, adjustment and attachment',<sup>7</sup> which is explored through ten modules grouped under three different sections: Encountering Australia, Living with the Land, and Understanding Australia. Encountering Australia, for example, looks at the response of Europeans to the flora and fauna of Australia during the first hundred years of their settlement. Part of this includes potentially controversial issues such as extinction and biological invasion. One module, 'Endling',

<sup>4</sup> M. Smith, *Links to the Land: Overview of programs, February 1998*, p.2, NMA Research Library. Also see M. Smith, 'Environmental History in the National Museum of Australia', *Public History Review*, vol. 8, 2000, pp.27-43.

<sup>5</sup> National Museum of Australia (NMA), *National Museum of Australia: A Summary of Acton Programs – Council Planning Meeting, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1998*, p.4, NMA Research Library.

<sup>6</sup> NMA, *Public Programs Brief No. 2 – Links to the Land, September 1998*, NMA Research Library, Land & People Working File. Also see NMA, *Ideas Summit 2, 17-18 June 1998 – Briefing materials for participants*, NMA Departmental File, 98/0017, NMA on Acton – Program Working Group – Nation; and *Working title: Links to the Land*, NMA Departmental File, 98/0019, NMA on Acton – Program Working Group – Links to the Land, NMA Research Library.

<sup>7</sup> NMA, *North Gallery – Tangled Destinies: Land and People in Australia*, NMA Departmental File, 98/0032, NMA on Acton: Public Programs Section Advice – Links to the Land, NMA Research Library.

for instance, examines the historical wave of extinction of native species that marked the European settlement of Australia, such as the Tasmanian Tiger. 'Biological Invasion' then focuses on the many different species the settlers introduced to the countryside in order to make themselves feel more at home, some which died out while others, such as the rabbit, proliferated to change the nature of the land causing difficulties and opportunities for both European and Aboriginal people.

Each section represents both indigenous and settler interaction with the environment. 'Firetracks', for instance, a module in the section Living with the Land, looks at the impact of fire on the Australian landscape through aspects such as it being used as a tool by indigenous people and its use in farming throughout history. Another module, 'Cities', focuses on Australia as the most urbanised nation in the world; examining how cities have developed, expanded and used the land around them, such as Adelaide using the distant Murray River as a water source and the effect of the discovery of gold on Melbourne. The section Understanding Australia concentrates on how changing knowledge, especially during the twentieth century, has shaped Australians' relationship with land. 'Deep Time' explores the acknowledgement that Australia's extraordinarily long history of human settlement means that Aboriginal people have had to live through major changes in the global climate and regional environments, and so transformations to the continent were part of a cultural as well as natural story.<sup>8</sup> *Tangled Destinies*, therefore, explores national identity by taking a cross-disciplinary approach to explore both what is distinctive about the Australian environment and experience, and the changing relations between people and the land.<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, a similar gallery had earlier been planned as a major feature in Te Papa, initially to be called *Human Impacts* and later *People and the Land*. In a paper

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<sup>8</sup> For a general overview of the programs in *Tangled Destinies* see NMA, *North Gallery – Tangled Destinies*, and also NMA, *Land & People – Interim Design Development Submission*, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1999, submitted by Anway & Co. Inc., Amaze Design & DMCD Inc., NMA Research Library.

<sup>9</sup> This type of historical interpretation of the environment is beginning to gain considerable popularity around the world, largely because many natural history museums that have remained traditional in their interpretation and display have experienced falling visitor numbers. One example was the exhibit 'Seeds of Change' at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History during the mid-1990s. It explored how the voyages of Christopher Columbus laid the 'seeds' that profoundly transformed the world, both biologically and culturally, through the exchange of plants, animals, and diseases, which were introduced sometimes deliberately, sometimes accidentally, by Columbus and those who followed him. The exhibit attempted to show that the process of encounter and exchange Columbus initiated affected the Old World as well, altering the flora and fauna, reordering the ethnic composition of countries, and changing the diet and health of peoples everywhere.



presented in 1999 at the 'National Museums: Negotiating Histories' conference in Canberra, Geoff Hicks, who was Conceptual Leader of the Natural Environment at Te Papa, explained that in terms of exhibition presentation, it was anticipated that 'contestation about past "wrongs" could be placed alongside current "rights" deriving from a human sense of place, and openly debated'.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, it would explore aspects such as the introduction of new species and the extinction of indigenous species in much the same way as *Tangled Destinies*.

The general view, however, was that the exhibition would not be celebratory enough for Te Papa, which in every way was attempting to be an entertaining experience, and would concentrate too much on how badly New Zealanders had treated the land leading, in Hicks' opinion, 'to an institutional timidity that ultimately saw the *People and the Land* exhibition stall'.<sup>11</sup> As will later be discussed, the celebratory nature of Te Papa leads to a number of questions over the museum's effectiveness in addressing national identity. The fact that this particular exhibition did not develop, for instance, can be perceived as limiting the success of Te Papa in its mission to explore national identity through the 'heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment'.<sup>12</sup> The story of people's interaction with the land is fundamental to the development and understanding of the nation. The existence of such a theme in the NMA just a few years later, indicates a growing awareness within museums of the need to explore and confront all aspects of the past, even if they are spheres of contestation.

The curators of *Tangled Destinies* also encountered tensions with how to fit environmental history into what was primarily a social history museum, one whose role it was to celebrate the nation. Indeed the gallery that eventually developed was the third put forward as the 'environment' theme of the museum, the first two being more specialised and concentrating more on a traditional interpretation of natural history. During the production process, there were also similar concerns raised by the National Museum Council to those in Te Papa, regarding the inclusion of a gallery that could be

<sup>10</sup> G. Hicks, 'Natural history museums in the environmental age', in D. McIntyre & K. Wehner (eds.), *National Museums - Negotiating Histories: Conference Proceedings*, Canberra, 2001, p.188. Also J. Phillips, 'Treaty of Waitangi Exhibition', Unpublished paper, no date. My thanks to Jock Phillips for providing me with a copy of his notes for this paper.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (MoNZTPT), *Report of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa for the year ended 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999*, Wellington, 1999, p.1.

perceived as concentrating too much on 'black-armband history', and other problems arose such as with loan arrangements.<sup>13</sup> The final existence of *Tangled Destinies*, however, marks a success for the museum in its claim to confront multiple aspects of the past. Certainly, no other museum supplies such a holistic perspective on the history of the environment, the impact of people, and the influence of the environment on Australian society. By bringing together environmental perspectives, social history and indigenous knowledge, and by its placement as the first major exhibition visitors encounter, *Tangled Destinies* provides a solid introductory framework for visitors to the NMA to think about Australia's history and the three themes of land, nation and people.

### **Non-Indigenous History in the NMA**

The three main galleries dealing specifically with non-indigenous Australian history in the NMA are *Eternity: Stories from the Emotional Heart of Australia*, *Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788*, and *Nation: Symbols of Australia*. This section focuses on two of these, *Eternity* and *Horizons*, looking at the ways they developed in the planning and structure of the museum and the ways they address Australian identity.

Adjacent to *Tangled Destinies* is *Eternity: Stories from the Emotional Heart of Australia*, the smallest but also one of the most discussed galleries in the NMA, largely due to its unique exhibition approach.<sup>14</sup> Named in remembrance of Arthur Stace, who wrote 'Eternity' for thirty years on walls and footpaths around Sydney, the exhibition seeks to explore Australian human history and identity through a range of emotions, placing individuals and their experiences at the centre of the interpretation of Australian history. In terms of national identity, the idea is that through a range of personal stories spanning Australia's history, the visitor will be able to relate to these emotions and have their own emotional experience allowing them to form a connection to what it means to be Australian.

Fifty stories are grouped under ten themes that are emotions and experiences encountered by everyone in real life: Mystery, Separation, Hope, Joy, Loneliness, Thrill, Devotion, Fear, Chance, and Passion. Each theme is displayed under a singular

<sup>13</sup> Mike Smith, Personal Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2001.

<sup>14</sup> *Eternity* was previously called *Australian Stories* and then *Perceptions*.

evocative colour, and within each are five stories headlined by a large face banner and one individual object. Under 'Mystery', for example, the story of Azaria Chamberlain is recounted along with the display of her black dress.<sup>15</sup> Each of the emotions is supposed to arouse in the visitor nostalgia, and their own experiences of that particular theme. 'Hope', for instance, aims to represent the ideas, hopes and dreams that all Australians have had at some point in time, whether it may be as a migrant landing in a new land or the hope of achievement. The theme includes, therefore, the stories of Arthur Phillip, the first Governor of New South Wales, and Olympian Betty Cuthbert. Similarly, 'Devotion' seeks to represent the common devotion that many Australians have to different causes, whether those causes might be related to religion, politics, or even a commitment to sport. As a result, the stories represented include that of Mary Mackillop's devotion to her faith, and Faith Bandler's commitment to the fight for Aboriginal rights in the 1960s.

