
Macleay Museum News

Number 5, March 1995

New Director Takes Charge

The Macleay Museum is looking forward to a bright future with the appointment of a new director. Vanessa Mack took up the appointment on 13 February, after a gap of two and a half years since the departure of the Museum's former director, Dr Peter Stanbury. In the interval the Museum was reviewed by a Committee chaired by Professor Carrick Chambers. The Committee reported to the Vice Chancellor in January 1994. Its primary recommendation was for the appointment of "a new Director to develop and implement a Collections Policy and Forward Plan for the Macleay Museum that supports the University's strategic aims".

Ms Mack is well equipped to fulfil these objectives, having extensive experience in collection management at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. After a career in librarianship with special emphasis on collections and information management, Ms Mack took up appointment as Assistant Registrar at the Powerhouse, becoming Senior Registrar in a department of 27 staff. The Registration department is responsible for formal registration of all objects, their documentation and storage (including management of computerised systems), inventory control of the Powerhouse's entire collections, the movement of all objects (including exhibition installation) and management of loans. As a senior manager Ms Mack was involved in strategic and operational planning for the museum as a whole.

The Powerhouse Museum twice sent Ms Mack on study trips abroad - to investigate documentation and computerisation of records in museums in England and France, and storage and documentation practices in North American museums. Ms Mack served on the Committee of Review of the Macleay Museum in 1993.

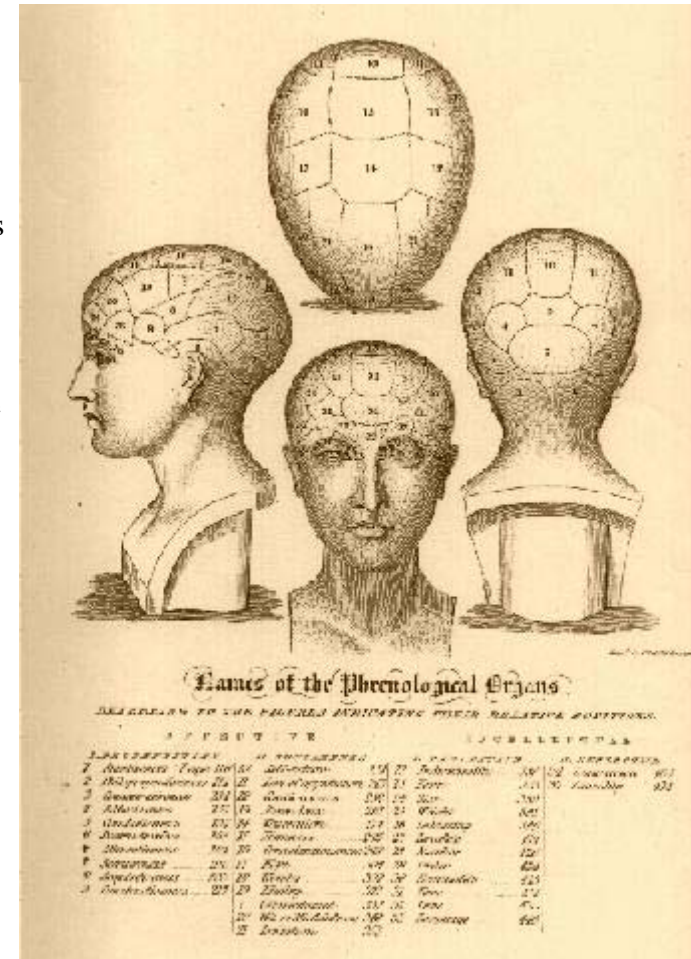
The University of Sydney has undergone an administrative transformation in recent years. The establishment of the External Relations Division, with responsibility for a wide range of areas linking the University with the outside community, led to the placing of all museums and collections within the University under the Office of Community Relations within the Division. This creates a strong basis for coordinating the diverse collections of the University and enhancing their interpretation.

Plans are underway for improved storage, documentation and display which will benefit general visitors to the Museum as well as research visitors.

