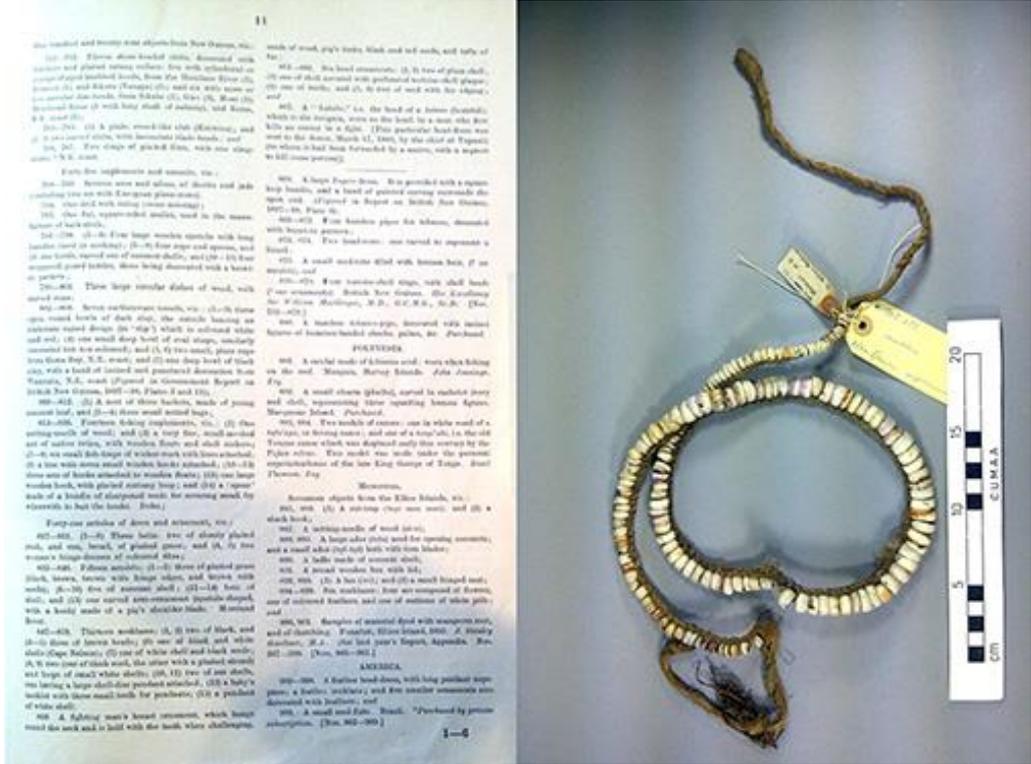




Finding MacGregor

Jude Philp, University of Sydney, 2015



Cambridge Museum annual report and necklace (MAA1903.233). Photo: J. Philp, 2015

Throughout museum history it is evident that the longer something remains in a museum without formal documentation or cataloguing, the greater are the chances of that object becoming 'orphaned' from its cultural origins and circumstances of collection. This is one of the key research issues that face the Excavating Macgregor team, as the sheer volume of the collections often meant considerable gaps occurred between the collections entering the museum and the collections' cataloguing. Added to this are the 'exchange' transactions that occurred in museums in the 19th and 20th century, a system that involved intra-museum exchanges of material. Extensive work by Michael Quinnell at Queensland Museum has made it possible to now investigate some of these tangles and gaps.

Following our first group meeting, Jude Philp travelled to UK in April 2015 to investigate Cambridge University's Macgregor material. The collection of just over 100 objects offers an interesting parallel to the 'official collection' housed in Queensland Museum, NMPNG, Museum Victoria, Australian Museum and the British Museum.

In 1898 Macgregor visited Britain and caught up with his old friend Baron Anatole von Hugel, then Curator of Cambridge University's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Von Hugel and Macgregor had known each other in Fiji. When Macgregor was working for the colonial administration, von Hugel was collecting cultural material from Fijians (see <http://www.fijianart.sru.uea.ac.uk/>). This collection offers insight into what Macgregor collected for his personal quasi-official use, as well as the shared interests of the shared interests of these men. The collection gifted to Cambridge included sensational items – such as those associated with Macgregor's peace-keeping efforts between the people from Dutch New Guinea he called 'the Tugeri' and the people of British New Guinea's Western Division. It also included everyday things such as jewellery, and material unique to his collecting efforts, such as clan pots from the Northern Division (today's Oro Province).

Although the gift included spectacular items it was not exhibited or even catalogued for some time as Macgregor's visit coincided with A.C. Haddon's research in British New Guinea. In 1898 Haddon, who would eventually replace von Hugel as the museum's curator, collected several thousand objects in British New Guinea and the Torres Strait. When new exhibitions celebrated the enormous cultural diversity of New Guinea's people it was predominantly Haddon's collection that was exhibited. Cataloguing this large collection had also hampered the cataloguing of Macgregor's material.

By Jude Philp, 2015

This blog was written for *Excavating MacGregor: reconnecting a colonial museum collection*. A University of Sydney, Australian Museum and Queensland Museum project funded by the ARC.



Australian Government

Australian Research Council