

Collections and Curators: South Australian Museum Anthropology from the 1860s to the 1920s

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In Australia, as in the rest of the Western world, the history of anthropology as a discipline is inextricably linked with the history of museums. During the early and mid-nineteenth century especially, interested scholars were preoccupied with the external characteristics of non-Western peoples and their cultures rather than with the internal dynamics of their societies. As the discipline of anthropology developed, this preoccupation was reflected in publications as well as in museum displays: human types, weapons and artefacts were catalogued and ranked in evolutionary sequences with little attempt to describe their cultural context. Not surprisingly, the rise of university-based social anthropology in the early part of this century meant that anthropologists turned away from the apparently one-dimensional character of museum artefact collections, and focused instead on field-oriented research among tribal societies. More recent efforts to revitalise anthropological studies of ‘material culture’ have met with some success, but it has taken the current wave of interest in Aboriginal art for anthropologists, in Australia at least, to reforge the discipline’s links with museum collections.

South Australia provides a particularly interesting case study in the history of anthropology, partly because of the extent and historical background of the collections housed in the South Australian Museum, and partly because of the activities of a distinct ‘Adelaide school’ of physical and data-oriented anthropology which arose during the 1890s and flourished particularly during the 1920s and 1930s.¹

I have distinguished six main periods in South Australian anthropology and associated collecting activity.² First, there was an energetic phase before the establishment of the Museum within the South Australian Institute in 1862 (not 1856 as is often quoted, as that was the foundation year of the Institute itself). Much of the material acquired in this phase left the country and some survives in European collections.

Second, a random, much less energetic phase followed, from the establishment of the Museum in 1862 to Edward Stirling’s appointment as Director in 1889, in which ethnographic acquisitions from places such as South Africa, Fiji or China

outnumbered Australian additions to the collection. The Museum was itself responsible for several important indigenous collections leaving the country in this period.

The first serious period of collecting and documenting Aboriginal material culture began with Stirling's appointment and forms the third phase. The fourth phase comprised a second serious period of collecting and documentation which began in the mid-1920s after an inter-regnum following Stirling's retirement. This phase was carried out with a sense of urgency and purpose which set Adelaide apart in Australian anthropology. It was heavily influenced by the activities of the University of Adelaide-based Board for Anthropological Research.³ The medical and physical anthropological interests of the Board's members was complemented to some extent by Norman Tindale's more ethnographic emphasis in his role as Museum Ethnographer. In this phase and the next Adelaide anthropologists were conscious of the marked distinction between their data-oriented approach and that of the Sydney school of social anthropologists trained under A.P. Elkin.

The fifth phase – which might be called the Tindale years – resulted in a proliferation of investigations by amateurs and professionals coordinated by Norman Tindale. This phase overlapped with the period of the Board for Anthropological Research's activities and shared with it an emphasis on the urgency of gathering data of all kinds about a 'disappearing race'.

The sixth, current phase again followed a rather fallow period after Tindale's departure for America in 1965. It is still too early to evaluate this phase, but already it seems to be characterised by a combination of different emphases in history, art theory, anthropology and archaeology, reflecting the diverse interests of an increased staff trained in several disciplines.

This paper deals mainly with the second and third phases, covering the origins of the Museum's collections from the 1860s to the 1890s, and briefly examines ways in which South Australian anthropology emerged as a discipline from its Museum base. It is worth drawing attention though, to the extraordinary curiosity about the local Aboriginal people which was shown by various scholars and amateur ethnographers in Adelaide during the first ten years of the colony. The explorers Sturt and Eyre both devoted large sections of the published accounts of their expeditions to the Aborigines. Trained and untrained artists such as George French Angas (who was later to take an active part in the formation of the Museum) and William Cawthorne

concentrated on Aboriginal subjects in their work in considerable ethnographic detail. The Lutheran missionaries Teichelmann, Schurmann and Meyer, encouraged to come to South Australia by Angas's father, George Fife Angas, produced grammars, vocabularies and ethnographies of the Adelaide and Encounter Bay groups within two years of their arrival. Much of this work was encouraged by William Wyatt, one of the first Aboriginal Protectors, and by Governor George Grey. Grey's influence was especially strong and had he remained in South Australia the total output of these early ethnographers would have been even greater.⁴

