
Macleay Museum News

Number 8, October 1996

Macleay goes Worldwide

The Macleay Museum now has a homepage on the World Wide Web at <http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/macleay/welcome.htm>. This will enable the Museum to communicate to the world the treasures that lie within the Museum. It will also increase our contact with schools locally.

Visitors to the site can view illustrated extracts from our exhibitions including ***'Most Curious and Peculiar': Women Taxidermists in Colonial Sydney*** (currently on show), learn about the Macleay family, have access to the Museum's collections, take a tour of the Museum gallery and bookshop, and contact the staff through e-mail.

The content is strongly supported by graphic material. On the title page a reproduction of one of the Museum's old cedar showcases has been constructed as a clickable map: clicking the mouse on to each window takes the viewer to a different part of the website. An overhead plan of the gallery has also been set up in this way so that the contents of each showcase can be seen. Many of the pages are illustrated with images from the Macleay Museum's historic photograph collection.

The website was several months in the making and was funded totally within the Museum's normal operating costs. Further developments to the site will include the setting up of a database so that viewers all over the world will be able to search the Museum's collections. A small programme will also be included which records where visitors to the homepage are coming from.

The website is intended as an initiator of dialogue between visitors and museum staff so that a visit to the homepage will encourage, rather than replace, a visit to the Museum in person.

The Macleay Museum's homepage can be reached at the above locator or by searching in Alta Vista under "Macleay Museum" ... and don't forget to sign the visitor's book!

Great Installations

The Macleay Museum gallery has four new single-case displays drawing on the Museum's collections of natural history, ethnography and scientific instruments. The displays cover such diverse topics as the controversies surrounding William John Macleay's collecting expeditions, the adventurous life of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay, and the technological advances which allowed the accurate charting of the Australian landscape during the 19th century.

The new displays represent the beginning of a gradual refurbishment of all the long-term showcases in the Museum gallery. The Museum has again used the talents of designer, Lucy Bannyan, and graphic designer, Marianne Hawke, in the production of the displays, to stunning effect. Leaflets are available on all the new displays.

Great Expectations - The Chevert Expedition to New Guinea, 1875 examines William John Macleay's motives for organising Australia's first scientific mission to a foreign country. Macleay always stressed that the aim of his expedition was to improve his family collections for the advancement of colonial science. The public did not judge his trip kindly, however, criticising him in the press for his failure to assess the interior of New Guinea for future trade and even annexation by Britain or Australia. Macleay had returned with the wrong treasure; "a vast and valuable collection" of birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, insects and ethnographic artifacts instead of gold.

"The Spoils of War"? - Objects Collected by Walter Wilson Froggatt in the Kimberleys in 1887 asks whether museums should retain objects which have been acquired in violent circumstances. Froggatt, employed by William John Macleay in 1887 to collect natural history specimens in the Kimberleys, accompanied police and pastoralists during a raid which aimed to drive Aborigines off land recently claimed by white pastoralists. One Aborigine was shot. Froggatt gathered any bags, bowls, shields and implements he considered valuable to return to Sydney before the camp was burned. Some of these objects are still in the Macleay Museum.

A Noble Cause - The Life and Work of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay (1846-1888) commemorates the 150th anniversary of the birth of one of Russia's most celebrated explorers. Miklouho-Maclay settled on the north east coast of New Guinea in 1871 and attained almost legendary status in his homeland during his lifetime for his efforts to defend the independence of indigenous people against the spread of colonialism. Miklouho-Maclay also co-wrote three scientific papers with William John Macleay while in Sydney and was instrumental in the establishment of a zoological field station at Watson's Bay in 1881.

By Land and Sea - Instruments of Place explores the impact of improvements in the quality of precision measuring instruments during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, particularly in navigation and surveying. Technological innovations enabled the Australian colonies to be

surveyed as a basis for the development of roads, townships, and pastoral properties. Royal Navy hydrographers could accurately chart Australia's coastline, reefs and off-shore hazards, so important to the safety of immigrant ships and export goods. A highlight of the display is a graphic reproduction of Mitchell's survey of the 19 counties of NSW. *By Land and Sea* was generously sponsored by the Institution of Surveyors, NSW Branch

The new displays emphasise the importance of the Macleay Museum collections as a symbol of colonial expansion. A common theme of control of land and nature, both intellectual and physical, runs through the displays.

Director's Notes and Jottings

New Vice Chancellor

The Museum was very pleased to welcome the new Vice Chancellor, Professor Gavin Brown, to the Museum on his first day in office. Professor Brown was a formerly a member of the Board of Trustees of the South Australian Museum and gave very positive mention to the rich museum resources of this University in his inaugural address in September. The Museum also welcomed the University Senate to drinks in the Gallery after their regular meeting in July. This was an opportunity for Senate members both to meet with staff and to become aware of the wonderful resource the University has in the Macleay Museum. Professor Brown will be joining us for morning tea and a full tour of the Museum in November.

Gallery Changes

Our program of Gallery improvements has continued, although slowly. We are very aware that the gallery lighting needs to be improved, both to create a less gloomy impression as visitors reach the top of the stairs, and in particular within the show cases, to reduce the light levels to an acceptable level for object conservation.