Altogether the stories are supposed to represent an emotional history of Australia over a broad matrix of time, ethnicity, class, and gender: 'They emphasise the importance of individuals, the complexity of Australian life, and the diversity of its people'.<sup>16</sup> A 1999 planning document explained the basis behind this 'emotional overview' of Australia:

Together the ten emotive themes constitute a complete story of Australian life that looks both backwards and forwards. They present our common national mysteries and tragedies, our passions for each other and our possessions, and our national and shared obsessions. They portray the essence of the Australian character in the 'lucky country', they celebrate our joy and achievements, our hopes and fears and our passionate devotion to a range of causes that have shaped Australian society and values.<sup>17</sup>

Within each individual emotion there are also touch-screen units, whereby people can explore each story in more depth, and at the end of the exhibition two video booths where visitors can record their own experiences, highlighting the Museum's mission to be as much about the present and future as the past, and making sure that the audience

<sup>15</sup> To find out about the Chamberlain incident see J. Bryson, *Evil Angels*, Ringwood, 1985.

<sup>16</sup> NMA, *Perceptions – Interim Design Development Submission*, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1999, submitted by Anway & Co. Inc., Amaze Design & DMCD Inc., p.8, NMA Research Library.

<sup>17</sup> NMA, *Australian Stories*, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1999, Prepared by Dr Marion Stell, Sophie Jensen and Johanna Parker, NMA Research Library.

become participants rather than passive consumers.<sup>18</sup> The aim is to limit the presence of a curatorial voice in *Eternity*, beyond the selection of the personal stories at any rate. The stories are told in the first person, the majority using primary source material and when this is not possible, for instance when the subject is no longer living, secondary source material has been used to tell the story rather than text panels written by curators.<sup>19</sup> There is also even gender representation, different ethnic communities are represented, and both ordinary and prominent Australians are depicted, and by putting them together in emotional themes it attempts to make sure that they are not aligned in specific historical groups such as 'migrants' or 'icons'. Marion Stell, one of the curators chiefly responsible for *Eternity*, has explained her own aims in designing the exhibition:

My ambition, from the beginning, was to make this gallery very different. I did not want to regurgitate the predictable 'famous' Australians, pay lip service to a couple of token women and eulogise the 'unsung heroes'. I wanted a way to eschew limiting and unsatisfactory social history categories like 'migrants', 'achievers', 'sporting heroes', 'the disabled'. I wanted to abandon uninspiring chronological constructions and lazy timelines. For me the exhibition had to say something worthwhile and new, and it had to say it differently.<sup>20</sup>

There are a number of possible problems with *Eternity*, not least the criticism that can be applied to the small space of what has become a busy gallery. The use of the name 'Eternity' in the national museum, to describe a gallery that is supposed to be exploring the nation's identity, is also problematic. The word 'Eternity' has itself increasingly become a clichéd image of the nation in Australia in recent years, illustrated by its widespread use at the Millennium celebrations in Sydney and at the 2000 Olympics. On another level, it is also hard to ascertain the actual emotional connection visitors have with the displays, or even whether the stories succeed in expanding the horizons of Australian history for the visitor. The complete reliance on triggering some kind of emotional response from the visitor is a difficult one. Without further interpretation some stories, such as that of children entertainer's The Wiggles under the theme of

<sup>18</sup> This has proved popular with around 700 visitors a month leaving a minute's message in *Eternity*. See S. Powell, 'Self-portrait of a nation', *Weekend Australian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2001. Also J. McDonald, 'From there to Eternity', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2001.

<sup>19</sup> NMA, *Perceptions – Multimedia and Design: Discussion paper*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1999, prepared by Sophie Jensen & Marion Stell, NMA Departmental File, 99/0055, NMA on Acton – Program Working Group – Stories of Australia, NMA Research Library.

<sup>20</sup> M. Stell, 'Eternity', *Museum National*, vol. 9, no. 2, November 2000, p.11.

'Joy', could easily just be seen as amusing curiosities. The cramped nature of the gallery might also restrict the possibilities of personally interacting with any one story or theme, though *Eternity* was initially planned to be double the size, both in the number of stories and in exhibition space. It was designed to be one of two thematic exhibitions, the other being *Horizons*, that threaded around the other galleries complementing and providing a non-narrative, non-chronological overview of the places and events represented in the exhibitions nearby it.<sup>21</sup> *Eternity* was eventually limited due to practical problems with both space and budget,<sup>22</sup> and it can now be seen as isolated from the other galleries, hindering the effectiveness of its interpretation and the possibilities for interaction with other exhibitions, histories and ideas.

While *Eternity* explores Australian identity through a shared sense of emotion, *Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788* focuses on national identity specifically in terms of Australia as a place of destination, in other words as a settler society. *Horizons* went through various changes during the museum's planning process.<sup>23</sup> Initially it was intended to be a far broader exhibition than it now is, focusing on Australia's place in global networks of empire, trade and population movement. Titled *Journeys*, the exhibition was to provide a global perspective on Australian history and society through a theme-based exploration of Australia's colonisation and national expansion, 'with an emphasis on the growth and nature of the population, the connections between population policy, economic development and culture, and the relationship of Australia to the world outside its borders'.<sup>24</sup>

*Horizons* was originally designed to provide a conceptual spine for the other permanent exhibitions, and in particular to complement *Eternity* – putting those stories of individuals into a larger context, to create deeper meaning.<sup>25</sup> As it eventuated, however, due to problems with space and money, *Horizons* now exists alone in the museum on a third floor mezzanine, and like *Eternity* can be seen as isolated from the other galleries. It now also focuses more specifically on topics of migration, rather than the broader

<sup>21</sup> See NMA, *Conceptual Design – 100% Submission*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1999, NMA Research Library.

<sup>22</sup> Personal correspondence to the author from Dawn Casey, Director of the NMA, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Previous names for *Horizons* were *Journeys*, *People in Motion*, and *Currents*.

<sup>24</sup> NMA, *Development Prospectus – Journeys: A National Museum of Australia Exhibition*, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1998, NMA Departmental File, 98/0018, NMA on Acton – Program Working Group – Mapping. Also see Ian McShane, *Journeys: A Concept Paper*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1998, NMA Departmental File, 98/244, NMA on Acton – Public Program Section Advice – Journeys, NMA Research Library.

<sup>25</sup> NMA, *Conceptual Design – 100% Submission*.

themes of population trends and Australia's place in the world, though of course such themes are inherent in one way or another throughout any discussion of migration. As the title suggests, *Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788* examines the history of migration in Australia and the role it has played in the development of the country:

The exhibition encompasses the variety of Australian experience from indigenous people and convicts, to migrants from around the world. It celebrates the richness of our backgrounds and shows how this heritage has influenced our sense of ourselves and our relationship with the rest of the world. ... The story of the peopling of Australia is one of the great human dramas, and the exhibition attempts to show the range of human experiences and emotions that are part of this drama.<sup>26</sup>

*Horizons* is based around four main themes: Possession, Visions and Opportunity, Home, and Defining Ourselves. Implicit throughout the exhibition is that Australians can now be identified as part of a multi-cultured, multi-voiced, and vibrant society, illustrated in part by the representation of different ethnic groups throughout the gallery. Each theme also attempts to illustrate the debate and changing nature of Australian national identity. 'Possession', for example, focuses on aspects such as the history of convicts in Australia, examining the changing perception of convicts in the national memory.

Topics that are addressed in 'Possession' include both the appropriation of indigenous culture by early European settlers and the appropriation and adaptation of introduced culture by Aborigines, highlighted by the relationship between Bennelong and Governor Arthur Phillip, while the changing perception of indigenous people is illustrated through European art during the nineteenth century, as it moved from romantic images of natives to caricatures of the indigenous people as weak or treacherous fringe-dwellers. 'Visions and Opportunity' then explores the continuing settlement of Australia, by focusing on schemes to increase migration to Australia and the motivations surrounding those who chose to settle. The 'Visions' aspect, for example, examines the schemes of migration planners such as Caroline Chisholm and Edward Gibbon Wakefield, as well as the migration programs of colonial, state and Commonwealth governments, to

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<sup>26</sup> NMA, *Currents: An Exhibition Brief*, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1999, p.2, NMA Research Library, Currents Working File. Also see NMA, *Currents – Interim Design Development Submission*, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1999, submitted by Anway & Co. Inc., Amaze Design & DMCD Inc., NMA Research Library.

illustrate how Australia was portrayed as a new and attractive country in order to attract migrants. 'Opportunity' then explores this concept of a 'land of opportunity' further, by focusing on the working life, enterprises and achievements of various migrants who strived to create an 'ideal' Australia. Individual stories of migrants are told, such as that of Mei Quong Tart, a Chinese immigrant who became a prominent business figure in Sydney during the late nineteenth century, and Vincenzo Dublé, an Italian barber who started his own business in Melbourne in the 1930s.