Reading Heads

Phrenology - the idea that a person's character could be read from the shape of his or her head - is the subject of the Museum's current exhibition, [*Reading Heads & Ruling Passions*](#). The exhibition brings together a rich variety of early books, phrenological busts, readings and illustrations, to explore the rise of phrenology in the early 19th century and its spread to America and Australia.

Phrenology is often regarded as a branch of charlatanism, beneath the dignity of serious investigation. The exhibition shows that the rise of phrenology was closely related to changing social conditions in the 19th century. The 'science' began with Franz Joseph Gall, a doctor in Vienna. He dissected brains at the beginning of the 19th century when little was known of neuroanatomy. He also developed his 'cranioscopy' based on the idea that the brain is the organ of the mind and that different mental functions could be related to different areas of the surface of the brain. Gall then considered that the relative development of these different areas, or 'organs', would be reflected in the shape of the cranium, enabling a person's character to be determined by a reading of the head.



Gall's ideas were taken up and promoted by his associate, Johann Caspar Spurzheim. An attack in the *Edinburgh Review* brought Spurzheim to Edinburgh, where he attracted much support as well as criticism. His most influential convert was George Combe who published

numerous popular books on phrenology. Phrenology was criticised by religious conservatives for atheism, materialism and fatalism. With its emphasis on individual differences and innate talents (or defects), phrenology was associated with movements for reform in education, medicine, penal conditions and other social concerns.

The role of phrenology in Australia is reflected in the exhibition through several local phrenological readings and publications. Two deathmasks prepared by the sculptor and phrenologist Walter McGill are a ghoulish reminder of the fate of the bushrangers Captain Moonlite and Thomas Rogan who were hanged at Darlinghurst Gaol in 1880.

Reading Heads & Ruling Heads has been developed with the participation of a group of History and Philosophy students around a major collection of early books on phrenology acquired last year by the University Library's Rare Book department. The exhibition also contains material kindly lent by the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales; the History of Medicine Library, Royal Australasian College of Physicians; the Justice and Police Museum; and the Psychology Department Museum. Brian Hill of The Glass Stopper Antiques lent an original Fowler phrenological bust, and a very amusing cartoon of 1826 has been reproduced from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Readings and other exhibits were contributed from private sources. The exhibition opened on 1 March and will run until late August.

Notes

New Display Cases

With generous support from the Chancellor's Committee the Museum has installed four new display cases in the Museum gallery. These were supplied by Click Systems and will be a great advantage in setting up special exhibitions. Three of the cases are being used for *Reading Heads & Ruling Passions*. The old cases have been moved to the Museum foyer and will be used for a display interpreting the history and uses of the Macleay Building. This display will open in mid year.

New Guinea Archaeology

The Macleay Museum's exhibition on the archaeology of West New Britain, *Lukluk Bek Long Taim Bebo* (see Macleay Museum News nos. 2 and 3) is being exhibited at the National Museum of Papua New Guinea from 23 June for three months.

Donations

Mrs Alice Maclay, widow of Rob Maclay, recently donated some publications, newspaper clippings and other material relating to N.N. [Miklouho-Maclay](#), the Russian scientist and explorer who established the first marine biological station in the southern hemisphere on Sydney Harbour in 1881. Miklouho-Maclay (1846-1888) became associated with William John Macleay in Sydney. After his death Miklouho-Maclay's widow donated artifacts and natural history specimens to the Museum in 1889. Rob Maclay, Miklouho-Maclay's grandson, died on 25 May 1994. Dr Maclay, for some years head of the science department at Sydney Grammar School, had a long-standing interest in the Museum. He was foundation president of the Miklouho-Maclay Society and was an instigator and generous supporter of the fund raised in 1988 to establish the [Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Centenary Fellowship](#).

Mr G.D. & Mrs L.A. Mitton have donated film, photographs and 16 artifacts collected by their son Robert Mitton, a graduate of Monash University. Mitton spent 6 years in Irian Jaya working for several mining companies in the 1970s. His interest and love for Irian Jaya and its people led him to amass one of the largest private collections of Irian Jayan artifacts in Australia. He also became a collector and cultural consultant for the National Museum of Papua New Guinea and the Papua New Guinea National Cultural Council. In 1976 Mitton died from leukaemia aged 30. In 1980, the Macleay Museum received 436 artifacts from Irian Jaya collected by Mitton in the early 1970s. The *Lost World of Irian Jaya*, based on Mitton's letters, diaries and photographs, was published in 1983. The recent donation supplements the collection already held in the Museum.