The largely untrained efforts of these early investigators reflected a high level of local curiosity about the new land, its natural history and its Aboriginal inhabitants. This enthusiasm found expression in the formation of The Natural History Society of South Australia in 1838. One of the first resolutions of this short-lived group stated that: 'Donations of books and specimens towards the formation of a library and Museum will be received by any of the Officers for the Society'.⁵

At least one important acquisition of Aboriginal material had been made by the middle of the following year, 1839. This collection – 'weapons and instruments used by the natives in the [Adelaide] neighbourhood' – was passed to the Governor in July 1839 'for the Adelaide Museum' by Mr Williams, the Deputy Storekeeper. It is likely that this material was bartered by Aborigines for commodities such as tobacco, tea, flour and sugar. Sadly, there is no evidence that the collection was even received by the Museum, an inevitable consequence perhaps of the fact that twenty-three years elapsed before Museum premises became available in 1862.

By the time the South Australian Institute was founded in 1856, the preoccupations of scientists and amateurs had shifted away from Aborigines and toward the natural sciences. The Museum itself was not officially opened for another six years, although the first Curator, a British-trained zoologist, Frederick Waterhouse, was appointed in 1860 and began receiving donations in 1861.⁶ Very few Aboriginal artefacts were received as donations or purchased during the first fifteen years of the Museum's history – a peculiar fact when it is remembered that two active members of the Institute's Board were William Wyatt, who had published a monograph on the manners and customs of the Adelaide and Encounter Bay tribes, and William Cawthorne, whose notes and sketches of Adelaide Aborigines rival those made by George French Angas.

A combination of factors seem to have been responsible for the long delay in

establishing a flow of Aboriginal ethnographic material to the Museum, and for the lack of enthusiasm shown by formerly active ethnographers like Wyatt and Cawthorne. Both of these men observed the rapid decline of the Aboriginal population around Adelaide during the first fifteen years of the colony. During this period Aborigines in and around Adelaide were discouraged from carrying their weapons, and in some cases these were destroyed by police.⁷ Most of the small collections which were made seem to have been sent to Britain or Europe. In the period before the establishment of the Overland Telegraph system and good transport links with remote areas it is not so surprising that Museum officials failed to see the potential for making the sort of collections which were now impossible to acquire closer to town.

Perhaps in the light of the disastrous effect of European contact on the Adelaide Aborigines, the South Australian Institute saw the Museum's charter quite distinctly in 1860. The 3rd Annual Report of the Institute Board stressed that

It is high desirable, and indeed, almost a national duty, to preserve for posterity the forms and semblance of the various singular and beautiful animals, birds, reptiles, and insects now inhabiting Australia, ere they shall have finally disappeared before the footsteps of the white man.⁸

No mention was made of Aboriginal material. By 1862 the Board was able to state that

... it should be generally known that the Curator is now able to receive any contributions and that he will be glad to communicate with any one who may be disposed to assist him in procuring suitable specimens, either of animals, birds, insects, fishes, snakes or minerals.⁹

The early Curator's Reports to the Institute Board show widespread enthusiasm for natural history collecting by local citizens. Here is an extract from a typical report of the 1860s, this one from June 1861: [Received from:]

Mr Francis [–] a dead pink crested cockatoo, a stuffed specimen of the Australian Coot, a Tasmanian Eel, a Lamprey and a dead young red kangaroo. [from] Miss Earl two very rare Portuguese coins of the fifteenth century. Mr Heutzenroeder a Brazilian silver coin. Mr Moore a crab from St Vincents Gulf. Mr. Flood the head of a Porpoise. Mr A. H. Davis three insects from the Reedbeds. Mr James Robin the head and snout of a species of Saw fish from Torres Strait.¹⁰

Waterhouse wasn't entirely happy with donations of coins – although these were later to form the basis of a remarkable collection. He couldn't prevent such donations though, or others which resembled 'curiosities' more than serious museum

specimens. In the period when the Museum was still finding its way it is not so surprising to read of an 1867 donation by Mr Honey, of

a tuft of hair from a lunatic white man named Arnold, found wandering in the interior 200 miles north of the Peake, supposed to have travelled from the Queensland District and to have wandered for upwards of 3 years ... without blanket or canteen and covered with small bluish spots.¹¹