Another of the themes, 'Home', addresses the shifting concept of home in a migrant society, from early settlers who still considered Great Britain as their 'home' and 'nation', to contemporary immigrants and their own feelings of alienation or belonging to a new land. Finally, 'Defining Ourselves' begins to ask broader questions about population, community relations and identity in Australia, by illustrating that the development of migration in Australia intersects with long-standing concerns over the nature of the population, community cohesion and questions of security, loyalty and identity. For example, by focusing on the White Australia Policy, it shows how the government was selective in its desire to strengthen the 'Britishness' and purity of the population. Another module, then explores how Australia became a sanctuary for refugees during the twentieth century and the tensions that this at times has created, such as around the arrival of Indo-Chinese refugees after the Vietnam War. By emphasising the triumph of overcoming such problems during its history, the underlying concept throughout the theme is that the nation can largely be judged 'as a success in its development as a multi-racial and multi-cultural community'.<sup>27</sup>

The gallery, therefore, attempts to place Australian identity firmly as a product of a settler society, identified by the multicultural nation that now exists. It illustrates in particular how the image of Australia being 'British' was constructed in the nineteenth century, and how this became increasingly untenable during the twentieth, and consequently succeeds in raising questions over the non-indigenous populations' traditional notions of identity. *Horizons* is the most conventional gallery in the NMA, however, in terms of its display techniques, through its reliance on an abundance of objects and interpretative text displayed in traditional, and often badly lit, glass cases.

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.3.

This is a problem in any modern museum, but more so in a museum that overall seems to be challenging visitors with new methods of interpretation, through thoughtful combinations of text, objects and multi-media. This return to more established museum practice in *Horizons*, as well as its isolated physical position, perhaps limits the exhibition's effectiveness by not managing to entice interest and ensuring that there is less interaction with the audience.

### **Pakeha History in Te Papa**

Taking a similar approach to *Horizons*, in that it too explores national identity through the idea of New Zealand being a settler and multicultural nation, is *Passports*, the first of the main exhibitions dealing specifically with Pakeha history in Te Papa. On opening, the non-indigenous historical component of Te Papa was made up largely of three main galleries: *Passports*, *On the Sheep's Back* and *Exhibiting Ourselves*. This examination focuses on *Passports* and *On the Sheep's Back*, along with some discussion of two other exhibits that attempt to interpret Pakeha identity in different ways: *Golden Days* and *Signs of the Nation*.

Planning had begun for Te Papa's galleries as early as 1990, and because of this consideration of the earlier ideas and concepts for the 'history zone' is warranted, in order to gain some idea of how these developed into the final opening exhibitions – known as the 'Day One' exhibitions.<sup>28</sup> In 1990, the plan for the history area was for a number of exhibitions dealing with separate issues to be linked to *The Promenade*, designed as a chronological, collections-based journey through New Zealand's history, including Pakeha, Maori and Pacific Islander history. Various suggestions for the exhibitions were put forward, quite different to those that exist today but which continue to illustrate a modern approach to museum representation. *Being Here: The Family*, for instance, was to present aspects of New Zealand social history, aiming to ask what the future would bring, and 'personalised by the inclusion of first-person

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<sup>28</sup> For example, it is worth noting in the context of this entire thesis, that early conceptual plans in 1990 made it clear that Te Papa should break with conventional museum practice and incorporate the 'new museology'. This was especially to be the case through the representation of 'new social histories'. See MoNZTPT, *Exhibitions Conceptual Plan: Draft*, Prepared by Ralph Appelbaum Associates Inc., New York, 1990, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) Archives, p.27.



accounts and primary sources wherever possible'.<sup>29</sup> *Exceptional New Zealanders* was to showcase famous and infamous personalities in a series of collection-based displays, while *Creating a New Zealand Identity* was to examine the process of creating a unique New Zealand identity, by exhibiting different objects from different cultural groups.<sup>30</sup>

By the middle of 1993, however, these themes had significantly changed, the specific exhibitions becoming *Immigrants*, *Work and Leisure*, *Claiming the Land*, as well as a 'current issues' space that would feature a series of changing exhibitions on issues of topical importance.<sup>31</sup> The concept was based around a social history approach, in order to 'challenge our audience to explore, celebrate and question different viewpoints of New Zealand's past'.<sup>32</sup> Like many of the NMA's exhibitions, there was also recognition of the need to represent the 'everyday' and familiar within the displays, in order to interest a wide range of visitors. Concerning the *Work and Leisure* exhibition:

Work and leisure are an important component of every person's life and they can be used to cover many topics. By establishing a gallery like this we can display aspects of the collection with a specific theme in mind. It will also allow us to explore some specific ideas in social history which in the past, as a museum, we have not really dealt with.<sup>33</sup>

At this point, the *Promenade* aspect of the history sector was still seen as an integral part of the interpretative process. It had been developed by Tim Hobson in consultation with the curators of the History Sector Group, and its aim was not only to provide the visitor with an understanding of the broad sweep of New Zealand's history and to act as a backbone in linking the separate issue exhibits, but also to serve as 'a fast track through the history exhibitions for those visitors with little time or interest', and to supply a link with the Maori cultural exhibitions.<sup>34</sup> At the end of 1993, however, the development process began to change with the appointment of Jock Phillips, the

<sup>29</sup> S. Simeral, 'Excerpts from the Exhibitions Conceptual Plan: Ralph Appelbaum Associates Inc. in collaboration with the Concept Development Team', *Museum Anthropology*, vol. 15, no. 4, November 1991, p.17.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> As will be evident, these themes are reflected in the opening exhibitions: 'Immigrants' in *Passports*, 'Work' and 'Claiming the Land' in *On the Sheep's Back*.

<sup>32</sup> MoNZTPT, *History Sector Exhibitions Concept Description*, October 1993, p.6, Te Papa Archives.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.12.

Government's Chief Historian, as Conceptual Leader in History. Shortly afterwards, *Promenade* was shelved, largely due to a belief that its traditional chronological approach was too boring for a museum that was, in every respect, attempting to be innovative and modern.<sup>35</sup> As will be discussed later, this shelving can in certain ways be considered unfortunate, leaving some conspicuous gaps in the historical representation.

Once Jock Phillips arrived on the scene a thematic approach was embraced, evident in the exhibitions that exist today. Indeed, the themes adopted for two of the exhibitions soon afterwards, *Passports* and *Exhibiting Ourselves*, remained the same throughout the planning process. It is important to again remember that all the exhibitions, and in fact the whole museum, is geared towards aiding the interpretation of national identity in New Zealand. Significantly too, like the NMA, they were not designed to identify or suggest to the public any **single** distinct version or idea of New Zealand's identity – another illustration of changing museological practice, as museums no longer attempt to spell out definitive stories or historical interpretation. Put in another way, they no longer tell their visitors what is right or what to believe. Instead, museums often now encourage people to debate and explore different interpretations of history and to come to their own conclusions. As Jock Phillips has described in relation to the three main Pakeha history exhibits in Te Papa, the aim was to give visitors three approaches to understanding national identity – 'identity is the sum of immigrant cultures, identity comes from interaction with a distinct environment, identity is a construct of the mind.' He goes on to emphasise that 'the hope was that questions would be asked, perceptions opened, not closed down.'<sup>36</sup> In other words, the history exhibitions were created to help people question notions of national identity.

*Passports*, for example, explores national identity through the idea that New Zealand is an immigrant and multicultural society.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, it is based upon a similar concept to *Horizons* at the NMA. *Passports* sees the migratory past as the one aspect of national identity that all Pakeha New Zealanders share. Jock Phillips describes it as 'a

<sup>35</sup> My thanks to Michael Fitzgerald, History Curator at Te Papa, for clarifying these issues.

<sup>36</sup> J. Phillips, 'The politics of pakeha history in a bicultural museum: Te Papa, The Museum of New Zealand, 1993-1998', in McIntyre & Wehner (eds.), *National Museums - Negotiating Histories*, p.149.