We approached Professor Warren Julian, Dean of the Architecture Faculty and an acknowledged lighting expert. Warren used the lighting problems of the Museum as part of the major assignment for students of his post-graduate course in lighting. Some of the solutions were impressive, and some of them way above budget! However, we hope that from the various total solutions submitted, we can develop a positive action plan which we can afford to implement over a period. Many students suggested painting the ceiling, and using forms of up-lighting to increase ambient light levels. Since the ceiling has not been painted for about thirty years, this sounds like a good idea and if we can afford it, this will be done soon.

Lighting in the cases is the highest priority and we will be replacing the lighting in the four new case displays towards the end of the year. We have a new Donations Box (more than ever needed!), new introductory panels to the Museum, and both of these will be further improved by the end of the year.

Exhibitions

Four new displays were opened in July and August, the first in the sequence being a totally refurbished exhibition on Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay, which was opened in time for a wonderfully successful function held in the Gallery on July 17 to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Miklouho-Maclay's birth.

This was followed by the opening without celebration of a new exhibition on the voyage of the *Chevert* in 1875, a revitalised exhibition on W.W. Froggatt, and culminating in the very successful launch of a sponsored display, ***By Land and Sea - Instruments of Place***, an exhibition of historic surveying instruments of the sort which played a critical role in the mapping and settlement of Australia. The Institution of Surveyors (NSW Branch) generously gave \$2000 towards the costs of this exhibition, and paid for the launch. We remain deeply grateful for this example of active support and faith in the worth of the Museum. It is a pattern of support we are very anxious be continued.

Plans are well underway for a further two or three of the long term display cases to be refurbished by July 1997, following the installation of our major temporary exhibition in February.

Staff Notes

We welcome Rosemary Stack to the position of Indigenous Heritage Officer, and her presence has already accelerated the project to identify the appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and repatriate historically significant items, in particular Ancestral Remains.

Angus Patterson, author of our impressive Home Page among many other accomplishments, is now part time on staff. This is a result of budget restrictions. Fortunately, his skill in working on Home Pages has been recognised, and he is now working elsewhere on campus improving the Home Page for the Novae Project in the Faculty of Education on his day away from the Museum.

School Program

We have recently sent a flyer to every high school in the state, informing History, Science and Aboriginal Studies teachers of our School Education Program. We have been fortunate in being able to join with the Prospective Students Unit in this mail out. We hope that this will mean a substantial rise in the number of schools visiting us, a number which has increased slightly this year. If any readers are in a position to encourage group visits to the Museum, please do so. (Bookings on (02) 9351 2274). During July we took part in a pilot project (which indeed originated in the Museum) for an after-school program for talented Science students. A group of students from Abbotsleigh School in Wahroonga visited various Science Departments in the University over a seven week period for tours, talks and activities. The program was very successful and will be offered more widely next year.

Special Visitors

In addition to the special guests entertained at the functions held for Miklouho-Maclay and for the Institution of Surveyors, the Museum was pleased to welcome visits from Dr Robert Anderson, Director of the British Museum and Mr Tristram Besterman, Director of the Manchester Museum. Several visiting scientists have looked at the collections, including Dr Jeremy Hollway and Dr Bernard D'Abrera, both

of the London Natural History Museum, and Dr Clem Fisher, of the Liverpool Museum, England.

Donations

In these days of the Vanstoning of the Universities, university museums and collections are not the top priority with cash strapped university administrations. The Macleay Museum is thus forced to join with more and more organisations in seeking assistance from its supporters, from the public, and from institutional donors. We do not feel we can charge admission, and indeed our visitor numbers would not bring in much income. We are unwilling to put our Newsletter on a formal subscription base, as we see it as a means of contact with our supporters, of advertising our wares and of raising the public profile of the Museum within and outside the University.

However, if you enjoy receiving the Newsletter, we would ask that you contribute if possible to its production costs, and to the work of the Museum by way of an annual gift. Such donations are tax deductible and you would receive a formal receipt from the University.

We will also be seeking further sponsorship for exhibitions, in particular for the major exhibition for 1997. Should any readers have helpful ideas, please ring me with them. We welcome involvement at all levels.

Vanessa Mack

Re-exploring the Pacific



From the days of Captain Cook, Europeans in the Pacific collected the tools, weapons and ceremonial items of the Island peoples they encountered. In the 19th century Sydney was an important base for Pacific shipping. Ships returning from the Pacific islands often brought artifacts collected by naturalists, explorers, naval officers, ship's captains, missionaries and planters.

The Museum's major exhibition for 1997 will draw on its diverse collections of Pacific artifacts collected in the second half of the 19th century. Through extracts from collector's journals and other documentary sources, the exhibition will explore how this material was collected and what it reveals about colonial attitudes towards Pacific Islanders. The exhibition will also try to present the indigenous perspective on the exchange of artifacts where this is indicated in journals and diaries.

Mask from the Purari River district of Papua New Guinea collected by Theodore Bevan in 1887

The exhibition is scheduled to open in late February and will run throughout the year. It will replace ***'Most Curious and Peculiar': Women Taxidermists in Colonial Sydney***, which runs until 31 January 1997.

