Invertebrate Activities

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken in the Museum’s Invertebrate Unit in recent times. For several years the Unit was largely inactive following the retirement of Woody Horning in 1994. It has been cared for, but open only on specific request by visiting scholars and no loans were made during this time. However, it is once again a working collection, open at least one day a week, with Margaret Humphrey as collection manager and the help of several regular volunteers.

The Invertebrate Unit contains the oldest part of the original Macleay donation, including numerous insects collected in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The University has confirmed its commitment to retaining and maintaining the collection and a museum committee has developed a revised collection policy. The insect collection will retain all the original and exotic material. This means that new additions will be limited but this will allow more time and space to attend to the material already held.

After widespread consultation, and with reference to the donors, most of the modern (post World War 2), Australian material has been assessed and offered to other museums, in particular the Australian National Insect Collection in Canberra and the Australian Museum in Sydney. Rather than concentrate on detailed curation of select groups, the intention is to make the whole collection more accessible to
visiting taxonomic specialists.

Word is getting around and visits and loan requests are on the increase. Several ‘lost’ type specimens have subsequently come to light and are awaiting confirmation. These include several large African moths, an Australian butterfly and a small, rare, American beetle. The extra space achieved by the transfers will also mean the rearrangement of many of the cabinets. A central open area in the Unit is envisaged to facilitate visits by the general public and around this area will be positioned those exhibits which are most popular with our visiting groups.

Of great assistance is the work being carried out by our volunteers, both regular and irregular. Dr Don Herbison-Evans, Ms Jillian Riley and Ms Lynley Dougherty presently donate one day a week of their time to the insect collection, repairing specimens, relocating them in unit trays, naphthalening drawers and generally putting the collection in order. In this way they learn not only about the collection, but about insects in general. Ken Fairey, a University of Sydney Ph.D. student, is building a device to facilitate repinning of the many specimens whose old pins have broken or corroded. It is particularly important to have strong pins on specimens being lent to avoid damage in transit. Mr Barry Day of the Australian Museum has very kindly and expertly repaired extensively damaged type specimens for us.

Although there has already been much relocation of specimens within the collection for scientific purposes and this will continue, there are many drawers, and indeed, whole cabinets, whose contents will remain in their original positions. These specimens were already, conveniently, in a scientifically acceptable arrangement. History students therefore will still be able to appreciate the original arrangements and settings of a century or two ago. This is particularly so with the foreign butterflies, most of which are still located in the original Georgian cabinets brought to Australia by Alexander Macleay in 1826.

Several of these cabinets have recently been transferred to Elizabeth Bay House on a five-year loan, and placed in Macleay’s library. They were cleaned and conserved by International Conservation Services. The cost of this was met by the Historic Houses Trust as a condition of the loan. The cabinets are now looking wonderful.

**Director’s Notes and Jottings**

**Staff Notes**
I am pleased to say there are no staff changes to report in this issue. Geoff Barker has now been confirmed as Curator, Historic Photograph Collection, and works three days a week (which is all we can afford, not all that the job requires!).

**Fellowship**
The new Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Fellow for 1999 began at the Museum at the beginning of July and has already published two articles as Fellow! He is Dr Steve Wroe, a mammalogist, with a passion for marsupial carnivores, especially from Australia. This family includes the Tasmanian Tiger, of which we have some specimens. Steve is examining our skeletal collections with enthusiasm, and every day we
have a little lesson in dentition as Steve examines and demonstrates another animal skull from our collection. He is also working on a display which will use animal skulls and models to show how we can deduce the diet of a species from teeth. It will also examine the question of convergence, one of the major themes in the study of evolution, and how different groups of animals arrive at similar solutions to the same problems independently.

**Work Experience**

Each year we participate in the school work experience program, and we try to arrange that each student spends some time in each section of the museum and thus gets an overview of museum work. Usually, we also do a ‘swap’ for one day with the Nicholson, to give a wider experience of University museums. So far this year we have hosted five students, from both public and private schools, including one country student. We are always pleased when a former work experience student comes back to see us when they come up to University. We also hosted Claudia Attia, a student of Education at Macquarie University, who worked with Rose Stack.

**Conferences**

Our budgetary difficulties make it difficult for staff to attend conferences as much as we would like, but we have managed a few in recent months. Rose Stack and Stuart Norrington attended a one-day seminar titled ‘Musing on Learning’ held at the Australian Museum in April. Susie Davies attended the National Museums: Negotiating Histories conference at the ANU and Julian Holland attended the 6th Biennial Conference of the Australian Society of the History of Medicine, both in July. In September, Julian presented a paper at the Metrology Society of Australia conference, and in October will speak at the 2nd History and Philosophy of Science for NSW Science Teachers conference, to be held at UNSW. In September, Vanessa Mack presented a paper at a conference on Computers and the Humanities, at the Ethnography Museum in Osaka, Japan. In this case, all expenses were paid by the Japanese hosts.