<sup>37</sup> *Passports* was originally called *The Peopling of New Zealand*.

founding trauma': 'They chose to leave, they suffered the uprooting of the voyage and they were forced to set down roots in a new land.'<sup>38</sup>

The exhibition explores this through three themes – leaving, travelling and arriving. Telling the story of non-Maori migration to New Zealand from the early nineteenth century to the present, 'these themes of leaving familiar surroundings and moving into uncertain territory allow people of all ages to identify with the migrant experience'.<sup>39</sup> The aim is also to take visitors on a journey themselves, 'a journey of discovery in which they vicariously experience many of the hopes and fears, the choices and obligations of being an immigrant'.<sup>40</sup> It attempts this through a combination of artefacts, interactives and oral histories, focusing both on older and more recent migrants. There is a game, for example, through which the visitor can find out whether they would gain entry into modern New Zealand, while another interactive game allows the visitor to take the role of a ship's captain in the voyage from Europe in the nineteenth century. These games attempt to be both entertaining and educational, based on solid research. The trials that are faced as a ship's captain, for instance, are based on original passengers' letters. A 1995 Concept Report warned, the games should not be designed in a way 'that trivialises the migrant experience, which was very often not "fun" ... Games need to be read in the sense of role-playing, rather than in the recreational sense.'<sup>41</sup>

Other experiential aspects of the exhibition include sound effects, reconstructed cabins in which the visitor can experience the living conditions on voyages, and drawers that hold a plethora of objects relating to specific individuals. Significantly, *Passports* is careful not to make the migration experience seem a necessarily good one, confronting each of the three themes by focusing on the hardships and trials migrants have to endure. There is also a fair representation of both male and female immigrants. In the section dealing with the arrival and adjustment to the new land, for example, the exhibition highlights that while some new arrivals embraced the challenges of the new

<sup>38</sup> 'Search for the Kiwi identity', *Sunday Star Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1996.

<sup>39</sup> MoNZTPT, *Passports, 90% Developed Design, Part 1, Interpretation and Objects*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1996, p.7, Te Papa Archives.

<sup>40</sup> MoNZTPT, *Peopling of New Zealand 30% Concept Design*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1995, p.15, Te Papa Archives. Also see A. Bailey, 'Journeys', *Inform: News and Information from the Department of Internal Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 1, June 1998, pp.7-8.

<sup>41</sup> MoNZTPT, *Concept Sector comments on the 'Peopling of New Zealand' Concept Development Report draft*, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1995, p.1, Te Papa Archives.

country, others were disillusioned by the realities of the environment and poverty. One illustration is the female Danish writer Ingeborg Stuckenberg, who migrated to New Zealand in the 1890s thinking it to be the utopian social laboratory of the world. Finding the country to be backward and uncultured, and forced to work as a maid, after eighteen months she shot herself.

*Passports* can also be regarded as being largely representative of the many different nationalities and cultures and their contribution to New Zealand life, and next to the exhibition there was a temporary gallery focusing on the Chinese community in New Zealand titled *The Making of a Chinese New Zealander*. In August 2000, this was replaced by an exhibition focusing on Dutch settlers, recognising 'the enormous influence that the Dutch have had on New Zealand culture'.<sup>42</sup> Jock Phillips has, however, identified two problems which had to be overcome during the development of *Passports*. The first was simply a lack of collections relating not only to the immigrant experience, but to popular culture and Pakeha history as a whole – highlighting the absence of collecting in this area by the museum in the past.<sup>43</sup> To remedy the situation, Phillips was forced to rely on more visual mediums such as games, and to go out into the community for the objects and stories he needed.<sup>44</sup>

The second problem concerned the need to be representative of smaller minority migrant groups, but not to the exclusion of the British majority who still accounted for some eighty per cent of New Zealand's immigrants. According to Phillips, this was a concern raised by some as soon as it was announced that there was to be an exhibition exploring New Zealand as an immigrant society, fuelled by the news of the development of the community gallery focusing on the Chinese. A perception that the 'British inheritance was being ignored for the sake of making Pakeha New Zealanders look bad'.<sup>45</sup> This can be seen as a continuation of the criticism about the perceived marginalisation of Pakeha history in relation to the Maori, now extended to a view that

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<sup>42</sup> MoNZTPT, *Nieuw Zealand – going Dutch, Concept Design 90%*, January 2000, p.3, Te Papa Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Jock Phillips, Personal Interview, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2000.

<sup>44</sup> *Passports* is consequently made up of a considerable number of loans and donations, as well as oral histories, especially from ethnic communities such as through the Wellington Indian Association, the Netherlands Foundation and the Dalmation Cultural Society. See MoNZTPT, *Passports, 90% Developed Design*, p.168. This was a problem also encountered with the exhibition *On the Sheep's Back*. See 'Museum help call', *Wairarapa Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1996.

<sup>45</sup> Phillips, 'The politics...', p.150.

'traditional' Anglo-Celtic New Zealanders were being marginalised within the nation by other Pakeha. To resolve this the history team put added focus on British culture by breaking it into its regional parts, presenting the variety of the different cultures it contains. A video called 'Places of Origin', for example, visits various parts of Britain and features different people, with different accents, discussing their experiences and ancestors, such as someone from County Antrim talking about linen weavers who left for New Zealand. The suggestion is that if the British inheritance consists of many different cultures then New Zealand, as an 'immigrant nation', has always been multicultural.

The Maori impact on Pakeha settlers as they adjust to the land is also highlighted. As Phillips explains: 'we as Pakeha must come to terms with the fact that our settlement here and our identity as New Zealanders necessarily rest on a history of conflict with the tangata whenua'.<sup>46</sup> The most notable illustration of this in the exhibition, is the story of John and Betty Guard, early pioneers in New Zealand, who had a famous conflict with the Maori in the early 1830s.<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting too that the story of the Guards is one of only a few relating to famous people in New Zealand's history. Another illustration of Te Papa's adoption of 'new museology', *Passports* concentrates on ordinary and everyday stories and people. As Phillips describes the concept behind the entire history zone:

We rejected the most obvious, and in some quarters popular, option – to establish a gallery of heroes. The clamour for such a solution came particularly from pakeha who sensed that the Maori exhibitions would be affirming of identity and therefore perhaps hagiographic in tone and who believed that the pakeha exhibitions should fill the same role. But we believed that a hall of fame would lay down narrow definitions of the New Zealand type. ... We did not want to fossilise definitions, nor prescribe restrictive

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<sup>46</sup> J. Phillips, 'Our History, Our Selves – The Historian and National Identity', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 30, no. 2, October 1996, p.119.

<sup>47</sup> Briefly, the Guards were returning to New Zealand from a trip to Sydney when they were shipwrecked on the Taranaki coast. They and their companions were attacked by local Maori who took Betty and her two sons hostage. John Guard was also captured but was let go on the condition he return with gunpowder. Instead, he set sail for Sydney where he persuaded the Governor that the Maori needed to be taught a lesson. Returning with a company of the Fiftieth, the Queen's Own Regiment, the hostages were released, and the violence ended with the soldiers of the Fiftieth playing football with the severed head of a Maori chief.

identities. ... we decided that it would be more interesting to start thinking about identity through the tales of the ordinary, not the famous'.<sup>48</sup>

The absence of more notable people from New Zealand's past, however, has been one focus of criticism of the Pakeha history exhibitions. The lack of representation of sporting heroes is especially noticeable – in a country where sport is important and often seen as indisputably contributing to the national character. As Joseph Romanos has described, you could fit the displays dealing with sport 'inside a decent-sized broom cupboard': 'To walk around Te Papa, the huge Museum of New Zealand, you would never believe that sport is, and has been for more than a century, one of the most important aspects of life here.'<sup>49</sup>

*Passports*, therefore, suggests that national identity is based on the idea of a 'nation of immigrants', in that everyone has the shared and common past of choosing to leave their homes, undergoing the upheaval of their journeys, and adjusting and establishing themselves in a new land. The second exhibition takes an entirely different approach. *On the Sheep's Back*, the smallest of the three main Pakeha history exhibitions, suggests that a distinctive New Zealand identity has emerged through people's interaction with the environment – somewhat like *Tangled Destinies* in the NMA. Working on the assumption that distinctive patterns of life develop after people have arrived, the exhibition explores this theme by looking at the place of wool in New Zealand's history.

Initially this theme was going to be addressed far more broadly, under the title *Life in New Zealand*, examining various patterns of social life that developed once people arrived in New Zealand. Jock Phillips has explained that he initially hoped for a number of changing short-term exhibitions that focused on the social experience, and the history team decided upon three themes with which people could be familiar and relate: issues of work, issues of play, and issues of domestic life and relationships. The three initial subjects agreed upon were the history of gambling to illustrate play, the processing of wool for work, and 'love' for the relationship section.<sup>50</sup> The gambling exhibit, for example, was to explore the conflicts surrounding gambling, and opposition to it, while the love exhibition was seen as a way of exploring interracial, gay and lesbian love and

<sup>48</sup> Phillips, 'Our History...', p.119.