Miklouho-Maclay Bust

As part of the celebrations held in Australia and Russia to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay the Russian Government presented to the University a significant sculpture of Miklouho-Maclay. The sculpture, by the renowned Russian sculptor, Gennardy Raspopov, was completed in 1987, and has since that time been in the Tretyakov Museum in Moscow, from which it was removed for its journey to Sydney. Made of pure copper, it will be mounted on a sandstone plinth (donated by Gosford Quarries) in Science Road, outside the Macleay Building, and will be unveiled at the end of October.

The presentation to the University was marked by a large and very successful reception in the Gallery in July. Mr Yevgeny Siderov, Minister for Culture in the Russian Federation formally presented the bust to the Chancellor, Dame Leonie Kramer. The sculptor's widow, Madam Anna Raspopova, was also present and gave a short speech about her husband's work and the making of the bust. Dr Daniel Tumarkin, editor of Miklouho-Maclay's *Complete Works* and a former Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Fellow, also returned to the Museum for the occasion. Several descendants of Miklouho-Maclay also attended this pleasant and memorable occasion.



(Malcolm Ricketts photograph)

Conferences

The 1996 conference of the Council of Australian University Museums and Collections (CAUMAC) was held in Adelaide. The Museum was represented by Vanessa Mack, Susie Davies and Julian Holland. Indications that positive results were following from the Cinderella Collections report were announced. At the AGM Julian Holland was re-elected treasurer.

Curator of Scientific Instruments, Julian Holland, attended the annual conference of the Scientific Instrument Commission held this year at the National Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa, Canada, in September. He presented a paper on the acquisition of scientific apparatus by the University of Adelaide, 1876-1900, based on original archival research in Adelaide and Britain. While in Canada, he visited several scientific instrument collections in universities and museums. The trip received financial support from the Ian Potter

Foundation and the University of Sydney as well as the Museum.

Crustacea of the World

The Macleays are well known for their extensive entomological collections, but the holdings of the Macleay Museum show that they were also avid collectors of Crustacea, the 'insects of the sea'. The crustaceans come in many forms, from the familiar king prawn and blue swimmer crab to the less familiar mantis shrimp and slater. The collection includes more than 3000 decapod crustaceans (ten-legs). These are the crabs, prawns and lobsters. All of these types of crustaceans were collected by the Macleays, but the majority are crabs.



Gnathochasmus barbatus

from *Illustrations of the Annulosa of South Africa* by W.S. Macleay (London: 1838)

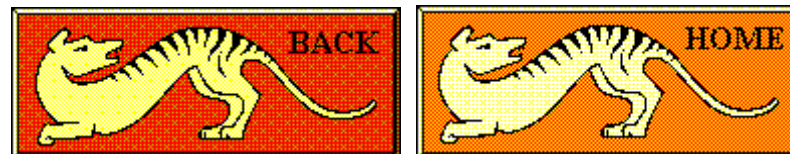
A typical crab, there is not. Some of the smallest and largest decapods are found among them. In the collections, there is a rather fragmented giant Tasmanian deepwater crab (*Pseudocarcinus gigas*) which in life may weigh up to 15 kg. This species is edible and supports a commercial fishery. On the other end of the scale is the 10mm pea crab (*Pinnotheres pisum*) which lives inside the shell of living mussels. The variety of forms amongst crabs is extreme. Swimming crabs such as the blue swimmer, are well suited for rapid swimming and burrowing in soft sediments with their flattened feet and swimming paddles. The box crabs on the other hand are no example of agility. As the name suggests, the body is thick and box-like. Their specialty, however, is food processing. They feed on hard-shelled snails which they

can crush with their 'can-opener' claws. Spider crabs are experts in camouflage. They often foster the growth of seaweed, sponges and soft corals on their carapace. A motionless spider crab in its natural environment may be near impossible to detect. Crabs of the family Parthenopidae may possess the most grotesque forms. *Daldorfia horrida*, for instance, is covered in knobs, spines, tubercles and sometimes even seaweed, that again serve as protection. Not all crabs of course live in the ocean. Many species of freshwater and land crabs occur in the tropics. These too are represented in the Museum's collections. As the subject for a study in variation, crabs are a fine example.

The Macleay collections are from the world over. Specimens were collected from the Mediterranean, the North Sea, Madagascar, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea, Malaysia, India, China, New Caledonia, Fiji, Hawaii, California, Mexico, Cuba, the West Indies, the Gulf of Mexico and the Straits of Magellan. Not all specimens, however, were personally collected by the Macleays. Specimens were also acquired through auction, exchange or through the offices of colleagues. Many of the specimens from the western Pacific, for instance, were collected by Dr Rainer on board HMS *Herald*. Original labels on specimens corroborate other records indicating that he visited New Caledonia and Fiji, for instance. A report on the decapod crustaceans held by the Macleay Museum is currently in preparation. The crustaceans in the Museum are important, not only for the type specimens held, but as part of the historical record of the Macleays' contributions to science.

Shane Ahyong

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334,016 Visitors
since January 12, 2000