By 1875 the records show that more ethnographic material had been acquired from outside Australia than from within the country. Fijian material (brought back to Adelaide by Wesleyan missionaries) figured prominently among these acquisitions, as did South African, Indian, and Chinese artefacts. There were some notable exceptions – George Taplin's collection of weapons and basketry gathered at Point McLeay, south of Adelaide, indicated the future role to be played by missionaries in Australian ethnographic collecting. And a collection of spears, stone axes, basketry and ornaments from the River Lynd in Central Queensland was an early hint of the wide geographic scope later achieved by the Adelaide Museum collection.

These were isolated examples however, and until 1877 the Museum still had no firm charter to collect Aboriginal material. This is in marked contrast to the Australian Museum in Sydney, which had gathered an important collection of Australian artefacts by the time of the disastrous Garden Palace fire of 1882.¹² Storage and display space within the Adelaide Museum was a consideration in restricting the growth of the anthropological collection, but not a vital one – in fact it appears that the Museum was already adopting the tactic during the 1870s of using its overcrowded quarters as an argument for a new building. The main factor appears to have been the general indifference towards Australian ethnographic material shown by Waterhouse, the Curator.

It took external pressure finally, in the form of a request from the Natural History Museum of New York, for the Institute Board to introduce a new policy towards collecting Aboriginal material. The Director of the New York Museum wrote in April 1877 asking:

to be supplied with as perfect a collection as can be procured of skeletons, arms, dresses & whatever illustrates the Aborigines of Australia for which all ample return would be made of American ... or of other objects that this Museum might require.¹³

The Institute Board members were keen to meet this request as speedily as possible and, on hearing from Waterhouse that he was unable to locate suitable

material immediately, they instructed him to report back on the cost of obtaining a collection for New York, as well as one for the Museum itself.

The immediate result of Waterhouse's enquiries was his construction of part of a network of ethnographic collectors which Edward Stirling was to extend across Central and Northern Australia during the 1890s and 1900s. Waterhouse's first step was to contact police troopers – in such localities as Overland Corner on the Murray River, Fowlers Bay on the West Coast, and Port Darwin – with an official request to forward artefacts to the Museum. Several important collections were supplied to the Museum by these individuals during the following years.

These collectors were also enlisted to provide natural history specimens for the Museum. In many cases it was Aborigines themselves who located these specimens and this fact was recognised by the Museum as early as 1861, when Waterhouse noted:

Mr Taplin of Point McLeay having also offered to employ the young Aborigines to collect specimens for the Museum, I have forwarded him with a supply of methylated spirit and some arsenical soap for the purposes of preserving the specimens. Mr Taplin having said that he should occasionally like to reward the collectors with some trifling sum, I have undertaken that any expenses of the sort would be regained.¹⁴

The role of Aboriginal people in making significant collections for natural history museums has usually been overlooked. It was an Aboriginal stockman working on Callabonna Station in northern South Australia who first reported the find of complete skeletons of the extinct *Diprotodon*. These were excavated and assembled for display and exchange with several major European and American museums by Stirling and his staff during the 1890s.¹⁵

Despite the early work of ethnographers based in most of the Australian capitals during the early and mid-nineteenth century, the attitude of Museum officials shows that Aboriginal culture in Australia was still perceived as homogeneous during the 1870s and 1880s. Although publications dealing with the variety and extent of material culture were beginning to appear both in Australia and overseas at this time, neither Waterhouse nor his successor, Wilhelm Haacke, were students of ethnology. Local variations in weapon and artefact types only served to reinforce the main theme – that Aboriginal society was savage and unsophisticated. This attitude lay behind the lack of any clear 'taxonomic' approach in ethnographic collecting and display. The impulse to rank artefacts in geographic and typological fashion, to document and then

fill lacunae, was apparent only in the natural history collections, at least until the appointment of Edward Stirling as Curator.