<sup>49</sup> J. Romanos, 'Not really our place', *NZ Listener*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1998, pp.54-55.

<sup>50</sup> Phillips, 'The politics...', p.152.

relationships. Over time however, both the gambling and love components were seen to be too controversial for a national museum and were quietly shelved.

On the surface, it would appear that a history of the wool industry in New Zealand would not be stimulating enough for the visitor in comparison to the rest of Te Papa. Nevertheless, the exhibition attracts attention through its display of familiar objects and its emphasis on the importance of wool to New Zealand. It traces the development of the Kiwi shearing shed, including a reconstructed shed in which the visitor can listen to old shearing yarns including those of Maori people, who played an important part in the shearing world. It also examines the history and traditions of weaving and knitting, displaying various wool products, and significantly succeeds in allowing important social divisions to be explored, such as those between men and women, Maori and Pakeha, rich and poor. Interestingly too, the exhibition makes use of the Elgar Collection of European colonial furniture, that had been largely bought with wool profits, the storage of which earlier in the 1990s had aroused so much controversy over the perceived marginalisation of Pakeha New Zealanders.

*On the Sheep's Back*, however, is the smallest of the history exhibitions, and consequently perhaps the least successful in attracting visitors, and in addressing the view that what gives New Zealanders their unique identity is their encounter with the land. The exhibition was planned to be much larger but in late 1996, the Museum Board, in line with the aim of appealing to the widest range of visitors, commandeered half of the space designated for the wool exhibition to establish *Golden Days*, an object theatre largely based around nostalgia.<sup>51</sup> As will shortly be highlighted, the decision contrasted sharply with the concept upon which the other history exhibits were based.

*Golden Days* is a fast-paced moving image and object theatre showing images of perceived nation-making moments. Visitors enter a junk shop theatre, to sit upon worn sofas and stools, to find themselves surrounded by paraphernalia such as a grandfather clock, stuffed toys, a New Zealand flag and old television sets. The window of the shop acts as the screen for the film, which begins as the shopkeeper pulls the window shutter

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<sup>51</sup> Jock Phillips has also pointed to the lack of sponsorship as contributing to the problems of *On the Sheep's Back*. Wools New Zealand had been approached, but support was not fostered as they wanted the display to focus on the modern development of wool, with the latest technical expertise, instead of a backward look at the historical culture of the wool industry. See Phillips, 'The Politics...', p.154.

down at the end of the day. The film celebrates, aided by the involvement of moving objects in the theatre, New Zealand's pioneering spirit from the sowing of the land, the development of international exports and energy resources, to events such as women gaining the vote, Vietnam protests and Sir Edmund Hillary conquering Everest.<sup>52</sup> *Golden Days* is essentially a nostalgic experience that attempts to celebrate the past by appealing to people's emotions through images of familiar and recognisable moments in history. Through this emotive approach, it can be compared to the *Eternity* gallery in the NMA. They are very different exhibitions, however, and while *Eternity* tries to appeal to a wider range of emotions, ranging from joy to fear, *Golden Days* is unashamedly a feel-good experience.

There are problems with the presence of *Golden Days* amongst the other history exhibits, especially concerning their aim of exploring notions of national identity. As discussed, the Pakeha history exhibits were designed to suggest a number of different approaches to national identity in New Zealand. Most importantly, they were designed to challenge pre-conceived notions and raise questions over modern interpretations of that identity. *Golden Days*, however, by dramatically showing a range of celebratory and ostensible 'nation-making' moments, appears to be attempting to definitively say that these are the points in history at which the nation can be identified. As Geoff Hicks describes, the exhibit 'wallows in reflective sanitised histories where no real tragedies occur other than a bit of social unrest and the Wahine and Tangiwai disasters',<sup>53</sup> while Phillips has mused that it 'seemed to destroy the whole conceptual scheme of the history exhibitions'.<sup>54</sup> The exhibit came about at the expense of half of *On the Sheep's Back*, and largely because of the New Zealand public's perception that Te Papa was not doing enough to celebrate Pakeha culture. *Golden Days* has become one of the most popular exhibits in Te Papa, so succeeding in the museum's aim to be celebratory and entertaining, but it can also be seen as subversive to the other Pakeha history exhibitions, within which it is positioned, that seek to seriously question ideas of national identity.

<sup>52</sup> For further description see T. Martyn, 'to the future', *Pacific Wave*, February 1998, pp.60-65, and G. Reid, 'Let's do the time warp – we are more than a sound-bite', *New Zealand Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1998, pp.G1-2.

<sup>53</sup> Hicks, 'Natural history museums...', p.188. The Tangiwai disaster was a rail accident caused by debris flow from Mount Ruapehu in 1953, costing 151 lives. Then, in 1968, a cyclonic storm caused the *Wahine* ferry to founder at the entrance to Wellington harbour, costing 51 lives.

<sup>54</sup> Phillips, 'The Politics...', p.154.



The *Signs of a Nation* exhibition at Te Papa deals with the Treaty of Waitangi, the central document in New Zealand's history in terms of Maori and Pakeha relations. As such, it represents an important part of the museum's bicultural nature, also reflected by the exhibition's prominent central position.<sup>55</sup> Central to *Signs of a Nation* is a large replica of the tattered Treaty of Waitangi,<sup>56</sup> and on each side the articles of the treaty are displayed, in both Maori and English, and there are areas where the visitor can sit and gain an understanding of some of the differences between the two versions.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the most effective part of the exhibition, however, is the existence of three clusters of tall steel poles, each cluster representing the treaty's articles relating to governance, land and cultural heritage, and citizens' rights. Standing amongst the poles, visitors can listen to a multitude of voices reflecting the different views of both Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders to the treaty and biculturalism: views ranging from 'The Treaty – it's not just for Maori, it's a bill of rights for us all', to 'the treaty is just a gravy train for the rich Maori elite'.<sup>58</sup>

In terms of 'equal' representation given to both Maori and Pakeha peoples and their views, the exhibition can be seen to succeed in its bicultural mission, and also in contributing to an understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, especially for many people who quite possibly would never have read it before but might have pre-conceived opinions. The rest of the exhibition, however, is less successful as it moves on to offer eyewitness accounts of the treaty's signing and then a series of artefact cases presenting the themes of governance, land and cultural heritage, and citizen's rights. In general terms, this part of the exhibition is badly lit and confusing in its arrangement of artefacts in glass cases, but more specifically fails to adequately examine the history and development of Maori and Pakeha relations. Where it does touch upon this, it is at best superficial, cursory and unfocused. For example, there is a series of timeline flip panels dealing with the changing relationships between Maori and Pakeha at ten year periods, which succeed in going into only the most minimal of detail.

<sup>55</sup> See P. Bossley, 'The Treaty', *Architecture New Zealand*, February 1998, Special Edition, p.64.

<sup>56</sup> The Treaty was neglected for the first sixty years of its existence, before being found damaged by water and chewed by rats.

<sup>57</sup> For explanation as to the problems involved in the interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi, see Chapter One of this thesis. Also see James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders*, Auckland, 1996, pp.193-7, and M. Durie, *Te Mana, Te Kāwanatanga: The Politics of Maori Self-Determination*, Auckland, 1998.

<sup>58</sup> E. Poot, 'Finding ourselves at Te Papa', *New Zealand Geographic*, no. 38, April – June 1998, p.123.

Since Te Papa's opening, a second Treaty of Waitangi exhibition has opened in Wellington at the National Archives of New Zealand. This offers a deeper examination of the specific topics that have surrounded the treaty over the years, including a focus on more contemporary issues such as the Waitangi Tribunal. The failure of Te Papa to further focus on these aspects in the *Signs of a Nation* exhibition, can be seen as a considerable missed opportunity. The topic of the treaty and its central location would be an ideal place to further integrate and examine the important themes of the Maori people's influence on Pakeha civilisation, and the impact of Pakeha settlement on Maori culture. Though these themes are touched upon at times in the museum's other exhibitions, their lack of full representation in Te Papa is a noticeable and serious aspect of this celebratory museum; surprising perhaps for a museum that has pushed its integrated and multidisciplinary concept so much.

This is an important point, as in its endeavours to be populist and celebratory, Te Papa often appears to be neglecting crucial aspects of New Zealand's history that might not be especially appealing, but are pivotal to the nation's development. As discussed, for example, the indigenous situation is inevitably tied to understandings of non-indigenous identity, and thus the exploration of the Treaty of Waitangi, its subversion by Pakeha settlers during the nineteenth century, and the continuing often bitter Maori-Pakeha relations throughout the twentieth century, is integral to this. In this regard, the NMA, through its occasional emphasis on contentious aspects of Australia's history, could be considered as being more representative of the nation's history and identity. In contrast, Te Papa as a whole, despite its blatant promotion of the 'nation', seems to portray a more idealised version of the past, restricting the possibilities for analysis and questioning of the factors that have contributed to New Zealand's history and identity.