**Publicity**

*Antiques in New South Wales* is published three times a year, and distributed free from many galleries and antique shops. In the last few issues, the staff of the Macleay have published two articles per issue on objects in our collections. This is a wonderful way to make the collecting public more aware of the wonderful things we house, and we are most grateful to the editors, Andre and Eve Jaku for their encouragement, and to Shirley and Chris Gearin who suggested it and have assisted greatly. The forthcoming issue will feature a short article by Anna Edmundson on the Fijian cannibal fork.

In another small piece of publicity to a different audience, one of the Port Essington bark paintings, collected in the 1870s, and which we believe to be among the oldest barks now extant, featured on the cover of *AGSM: the Magazine of the Australian Graduate School of Management*, Winter ’99 issue. The Graduate School of Management is now operated jointly by this University and the University of New South Wales. We also were the subject of an article ‘Magnificent Macleay’ in a new glossy journal *Scots: celebrating our Scottish Heritage*, No. 3, 1999, and our current exhibition *Adorned* was featured in the Spring issue of a new jewellery life style magazine, *Jewel*.

**Indigenous Heritage**

The Repatriation Project is proceeding slowly. We continue to liaise with several communities regarding the return of Ancestral Remains which have been deaccessioned. We are providing these communities, several in NSW, in Derby and in Darwin, with reports on Remains
provenanced to their areas. We have developed a good working liaison with officers of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council Ancestral Remains project and it is through the assistance of this body that the University’s project officers are able to meet with many more Aboriginal people than would otherwise be possible. Much work has been completed in the area of Culturally Significant material and we are awaiting the results of our consultations with the Northern and Central Land Councils.

Lighting
In the last issue we reported the installation of new track lighting in the gallery, thanks to the generosity of Professor Warren Julian from Architecture, the designer and organiser, and in-kind donations from Sylvania Lighting. We are still coming to grips with how to use the new flexibility offered by the new system. Following another extremely generous donation of the relevant lighting equipment by Peter Portelli of Pierlite Pty Ltd, again organised by Professor Warren Julian, new dimmable lighting was installed in all the showcases in August, and dimmer switches which operate on movement will be added shortly. When no one is in the gallery, the light levels in the cases will be very low, but will increase as visitors approach. This means we can have higher lighting in the cases than is recommended, as it will be on for a shorter period.

Home Page
Geoff Barker has taken over responsibility for managing the Museum’s Home Page: <www.uysd.edu.au/su/macleay/welcome> and has done a considerable amount to update it and improve the base on which it was constructed. (This is the underlying structure.) Check it out, especially the new sections on the Historic Photograph Collection, Geoff’s special interest. Feedback welcome, and work on it is continuing.

International Intern
Isaac Emrick, a student from the University of West Virginia, recently visited Australia as part of the Australian Catholic University Study Abroad program. Isaac spent a two-week internship with the Macleay in June. Isaac is studying anthropology and has a special interest in Australia. He is planning to return to do postgraduate study in Australia. He worked mainly with Susie Davies, Rose Stack and Geoff Barker on the ethnographic collections.

Donations
As ever the Museum is grateful for donations to assist us in presenting and promoting the Museum. Donations are tax deductible, and should be sent direct to the Development Office with a note that the donation is intended for the Macleay Museum. At a time of diminishing budgets the generosity of our friends and supporters makes a vital contribution to the work of the Museum.

Vanessa Mack

New Displays
A number of long-term displays have been installed or revised during the year.

**The Armchair Collector** is a new display focusing on William John Macleay’s role as a collector of ethnographic material. Although Macleay’s collection was one of the largest in private hands in colonial Australia, most of these artifacts were collected by other people. Even during the *Chevert* expedition to New Guinea in 1875, Macleay was rarely an active participant in collecting artifacts. His collectors and the ship’s officers gathered most of the *Chevert* expedition objects now in the Museum.

Macleay was essentially an armchair collector who gathered together more than 2,000 objects from Australia and the Pacific region over nearly 20 years. Aside from those items acquired during the *Chevert* expedition, he amassed most of his collection through purchase or donation.

A photograph of some artifacts from Macleay’s ethnographic collection, taken by Colonel Stuart-Wortley in 1880, provides the focus for **The Armchair Collector**. The objects in the photograph are still in the Museum and some of these are juxtaposed against an enlargement of the photograph mounted at the back of the display case.

Aboriginal paintings from Yirrkala have been changed over. The display - *Yirrkala* - now features paintings from the late 1940s by Waidjung, Wonggu, Dangadj and Mauwunboi, all senior men in Yirrkala. The visitor will obtain a glimpse of their country through the themes depicted in the paintings, including the Mythic Crocodile and Fire Dreaming, the Wild Potato, Fish and Fish Traps, and Thunder Man.