The evidence suggests that Waterhouse never really appreciated the need to build a representative collection of Aboriginal material. After successfully exchanging Aboriginal artefacts (as well as natural history specimens) with the New York Museum in 1877, he sent a further collection to the Paris Universal Exposition of 1878, consisting of Murray River and Western Australian artefacts. In early 1879 Waterhouse reported to the Institute Board that a consignment of '190 Aboriginal artefacts collected from Port Darwin, The Goldfields and Port Essington', which had arrived too late to be sent to the Paris Exposition, should be purchased anyway, but only to serve as material for future exchanges with other museums.¹⁶ The fact that this material (collected by Inspector Paul Foelsche) represented one of the earliest and most comprehensive collections of northern Australian ethnography yet assembled did not figure in the argument:

... ethnological specimens are becoming scarce and much required for Museums. Dr Haast of the Canterbury Museum has later applied for some and offers a liberal return ... in natural hist. specimens, incl. skeleton of an Ostrich, a young Giraffe, and a full grown lion ... [and] Dr Peters of the Royal Museum, Berlin, is also desirous of procuring specimens and would make a liberal return for any I could forward him.¹⁷

For Waterhouse, the Australian Aborigine was sufficiently defined, for museum purposes, by a 'set' of weapons and artefacts. Any excess, whether from the Adelaide vicinity or from the remote outback, was regarded as legitimate exchange material. By the end of 1879 the display cases in the Institute Rooms were overflowing with ethnographic material and Waterhouse was piling specimens on the tops of cases, pending their exchange.

Waterhouse successor, Dr Wilhelm Haacke, was also a zoologist. He showed little interest in Aboriginal material and appears to have shared Waterhouse's view that a 'set' of artefacts was sufficient for the Museum. It is worth examining just what Waterhouse and Haacke considered to constitute such a representative collection. The list of artefacts sent from Adelaide to the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1888 is as interesting for what it omits as for what it includes. There were 133 spears (pronged, barbed, plain and stone-headed), (no spearthrowers), 14 boomerangs, 5 carved shields, 6 clubs, 2 model canoes, 7 string bags, 1 large basket, 5 bark belts, 2 necklaces, 4 large mats, 1 fishing net, and 3 string bags for carrying the pituri

narcotic.¹⁸ This was a marked increase in range and type over I fists of a decade earlier, which did not include any women's artefacts and comprised mainly weapons.¹⁹ Despite this shift, the emphasis on weapons remained, and even with the inclusion of other material, the conclusion that Aborigines lived a harsh and meagre existence far inferior (in economic terms at least) to that of the colonists, was inescapable and is still pervasive.²⁰

Especially notable for their absence from these lists, and from International Exhibitions ill the nineteenth century, were all^y items which are recognised today as Aboriginal artworks.²¹ Bark paintings, wooden carvings, even sacred tjurunga stones and boards, which were to establish Aborigines as accomplished 'primitive artists' in the twentieth century, were in fact almost completely unrepresented in Australian museums during this period. Bark paintings did not appear in museums in any numbers until Baldwin Spencer commissioned a series of these in Arnhem Land for the Victorian Museum in 1911; wooden sculptures were not made in quantities (apart from the mortuary posts of Melville and Bathurst Islands) until a market for them grew during the 19⁴⁰s and 1950s; and tjurungas remained relatively unnoticed until serious anthropological research into their significance made them desirable to collectors during the 1890s.²²

In the meantime Haacke appeared even more ready than Waterhouse to use ethnographic material in exchanges to build the strength of the natural history collections. This practice did not go unnoticed in the local Adelaide community and there were several letters to the press in 1881, characterised by Hale in his history of the South Australian Museum as

Seemingly ... the first protest by the man in the street against undue exportation [sic] of Australian natural history specimens.²³

Haacke was replaced by Edward C. Stirling, a co-founder of the Adelaide Medical School, the first Australian politician to introduce a bill to enfranchise women, and a qualified scientist. Stirling had studied anthropology at Cambridge as part of his science degree and was well aware of the value which a large, wide-ranging artefact collection represented to the emergent profession of anthropology. It was his professional background and his links with Cambridge and Oxford anthropologists such as A.C. Haddon and E.B. Tylor, as well as his society connections within Australia, which enabled Stirling to transform the Aboriginal collection into the finest in Australia. In 1897, his chief rival, Walter Baldwin

Spencer, wrote of ethnographic collections in Australia that:

in Melbourne we have nothing at all and in Western Australia less still. Sydney even is very poor in Australian things while Adelaide has a great deal the best Australian collection and is especially well off in South and Central things.²⁴

Had Haacke's replacement been yet another natural historian only peripherally interested in Aboriginal material there is no doubt that Spencer's 1897 description would not have applied.