### **'Nation' and 'Exhibiting Ourselves'**

The non-indigenous history galleries at the NMA and Te Papa, therefore, address national identity in various ways, such as through the idea that identity is founded on a settler and multicultural society, or on a relationship with the land. The final two galleries dealing specifically with non-indigenous history, *Nation* in the NMA and *Exhibiting Ourselves* in Te Papa, take a different approach. Both galleries focus on the ways that national identity can be 'invented' through a range of national symbols.

*Exhibiting Ourselves*, for example, attempts to put this in a historical context by looking at the symbols New Zealanders have constructed to describe themselves in the past, while *Nation* focuses on a range of symbols that could be used today to define Australian identity.

The idea of the 'construction' of national identity used by both galleries can be seen to be inspired by Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities', whereby symbolic vocabulary is shared throughout a community.<sup>59</sup> *Nation: Symbols of Australia*, the largest of the permanent non-indigenous history galleries in the NMA, attempts to explore Australian nationhood and national identity through a range of familiar national symbols acting as windows into Australian history. Guy Hansen, the curator principally responsible for *Nation*, has explained the rationale behind this method of interpretation:

Expressions, or 'symbols', of national identity can be found in the visual, aural and material culture record of Australian history. Each symbol has a history that explains how the object, image or practice emerged, how it was accepted or contested over time, and what ideas and values about Australia and Australians it embodies. Reviewing the history of symbols in this way provides a range of views or voices about national identity, varying according to the time and context in which they were produced, and demonstrating that the concept of national identity is diverse and dynamic. This approach highlights the active way in which different groups and individuals use symbols to represent the nation and its citizens.<sup>60</sup>

*Nation* aims to explore various different representations of national identity that have at sometime been constructed by society in a bid to define the nation and the people. In this sense, each symbol that is examined represents a different voice on Australia's national identity. Allowing the visitors to decide for themselves which symbols best reflect their own notions of the nation, the objective is effectively to provide them with a basis upon which to start considering issues of national identity and nation.<sup>61</sup> By

<sup>59</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1983, p.9.

<sup>60</sup> G. Hansen, *Symbols of Australia: Exploring national history at the National Museum of Australia*, Unpublished paper presented to the Museums Australia conference, Australian National University, Canberra, April 2001, p.6. My thanks to Guy Hansen for providing me with a copy of this paper.

<sup>61</sup> NMA, *Symbols of Nation – Program Resources Brief*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1999, NMA Research Library. Also NMA, *Public Program Brief - Symbols of a Nation*, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1998, NMA Research Library; *Nation – Interim Design Development Submission*, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1999, submitted by Anway & Co. Inc., Amaze Design & DMCD Inc., NMA Research Library; *Program Summary: Symbols of Nation*, prepared by Guy

moving away from a traditional historical examination of national history, each symbol that is examined provides a 'window' to specific aspects of Australia's history, hopefully encouraging the visitor to explore the nation's history and culture even more.

The ideology behind the *Nation* gallery changed little during the development process. The use of symbols to reflect the nation's history has been prevalent throughout, though earlier in the process these were to be more strictly and evenly divided between official symbols, that provided a more traditional chronological overview of national history, and symbols of popular culture.<sup>62</sup> As it eventuated, the gallery was extended once the *Eternity* gallery was cut in size, and more emphasis was given to the selection of constructed symbols of popular culture that have been prominent in the national imagination. Official symbols are still represented in *Nation*, however, and indeed a centrepiece of the gallery is a scaled-down replica of The Citizen's Arch that was built to celebrate the 1901 opening of federal parliament.

The official symbols displayed in the gallery are straightforward enough, illustrating recognisable images such as the national anthem and flag; exploring the history of such symbols to reveal 'how they have evolved over time, reflecting the changing face of Australia'.<sup>63</sup> As Guy Hansen describes, the symbols are examined so that they 'no longer appear as immutable signifiers of the Australian nation but rather as an evolving set of symbols reflecting changes in Australia's national identity'.<sup>64</sup> An example is the history of the national flag, where despite Federation in 1901 it was not until 1950 that the Federal Government confirmed the official adoption of a new national flag.

The symbols of popular culture, however, are more challenging and open to misinterpretation. Twelve different categories represent constructed images that are recognised nationally, and that can be seen to contribute to a sense of belonging and the national psyche, and because of this the exhibition relies significantly on the display of individual, prominent and everyday objects aimed to instil recognition and often

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Hansen, Denis Shepard & Brad Manera, NMA Departmental File, 98/0017, NMA on Acton – Program Working Group – Nation, NMA Research Library.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, *Nation Exhibition Overview*, Facsimile from Guy Hansen to Matt Kirchman, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1999, NMA Departmental File, 99/0066, NMA on Acton – Program Working Group – Nation, NMA Research Library.

<sup>63</sup> Exhibition text. Also see *Summary Content Outline – Symbols of Nation, Module 0928*, NMA Research Library, Nation – Symbols of Nation 0928 File.

<sup>64</sup> Hansen, *Symbols of Australia...*, p.7.

nostalgia in the visitor. 'Cooee!', for example, explores how the development of national institutions such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and the Post Office helped create a shared sense of community across the nation. Highlights are the display of different types of Post Office mailboxes that were used between the 1870s and 1960s, and the ABC outside broadcast van used during the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.

Each category depicts images that can be seen personify the Australian character. 'Spirit of the Digger', for example, looks at the origin of the 'Digger' archetype and the importance of Anzac Day as a national holiday. 'Hopping Mad' portrays the kangaroo as a symbol of the uniqueness of Australia, including the display of a rugby jersey of the Australian national team who are called the Kangaroos, while 'Feeding the Nation' attempts to show how the Australian diet is an important part of the national identity through the display of familiar foods such as Vegemite. Within 'Suburbia', the importance of suburban living in a nation where most people live in suburbs is explored. Particular attention is given to the significance of the backyard as a special place in Australia's cultural landscape and imagination, through the display of objects such as Hills Hoist rotary washing lines and Victa lawnmowers, and asks the visitor: 'Is this where Australians are most truly themselves – sociable, relaxed, domestic and democratic?'<sup>65</sup> 'Australian Voices' on the other hand, examines the uniqueness of the Australian language as contributing to a distinct national identity. Visitors can explore the development of the language through the medium of a basic interactive, whereby they can learn the origins of various common phrases, such as discovering that the expression 'dinkum' originates from a phrase from the British Midlands meaning 'a fair share of work'.

Indigenous people are also represented within *Nation*. 'Australian Dreaming' examines how Aboriginal people and their culture have often been used to symbolise Australia through souvenirs, art, advertising and films, and there is acknowledgement that for many the use of such imagery is offensive and disrespectful. Some of the other themes also consider the contribution of the Aboriginal people. Bush tucker and how it has sustained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for thousands of years is

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

explored in 'Feeding the Nation', while 'Spirit of the Digger' includes a poem by an Aboriginal serviceman describing how he continued to suffer racism in Australia even after fighting for the nation in the Korean War. 'Hopping Mad' also explains how kangaroos have held a profound place in the traditions and stories of indigenous people.

The inter-relation of the NMA's primary themes of land, nation and people is also evident in the gallery. 'Land, Sea and Sky', for example, depicts images of iconic landscapes, such as Uluru and Bondi Beach, which 'populate Australia's national imagination',<sup>66</sup> while the theme 'Imagining the Country' attempts to show how maps have helped the way Australia is understood.<sup>67</sup> Dominating 'Imagining the Country' is a large three dimensional map of Australia, visible from three floors, that constantly shows images and statistics illustrating Australia as 'a place of diverse and often unique people, landscapes and national boundaries'.<sup>68</sup>

*Nation*, therefore, attempts to explore a selection of traditional symbols that have been constructed to represent the Australian nation and national identity. Each is portrayed to illustrate how the object, image or practice emerged as a national symbol, how it has been accepted or contested over time, and what ideas and values about Australia it embodies. Problems arise, however, with such an approach to national history and identity in a museum. As discussed, for instance, some critics have been vocal in accusing the museum of trivialising Australia's history, with a message of 'sneering ridicule for white Australia'.<sup>69</sup> In some ways this is easy to understand, as displays that include kangaroos, vegemite, Hills Hoist rotary washing lines and Aussie slang, can be seen to perpetuate stereotypical views of Australia more appropriate to promoting the country abroad than forcing self-examination of the Australian national psyche. Nevertheless, the gallery appears to engage with a wide range of visitors. Despite the absence of a chronological examination of Australia's history since 1788, the display of everyday and, significantly, recognisable symbols and objects, reflects new museological ideas and might instil in its audience a sense of belonging and attachment.