Historic Photograph Collection

The Museum's [Historic Photograph Collection](#) contains approximately 50,000 images relating to Australia and the Pacific with emphasis on the University of Sydney and its environs. The images range in date from the 1840s to the 1950s. Research enquiries can be directed to Angus Patterson, who is curating the collection. Appointments should be made for research access to the Collection. In most cases images are available for reproduction. A schedule of fees is available. For further information contact Angus Patterson on (02) 9351 4200.

Volunteers

The work of the Museum is greatly aided by volunteers. At present the Museum is seeking a volunteer with library experience to assist in cataloguing its library. If you think you can help, please phone 9351 2274.

Spare Newsletters

Spare copies of the Newsletter of the Miklouho-Maclay Society of Australia, produced between 1980 and 1988, are available from the Museum. Back issues of Macleay Museum News are also available. For either of these contact the Museum on 9351 2274.

1994 Publications

(Co-authors not associated with the Museum marked with an asterisk.)

Horning, D.S., Presidential Address 1992: *'The Natural History Collections of William John Macleay as Reflected Through His Known Diaries (1874-1876, 1878-1881)'*, Proceedings of the Linnean Society of N.S.W. 114(2), 1994: 91-107

*Earnshaw, B., *Hughes, J. and Davidson, L. (eds), *Fanny to William, The Letters of Frances Leonora Macleay 1812-1836*, (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales and Macleay Museum, [1994])

Barkcloth



**Barkcloth from Santa Isabel Island,
Solomon Islands**

The barkcloth shown here is one of fifty-two barkcloths in the Macleay Museum. Indigo-blue in colour, it is decorated on one side with H-shaped motifs and designs possibly representing stylised fish in a deeper blue outlined in a reddish-brown colour. The barkcloth is approximately 160 x 110 cm. It comes from the Solomon Islands to the north east of Australia and is similar to barkcloths from Santa Isabel Island.

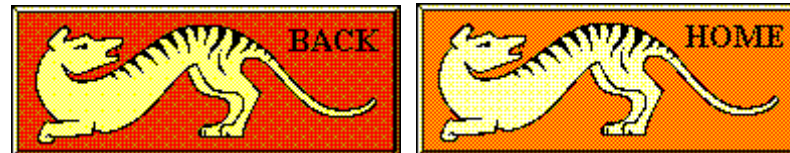
There are approximately 300 artifacts from the Solomon Islands in the Macleay Museum, the majority of which seem to have been collected before 1879. William John Macleay (1820-1891) acquired Solomon Island material from Dr James C. Cox (1834-1912), a medical practitioner and collector, and John William Brazier (1842-1930), a shell collector who also collected natural history specimens for Macleay from 1874. It is likely that Macleay acquired this barkcloth from Brazier who visited Santa Isabel twice, in 1865 on the voyage of the HMS *Curaçoa* and in 1872 on the HMS *Blanche*. There are other items in the collection which were collected on the voyage of the *Curaçoa* in 1865.

Barkcloth was traditionally used in several areas of the Solomon Islands for clothing, mourning garments, and in other ritual contexts. This barkcloth has been included in *Australian South Sea Islanders*, a touring exhibition curated by the Australian National Maritime Museum, which opened at Mackay, Queensland, this month. The exhibition will be shown in Rockhampton before coming to the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney in August.

Other barkcloths in the Macleay Museum come from Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, Pitcairn Island, and the Cook Islands. Of particular interest are two decorated barkcloths from Papua New Guinea collected by Arthur Onslow on Macleay's Chevert Expedition in 1875.

William John Macleay's [ethnographic collection](#) contains over 2,500 artifacts. Many of these items were obtained in the 1860s and 1870s from explorers and missionaries as well as from collectors on exploring expeditions of the Pacific. Macleay also employed natural history collectors in Australia and the Pacific region who sometimes collected ethnographic material which he subsequently purchased.

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334,016 Visitors
since January 12, 2000