Stirling's success in increasing the Aboriginal material lay partly in his own field efforts. During 1892 he accompanied South Australia's Governor, the Earl of Kintore, from Darwin to Adelaide in a horse and buggy with museum collectors, and on this trip he met Frank Gillen, the genial, whisky drinking Alice Springs telegraph operator who was already becoming known as the expert on Central Australian Aboriginal life. Two years later, Stirling accompanied the Horn Expedition to Central Australia as the official anthropologist, and was able to introduce the expedition's zoologist, Baldwin Spencer, to Gillen in Alice Springs – this was the start of their tremendously significant anthropological partnership.²⁵

In the meantime, Stirling saw the potential of the Overland Telegraph network for increasing the ethnographic collections from various parts of remote Australia. He composed and sent a form letter to telegraph operators up the line from Adelaide, and within a few months was receiving a steady stream of material, from Strangways Springs, Charlotte Waters, Alice Springs, Barrow Creek and Tennant Creek for example. He had a similar response from police troopers as far apart as Borroloola on the Gulf of Carpentaria and the West Coast of South Australia. Other collectors were more diverse in their backgrounds: Clement Wragge, the Queensland Government meteorologist, contributed a large collection from Cooktown in 1901, the merchant D.M. Sayers sold Stirling a large amount of Melville Island material, pearling captain Henry Hilliard sent collections south from Broome and mining prospector St Barbe Ayliffe sent artefacts from the Ashburton River in Western Australia and from the unexplored Musgrave Ranges in north-west S.A. during the 1890s. Much of this material from remote areas had never been seen in museums before and is unrepresented anywhere else today.

Stirling superintended the move from the Jervois Wing to the new temporary North Wing (still standing today) during 1894 and in January 1895 the Museum opened for business in its own building for the first time, outgrowing it within the

following decade. In the meantime, Stirling had arranged the collection according by object type, according to the prevailing standards set by the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Stirling's method of displaying anthropological material was characteristic of a taxonomic approach which provided the opportunity to present the same type of evolutionary sequence which structured the natural science displays. Clubs, spears and boomerangs were arranged to show an assumed progression from the simplest to the most complex forms, just as within the Museum as a whole, one noted the progression from rocks and minerals, through the most basic fossil forms, to insects, birds, mammals, to primitive man, and to that cornerstone of civilisation, Ancient Egypt. By the late nineteenth century the Australian Aborigine was popularly accepted as the yardstick for human achievement in the technical and cultural sphere, and while Stirling made some efforts to present aspects of Aboriginal social life, the net effect of the Australian Court in the Museum was to reinforce the public's opinion of Aborigines as a simple, superstitious race, fixated by the daily search for food.

By the turn of the century the discipline of social anthropology was separating from the object-centred activity of museum ethnology. Australia had become the testing ground of many of the new theories being developed about primitive religion, kinship and social practice. For anthropologists and social theorists such as Sir James Frazer, Baldwin Spencer, Andrew Lang and Emile Durkheim, the Aborigines represented 'the earliest and most primitive surviving types of primordial men'.²⁶ The main issues, as discussed in such publications as Andrew Lang's *Secret of the Totem*, published in 1905, were concerned with the intricacies of Aboriginal kinship structures, religious beliefs, and the significance of initiation ceremonies and Central Australian sacred objects, *tjurunga*. To the historicist school of anthropologists, the possibility that these Australian phenomena held the key to understanding the origins of modern institutions such as marriage and religion, was exciting. A guiding assumption was that scraps of anthropological knowledge gained in the field could be fitted together like a puzzle, to solve much larger questions. With comparatively few investigators in the field, anthropological knowledge became jealously guarded in Australia, the more so as the perception grew that Aboriginal culture and beliefs were being dramatically affected by European influence in inland Australia. Fison and Howitt, followed by Spencer and Gillen, formed steady partnerships and maintained close, if complicated relationships with Frazer, Balfour, Haddon, Morgan and Tylor back in England. On the other hand, men like Roth, Basedow and Mathews worked

alone, excluded by the Australian 'establishment' Spencer wrote to Fison in 1901 of Mathews, for example:

That man Mathews (R.H. not the Rev.) has been plying everyone all along the [Telegraph] line with questions. Fortunately most of the people have taken no notice of him but he has got some information of a certain kind from one or two people some which we know to be erroneous. He is a nuisance and will do more harm than good.²⁷

Edward Stirling remained on the periphery of these investigations, but his appointment as anthropologist to the Horn Exploration Expedition of 1894 raised aspirations which he was probably never equipped to fulfill. He clearly regretted losing such an invaluable field worker as Gillen to his Melbourne counterpart, Baldwin Spencer. Stirling made several efforts to enlist Gillen in unlocking the 'secret of the totem' but was vigorously excluded by the Alice Springs ethnographer, who wrote to Spencer in 1894:

I shall not trouble to send Stirling anything in future except perhaps Anthropological things.²⁸

and again in 1896:

I note what you say about putting my information where it is likely to filter thro' to Adelaide, and I intend to practise reticence the native subject in future.²⁹

For Gillen, who was responsible for gathering several of the most important collections of Central Australian ethnographic material (now held in the South Australian and Victorian Museums), the distinction between the relative values of objects and ideas was quite clear. This is not to imply that either Gillen or Spencer had a low regard for ethnographic material. It was rather that they were swept with enthusiasm for the new discoveries being made about Aboriginal religious belief. In a letter to Henry Balfour in 1902, Spencer indicated that the collections under his care in the National Museum of Victoria also exerted their own fascination. He wrote of obtaining

... a complete set of Arunta material and sacred ceremonial objects such as will make your mouth water ... The ordinary public does not appreciate our collection but in years to come it is some satisfaction to feel that ethnologists will do so ...³⁰

Stirling was similarly affected, as his numerous letters to collectors across the country during the 1890s and 1900s reveal. He and his assistant director, Amandus Zietz, took every opportunity to increase the anthropological collections, bargaining with collectors and withstanding government pressure to limit the Museum's

activities.³¹ After Spencer's vehement rejection of the Lutheran missionaries Carl Strehlow and J. Georg Reuther for their contention that Aborigines believed in an All-Father God, Stirling capitalised on this division to acquire large collections of ethnographic material from both Hermannsburg and Killalpaninna Missions.³²

Stirling's experience in transferring the ethnographic collections twice, once from the Jervois Wing to the North Wing and then again from the North Wing to the new East Wing (which was opened in 1914), meant that he had handled, inspected and written labels for most items in the collection. He had also instituted a new registration system for each artefact in 1911, with entries for object type, donor or vendor, locality, tribe, and additional remarks. The new 'Australian Court' (later named the Stirling Gallery), which opened in 1914, contained over ninety per cent of the collection in an exhibition which was a mixture of dioramas, closely written information, and the taxonomic approach. This exhibition remained substantially intact for the next seventy years.

Despite the superiority of the Adelaide collection however, it was the Melbourne-based activity in the rising discipline of social anthropology, led by Spencer and Howitt, which saw the focus of Australian anthropology shift decisively to the eastern states around the turn of the century. The new interest in social anthropology led, as mentioned, to a gradual rejection of museum ethnology and its preoccupation with objects. As the American historian of anthropology, Susan Bean, has observed:

A fundamental change in the epistemological status of material objects was underway. The differences between peoples were no longer seen to inhere in things (for example blood and brain size, weapon and costumes). Culture was disentangled from race. The significance of artefacts was to be found in related beliefs and social processes.³³