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> D. Shepard, *Overview of 'Imagining the Country'*, November 1999, NMA Departmental File, 99/435, NMA on Acton – Program Working Group – Mapping, NMA Research Library.

<sup>68</sup> NMA, *Nation – Interim Design Development Submission*, p.3.

<sup>69</sup> M. Devine, 'A nation trivialised', *Daily Telegraph*, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2001. Also B. Dutter, 'Australians angry at "kangaroos and koalas" museum', *Daily Telegraph* (UK), 17<sup>th</sup> March 2001, p.21.

While *Nation* can be seen as largely celebratory in its use of familiar symbols as windows to a possible Australian national identity, *Exhibiting Ourselves* in Te Papa took a far more critical approach in examining the motives and flaws behind previously 'official' images of identity. *Exhibiting Ourselves* actually closed during 2001, as part of the Greater Te Papa Project that saw the extension of gallery space for Te Papa's art collections. Its existence as one of the main Pakeha history opening exhibitions, however, and its conceptual similarities with *Nation*, warrant its consideration here.

*Exhibiting Ourselves* essentially explored the history of national identity in New Zealand. Central to the exhibition was the notion that having migrated to the new world, and having developed a distinctive way of life, Pakeha New Zealanders began to consider their identity and sought ways to proclaim their uniqueness. It examined how they 'officially' regarded themselves at different points in time and then explored, with the benefit of hindsight, the reality behind those sanctioned views. *Exhibiting Ourselves* suggested that national identity is a product of the mind, no more or less than what people imagine it to be, focusing on the question 'How was our national identity constructed?'.<sup>70</sup> By investigating four international exhibitions spaced at approximately fifty year intervals, the 1851 Great Exhibition, the 1906 Christchurch International Exhibition, the 1940 Centennial Exhibition in Wellington and the Seville Exposition of 1992, *Exhibiting Ourselves* attempted to highlight a celebratory sense of nationhood while at the same time inviting debate about its content. At the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, for instance, the New Zealand display was designed to illustrate New Zealand as a land of abundance, in order to sell goods in Britain and attract immigrants and investors. The Maori were portrayed as 'native curiosities' and one exhibit was John Gilfillan's painting *Inside a Maori Pa*, which evoked a peaceful image of life in a native village. *Exhibiting Ourselves* challenged this promotion by not only displaying the painting but also telling the story of when Gilfillan was attacked by Maori, losing his wife and three children, and forcing him to move to Australia.

The 1906 Christchurch Exhibition was largely a celebration of the progress made since the time of the pioneers. *Exhibiting Ourselves* showed how New Zealand was portrayed as the social laboratory of the world where 'the landscape had been tamed' and

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<sup>70</sup> MoNZTPT, *Exhibiting Ourselves, 90% Developed Design*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1995, p.19, Te Papa Archives.

'civilisation and prosperity were just around the corner',<sup>71</sup> evident through progressive laws giving the vote to women and pensions to the aged. By 1906 too, Pakeha New Zealanders were portraying New Zealand as 'Maoriland', an appropriation of Maori culture to express a national identity that *Exhibiting Ourselves* acknowledged has existed ever since. In 1906, for example, this was expressed by the construction of a full-scale Maori pa next to the Exhibition's fairground, a placement suggesting that the Maori were best seen as a tourist attraction. In contrast, at the Centennial Exhibition in 1940, New Zealand illustrated its progress as being based both on a tradition of loyalty to Britain and veneration of pioneer New Zealanders. It also put itself forward as a model for bi-racial harmony, and *Exhibiting Ourselves* challenged this myth by displaying, alongside a photograph of the Prime Minister Joseph Savage shaking hands with a Maori warrior, a quote by the Maori leader Apirana Ngata: 'I do not know of any year that the Maori people approach with so much misgiving as the Centennial year. In retrospect what do the Maori see? Lands gone, the power of the chief crumbled in the dust. Maori culture scattered – broken.'<sup>72</sup>

*Exhibiting Ourselves* questioned traditional images of national identity by illustrating the ways in which identity is often a construction of the mind. Another more recent example is that of the 1992 Seville Exposition. At a time when New Zealand was in deep recession, the message was put forward of a sophisticated cosmopolitan nation with strong secondary and tertiary industries.

*Exhibiting Ourselves* was the most traditional of the opening history exhibitions, in terms of its reliance on an abundance of artefacts in glass cases. Yet, this in some way perhaps aided the exhibition's intellectual, if not popular, success. Bronwyn Labrum, one of the history curators at Te Papa, has described how *Exhibiting Ourselves* appealed particularly to academic historians, especially on a conceptual level as they knew the history behind it.<sup>73</sup> The exhibition was punctuated throughout by vivid re-creations of the Exhibitions' displays, including basic interactive games such as an original fortune-telling machine and test-your-strength machine from the 1906 Christchurch Exhibition,

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<sup>71</sup> Exhibition text.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> B. Labrum in 'Thinking Visually: Doing History in Museums – An interview with Bronwyn Labrum', in B. Dalley & J. Phillips (eds.), *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland, 2001, p.186.



and the robot Dr Well-and-Strong, from the Department of Health, who in 1940 proclaimed to visitors the virtues of the New Zealand welfare state. Indeed, the only part of the exhibition that relied heavily on new technology, the section dealing with the 1992 Exposition that included a light and sound show, was far and away the least comprehensible and generally failed to get the desired message across. Jock Phillips acknowledges himself that this area, called 'The Void', was confusing and that a lot more could have been done with the space, and it was through late development and lack of money that it could not be developed further.<sup>74</sup> At any rate, there is a certain irony in the inclusion of *Exhibiting Ourselves* in Te Papa in the first place. The International Exhibitions, and more lately the Expos, were very self-conscious ways in which a country and its people promoted and presented themselves. In many ways, Te Papa can be interpreted as the latest manifestation of this. Jock Phillips himself has described the Exhibitions as the 'Disneylands of the past',<sup>75</sup> and as Rodney Wilson, the Director of the Auckland Museum, has discussed:

[Te Papa] does it in a more profound and intelligent way of course, but it is essentially within the genre of our display in Brisbane or our display in Seville, and I do not mean that in a dismissive way, or disrespectful way. I think Te Papa has a very clear desire to tell a story about New Zealand ... and it does it in a way that people, by and large, enjoy.<sup>76</sup>

*Exhibiting Ourselves* was a unique approach to addressing the issue of national identity, and forced visitors to question their own pre-conceptions of what it was to be New Zealanders. This was brought to the fore at the end of the exhibition, where a selection of t-shirts were displayed illustrating various narrow or stereotypical images of national identity in New Zealand today, such as sheep and the America's Cup. In many ways then, *Exhibiting Ourselves* can be seen as the most pertinent opening exhibition in terms of the museum's mandate to be about nation, as well as the most critical of traditional representations of national identity, and because of this it is unfortunate that it was closed in 2001.

<sup>74</sup> Jock Phillips, Personal Interview, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2000.

<sup>75</sup> J. Phillips, 'Our History...', p.116.

<sup>76</sup> R. Wilson, Personal Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2000, Tape with the author.

## Conclusion

Central to the philosophy of both these new national museums, therefore, is the need to consider and explore national identity, without prescribing any one single definition of identity. Addressing the problematic question of non-indigenous identity, both museums attempt to do this by taking a thematic approach, and by putting forward three main different interpretations upon which national identity could be based. To summarise, in the NMA *Eternity* interprets identity as being based on shared emotional experiences, *Horizons* suggests that this identity derives from Australia's existence as a settler society, while *Nation* attempts to explore Australian identity through a range of familiar symbols, which have been invented over time to create a shared sense of belonging and attachment to the nation. In essence, both the NMA and Te Papa take the visitor on a journey of possible ways to interpret what it is to be an Australian or New Zealander. In Te Papa, for example, *Passports* takes a similar approach to *Horizons* by suggesting that New Zealand should be viewed as a nation of immigrants, in that everyone has a common past shaped by the trauma of 'leaving', 'journeys' and 'arrival', while *On the Sheep's Back* presents the opposite view that identity is actually shaped by the land. Finally, *Exhibiting Ourselves*, like *Nation*, suggested that national identity is nothing more than a construction of the mind. In other words, it is 'what we conceive it to be'.<sup>77</sup> Significantly too, *Exhibiting Ourselves* indicated that one image, history or identity is not sufficient in proclaiming a nation.