A two-part display, **Working with Microscopes**, complements the existing display of historic microscopes. The first case looks at some of the equipment and techniques associated with microscopy. With the development of microscope optics in the nineteenth century, microscopes became standardised so that objectives could be changed over. The display includes two objectives by Andrew Ross (1851) and Zeiss (c. 1890). The case also looks at polarization, drawing with the camera lucida, photography, microphotographs and measurement with stage and eyepiece micrometers.
The second case looks at microscope slide preparation techniques including section cutting, staining and mounting. A number of prepared slides by English, European and Australian preparators are exhibited including a stunning series of insect preparations by Darlaston of Birmingham.

The Museum has a small but varied collection of slide rules. These are brought together in *Slipsticks*. An essential working tool for scientists and engineers in the later nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth century, slide rules were displaced almost overnight by electronic calculators in the early 1970s.

The slide rule was invented in the seventeenth century. While the Museum does not have any so early it has an example of Saxspearch’s slide rule made in the 1750s. This was the first to be patented. Other examples on show include a large teaching slide rule for use in class rooms, a cylindrical Fuller slide rule with a scale 500 inches long and a special purpose slide rule for determining X-ray exposures for diagnostic purposes made about 1914.

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*Adorned: the Book*

*Adorned: traditional jewellery and body decoration from Australia and the Pacific*: first the exhibition, now the book. Anna Edmundson and Vanessa Mack have been working hard over the last few months to complete and edit this 112-page book, the first to be published in English on the traditional jewellery of our region. Anna Edmundson and Chris Boylan, of the Oceanic Art Society, are the authors, with photography by David Liddle, and Vanessa as the organising editor. The book will be the first on the important ethnographic collections of the Macleay, and if it sells as well as we hope, then we would intend to try and publish a similar book on some of the Aboriginal material in
the collection in the next couple of years. Many pieces in the current exhibition are featured in the book, including pieces from private lenders which have not been published before. The book will be launched in October. *Adorned* is available from the Museum for $39.95.

**The Decorated Ear**

Ear plug, Santa Ana or New Georgia, Solomon Islands, wood, pearl-shell inlay, seed
8.3cm (diam.) x 1.6cm. Ex E.P. Ramsay Collection, collected before c1894. Macleay Museum, 93.1.15. Photograph: David Liddle

Young child from New Georgia (?) wearing ear ornament

©Macleay Historic Photograph Collection Bowden 050
Decorating the ear was one form of personal adornment common in the Solomon Islands. European accounts from the mid nineteenth century record that ear ornaments of various sizes and shapes were made of different types of shell, including turtle shell and pearl shell, as well as wood, seeds, decorated bamboo, shark’s teeth and bone. Some of the most striking ear ornaments were the large cylindrical wooden ear plugs worn in the earlobe in various parts of the Solomon Islands.

Ear ornaments were worn by both sexes from an early age. The method used for piercing the ear lobe varied. Walter Ivens, a missionary with the Melanesian Mission from 1896 to 1909, recorded the following ways used to pierce the ear in the south-eastern Solomon Islands:

‘A piece of turtle-shell is bent into shape and clipped to the lobe. It eats its way through gradually and without much pain. Another way is to bore a hole with the bonito hook, te’i [tuna fish hook], but this gives pain. When the hole is once made, a piece of stick or a role of leaves is inserted. The size of this is gradually increased until it is possible to insert the wooden plugs, wo’uwo’u, so much fancied in Ulawa. Two inches in diameter is the normal size for these plugs.’
The Kwaio people of Malaita Island in the south-east wore long decorated ear sticks through their ear lobes on special occasions, such as dances. Such ear sticks were made from small pieces of bamboo over which a long strip of red dyed plant fibre (probably coconut palm) was wound around in a spiral. Strips of yellow orchid fibre were then woven through the red plant fibre strip to create an intricate pattern. Considerable skill and patience must have been employed in their making. This type of weaving is also seen on hair combs from Malaita Island made by the East Kwaio people, who continue to make hair combs and ear-sticks.

The ear-sticks shown here were collected by the Reverend Charles C. Godden (1876-1906), a missionary with the Melanesian Mission who was based in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) from 1901. In 1905 Godden cruised around the northern New Hebrides and Solomon Islands on the missionary vessel, the Southern Cross. Godden, in a letter he wrote to his sister Louisa (28 May 1905), noted that he bought hair combs and ear sticks from the people of Mala (Malaita) during the voyage. Godden was murdered in the following year at Lobaha, New Hebrides, by an islander who had recently returned to his home after spending years working on a plantation in Queensland.

Godden’s untimely death highlights the impact that ‘black-birding’ or the forced removal of indigenous peoples from various Pacific Islands to work on plantations in north Queensland had on those people. These ear-sticks are part of a larger collection of Vanuatu and Solomon Island objects collected by Godden between 1901 and 1906.

Ear ornaments from the Solomon Islands are featured in the Museum’s current exhibition, *Adorned*, which displays more than 200 items of jewellery and body decoration from Australia and the Pacific region.

Susie Davies

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