Bean argues that, in the United States at least, museum ethnology became marginalised as anthropology itself emerged as a new University-based discipline, dealing in contemporary ideas and assumptions of cultural relativism rather than in objects and assumptions of evolutionist historicism. Interestingly, while this shift can be observed in Sydney during the 1920s, it did not appear to occur in Adelaide. The reason seems to lie in the fact that the dominant 'school' of anthropology which emerged in Adelaide was physical, rather than social, anthropology, and while it was university based, this school also had a very strong foundation in the Museum through Edward Stirling. As the first Professor of Physiology at the University of Adelaide,

Stirling had always maintained an interest in physical anthropology. His interest in the physiology and origins of the Australian Aborigine was shared by his Medical School colleague Professor Archibald Watson, by the Government Pathologist John Cleland (father of the more famous J.B. Cleland) and by William Ramsay Smith, who as City Coroner was arrested for what might loosely be termed 'body snatching' in 1902. The Museum had been receiving Aboriginal and other skeletal material through donation and purchase since the 1860s but it was the discovery and retrieval of an entire cemetery of Aboriginal bones exposed by earthworks at Swanport on the lower River Murray in 1911, which concentrated Stirling's attention on the subject. He deduced that as the collection contained a large number of youthful individuals the Swanport burial may have represented the result of an epidemic, possibly caused by smallpox transmitted along the Murray River from the eastern seaboard after European arrival. After ordering craniometric apparatus from England, Stirling began to analyse the collection and to gather data on Aboriginal burial practices for a publication on the subject, never completed.³⁴

By the time of Stirling's death in 1919 several other medical researchers in Adelaide had become interested in the scientific potential of the skeletal collections. Thomas Draper Campbell, later to become the founder and head of the Adelaide Dental School, based his Doctoral thesis concerning 'The Dentition and Palate of the Australian Aborigine' on the Swanport material. His interest in the wider ethnographic collection led to his appointment as Honorary Curator of Anthropology during the 1920s, until Norman Tisdale assumed the position in 1928.

In 1925, when representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation visited Australia to hold discussions about funding the establishment of a Chair of Anthropology in an Australian University, it was Campbell, Wood Jones and J.B. Cleland who were most active in stressing the suitability of Adelaide — both because of the current research into physical anthropology based at the University of Adelaide, and because of the legacy of the anthropology collections and their documentation left by Edward Stirling.³⁵ In the event, despite the clear interest of the Rockefeller Foundation in physical anthropology, the Chair went to Sydney, and the present strain of British-influenced functionalism developed from the appointment of Radcliffe-Brown in 1926, followed by A.P. Elkin and the students whom they both taught.

To some extent, Adelaide became an anomalous back-water of anthropology during the next fifteen years. Upon losing the Chair to Sydney, the Adelaide

anthropologists decided to form their own organisation – the Board for Anthropological Research – and to apply for field-work funds to the Australian Research Council on their own account. They used this money and support from both the University of Adelaide and the South Australian Museum to conduct annual expeditions to remote localities in Central Australia until the outbreak of the Second World War. From the Museum's perspective, the essential point perhaps is that and social data as well as artefact and natural history collecting were regarded as essential in constructing a picture of the Australian Aborigine as a product of his complete physical and social environment.

The assumption throughout this period, founded on empirical data and apparent trends, was that the full Aboriginal population of Australia would not survive beyond the turn of this century. The sense of urgency which this perception created is the primary explanation for the extraordinary amount of data which was gathered by the dozen or so men who made up these expeditions. On the 1932 expedition to Mt Liebig for example, which lasted for three weeks in August of 1932 record cards and photographs for 93 Aboriginal people were completed. Four hundred other photographs of ceremony and social life are preserved, eight plaster face and bust casts were taken, six wax cylinder recordings of ceremonial songs were made, 3000 feet of 16mm film was taken, nineteen sheets of crayon drawings by Aborigines were made, 320 artefacts were collected, and twenty one publications resulted.³⁶