*Nation* and *Exhibiting Ourselves*, through their exploration of images and symbols that have been and could be constructed to provide a basis for an Australian and New Zealand identity, can be seen as the exhibitions that most flagrantly reflect the perceived role of the national museum in addressing the nation and its meaning. They can also be seen as manifestations of the new museology, in terms of their questioning of possible interpretations of identity, as well as illustrations of the complex and confused nature of non-indigenous identity throughout Australia and New Zealand's European histories, and especially at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>77</sup> Phillips, 'Our History...', p.115.

More critical than the celebratory nature of *Nation, Exhibiting Ourselves* can perhaps be viewed as more successful in making clear that identity is a construction of the mind, by examining how New Zealanders have 'officially' regarded themselves and, with the benefit of hindsight, then exploring the reality behind those views. In contrast, *Nation* at the NMA, rather than challenging such images, at times seems to celebrate and proclaim them in a way that could easily be interpreted as perpetuating constructed and often misleading perceptions of the Australian nation.

The approach of exploring national history and identity through a range of constructed symbols can cause notable problems. *Nation* is designed to provoke Australians to question traditional representations of the nation. Yet, many of the themes are represented as being largely celebratory with little space for contesting views. This is in contrast to other parts of the museum, which often highlight areas of contestation. Despite one of the principles behind the *Nation* gallery being that it was not to attempt to lay down definitive interpretations of identity, just by displaying such images in an institution such as the National Museum, the message that might be conveyed is that these **are** the images through which we can identify and define ourselves. In effect, simply reinforcing the notions that define the 'imagined community'.

Indeed, this leads to an important possible shortcoming of the thematic approach that the history exhibitions in both the NMA and Te Papa take, and that was briefly mentioned earlier in regards to an early plan for a *Promenade* in Te Papa. In both museums, there are significant gaps in the Australian and New Zealand 'story'. Especially in terms of political and military history, and without any kind of chronological key to the country's history, these 'absences' make the interpretation of some of the displays very confusing. Of course, the express aim of the history exhibits in both the NMA and Te Papa was not to tell a comprehensive history of Australia and New Zealand. It is important to be aware, however, that many people do still visit museums to learn or experience the past of a museum's locale, whether it be a town, city, state or nation, and the lack of some kind of general historical narrative, in this author's view, can contribute to a lack of coherency and understanding.<sup>78</sup> In this sense, the retention of the pre-1993 idea of the *Promenade* in Te Papa, a chronological journey

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<sup>78</sup> Also see K. Windschuttle, 'How not to run a museum', *Quadrant*, vol. XLV, no. 9, September 2001, pp.16-17.

through New Zealand's history linking various separate theme exhibitions together, might have been more successful. At the very least, it is likely the History Zone would be better served by even just a detailed panel highlighting the pivotal events in New Zealand's past. The lack of some kind of broad overarching narrative linking the different exhibits, can make the national histories that the museums are supposed to be interpreting incoherent and unintelligible. In the NMA too, the closest the museum comes to a traditional national history narrative is 'Moments', a part of *Nation*, displaying a number of individual moments in Australia's history since 1788. Yet not only are these limited in number, by laying out a range of specific events, such as the gold rush, Federation, and the death of Phar Lap, the underlying curatorial voice in 'Moments' seems to be declaring that these are the defining moments in Australia's history, not allowing room for dispute. This is comparable to *Golden Days* in Te Papa, which also presents a selective number of nation-making moments.

The lack of inter-related discussion of the different histories is also evident, notably between indigenous and non-indigenous history, despite the integrated frameworks upon which both museums are based. It is important to remember that, in order for identity to be comprehensively discussed, museums need to create an understanding of the many diverse pasts and histories that exist. This is particularly true of national museums in their aim of contributing to the interpretation of national identity. Only then, and by allowing history and notions of identity to be questioned and explored, can a national museum really begin to be representative of the nation.

## CONCLUSION

### A Challenging Future

This thesis has been written in response to the developments in museology that have taken place around the world during the last few decades, and the increasingly prominent and debated issue of non-indigenous history and national identity in both Australia and New Zealand. The post-colonial era has created an environment within which people actively seek to examine the legacies of European imperialism in order to gain an understanding of their place within the burgeoning global world. This has created specific issues of identity for the non-indigenous populations of settler societies such as Australia and New Zealand with their chequered histories, especially those concerning the domination of indigenous peoples. In particular, new interpretations of history have emerged during the last few decades, challenging traditional bases of nationalism, which has led these societies to actively seek to understand and reconcile themselves with the past, in order to define an increasingly problematic and complex national identity. Broadly, issues of identity, especially in relation to history, have gained a particularly prominent role in the political and cultural arenas of Australia and New Zealand.

As a product of this post-colonial environment, the museum community in both countries has also markedly changed in recent years. As the role of history has become increasingly important, so too has the role and function of museums in interpreting these histories and contributing to understandings of the nation. In brief, as a consequence of this new prominence, museums have been forced to adapt to become representative of different communities and all the diverse histories that they comprise, which traditionally would not have a place within museums; to accommodate and interpret these histories in new ways, and to become more accessible and open to debate. The importance of this has also been fuelled by both governments and the public demanding greater accountability from museums, and by their position within a growing competitive marketplace. Consequently, museums have also been forced to adopt new methodologies, such as state of the art technology and oral histories, in order to appeal to the widest possible audience.

The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa have developed recently, both in response to this changing historical and museological climate, and to the increasingly important role and position of national museums around the world. Illustrative of new museological trends, for instance, both the NMA and Te Papa take a multi-disciplinary approach towards the interpretation of history and identity, integrating different themes and making use of new histories and new technologies. The NMA, however, is careful not to stretch this new museology too far, especially in terms of focusing on entertainment to the neglect of education. Throughout the museum, for example, interactive and multimedia elements are balanced with more conventional displays of artefacts and interpretative text. This is in contrast to Te Papa, which has been harshly criticised in some quarters for resembling 'Disneyland' more than a museum. Te Papa is clearly a unique institution stretching some concepts of the 'new museology' through its rides and post-modern interpretation. As Robin Parkinson celebrates: 'Te Papa is, in the best sense, the ultimate do-it-yourself museum. It tells the New Zealand story; it is aimed at the widest New Zealand audience and it is a uniquely New Zealand product. There is ... nothing else like it in the world.'<sup>1</sup> Te Papa is a visually entertaining place, and there is no doubt that it has succeeded in its aim of being 'unmuseum-like', in attracting non-traditional museum visitors and being a popular tourist attraction, illustrated simply by the staggering number of visitors in the first few years of its opening.

Furthermore, there is little chance that the debate surrounding both museums, that was identified in the preceding chapters, will go away. This is especially the case in regards to Te Papa, but the NMA is certainly not immune. Indeed, the controversy surrounding both museums is indicative of the complex and contentious nature of national identity in both countries and surely should be welcomed, both in illustrating the museums' success in being vehicles for contested notions of identity, and in provoking discussion within the museum world concerning changing roles and functions. As Bronwyn Labrum, one of the curators of the opening Pakeha history exhibitions at Te Papa, asserts: 'Public debate involves pressure but it's also a very healthy sign. ... it shows that people do in fact care and that history matters and is alive to them.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. Parkinson, 'Design in exhibits', *Architecture New Zealand*, February 1998, Special Edition, p.62.

<sup>2</sup> B. Labrum in 'Thinking Visually: Doing History in Museums – An interview with Bronwyn Labrum', in B. Dalley & J. Phillips (eds.), *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland, 2001, p.183.

It is also clear that the thematic approach taken by both the NMA and Te Papa is representative of museum trends at the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially in their efforts to represent many different segments of the population. In fact, both museums can be seen as illustrative of the themes that have thread throughout this thesis. Namely the changing nature and functions of museums, the important political and cultural role of history and museums in society, and the complex and problematic nature of post-colonial settler identities. Most significantly perhaps, their long developments stretching back to the nineteenth century represent how the traditional cultural homogeneities of Australia and New Zealand have been challenged, and how their museums and societies as a whole have been forced to adapt to the post-colonial world.

Such developments are not limited to these two societies of Australia and New Zealand. Questions of nation and identity, as well as the role of museums, have become increasingly prominent in societies all around the world, illustrated by the renovation and establishment of new national museums everywhere during the last two decades. These museums face similar challenges and tensions as they seek to tackle the question of national identity, and the impossible task of satisfactorily representing all the different histories which comprise every nation.

National museums find themselves in conflict. On the one hand, new interpretations of history have shown that there is no longer one national story for a museum to tell. Museums need to contribute to an understanding of the many different pasts and histories that exist, and only then can national identity, or more importantly **national identities**, be realistically discussed. Yet, the national museum exists primarily to tell the story of the nation, and in order to properly understand that story the museum inevitably needs to retain some kind of coherent narrative, to show the nation's progress and to hold all the other stories together. Caught between these two sets of demands, national museums have never faced a more difficult – nor a more interesting – future.