Norman Tindale made a large contribution to these expeditions and the rigorous attention to detail which became a feature of their success was reflected in his work with the ethnographic collections at the museum. Unlike his Sydney counterpart, Frederick McCarthy, who was the first museum curator in Australia to be trained as an anthropologist, Tindale had no formal qualification in his field. However, the eclectic range of Tindale's interests during his forty-seven years at the Museum and his associations and links with a variety of amateurs and professionals in various fields ranging through anthropology, history, archaeology and linguistics, ensured that while the Museum never became a centre for the sort of academic anthropology practised in Sydney, it remained a place where the Aboriginal collection was constantly being used and reinterpreted. This collection begun half-heartedly by Waterhouse and Haackc, and transformed entirely by Stirling and his assistant director, Amandus Zietz, was to be transformed again by Tindale. His main contribution was to add social and historical context to collections which had

represented an ahistorical and unchanging Aboriginal 'tradition' to his predecessors.

¹ See Jones 1987.

² There is some conjunction between these phases and the phases which MacLeod (1982) has identified in the development of colonial science in Australia. Kohlstedt (1983) provides a closer treatment of the development of the period, but restricts her discussion to natural history collections.

³ Jones 1987.

⁴ Grey also supported the Museum with donations of minerals and natural history material from Johannesburg during the 1860s. Grey's formative role in the early history of Australian anthropology and linguistics has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged. See, for example, Service 1985: p.134.

⁵ *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, 15 Dec. 1838, p. 4.

⁶ See Hale (1956) for an account of this period. Waterhouse's Curatorial reports to the Board of the South Australian Institute also provide a valuable source. See GRG19/168 in State Records SA (SRSA).

⁷ A graphic record of this practice appears in Cawthorne's collection of watercolours, held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

⁸ Second Annual Report of the Institute Board, 1860. GRG19/355/2, SRSA.

⁹ Fourth Annual Report of the Institute Board, 1862. GRG19/355 2, SRSA.

¹⁰ Curator's Report, June 1861. GRG 19/168, SRSA.

¹¹ Curator's Reports, 1867. GRG19/168, SRSA.

¹² See Bolton, O'Donnell and Wade 1979. Like the Adelaide Museum, the Australian Museum in Sydney was very slow to make Aboriginal collections a priority. The first Catalogue of collections was published in 1837, ten years after the Australian Museum was founded, and only twenty-five Aboriginal items were listed in it. See Specht 1979: pp.141-42.

¹³ Curator's Report, Apr. 1877. GRG19/168, SRSA.

¹⁴ Curator's Report, May 1864. GRG19/168, SRSA.

¹⁵ Hale 1956: p. 56.

¹⁶ Curator's Report, Feb. 1879. GRG19/168, SRSA.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Curator's Report, July 1888. GRG19/168, SRSA.

¹⁹ The list forwarded to the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879 for example, included 74 spears, 5 spearthrowers, 3 clubs, 1 boomerang and two 'bamboo trumpets' (didjeridu). Curator's Report, Mar. 1880. GRG19/168, SRSA.

²⁰ This conclusion has been extensively modified since the late 1960s, marked by the application of the phrase 'the original affluent society' by Marshall Sahlins to hunter-gatherer societies. See Dingle (1988) for a summary of research in this area.

²¹ See Jones (1988) for a discussion of the 'discovery' of these forms by Europeans and their definition as Aboriginal art.

²² See Jones (1988) for a fuller discussion of this theme. One of the earliest acquisitions of ceremonial material to be mentioned in the South Australian Museum Curator's Reports was in 1878. In December of that year, Dr F.C. Renner forwarded 'some large flat stones worked by the natives found near Alice's Springs & from Mt Boothby' (Curator's Report, Jan. 1879. GRG19/168, SRSA). In September 1880, Mr Charles Tuckfield of Alice Springs donated 'a shell ornament used by natives at circumcision, 3 magic wands with carved emblems [and] 2 ceremonial ornaments used on the occasion of marriage.' Curator's Report, Oct. 1880. GRG19/168, SRSA.

²³ Haacke was also apparently responsible for sending a large proportion of the William Owen collection of Fijian artefacts (acquired by the Museum in 1860) to Germany. See Hale 1956: 47.

²⁴ W.B. Spencer to H. Balfour, 20 Sept. 1897. Spencer Papers, Box 4, no. 2, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. McCarthy (1982: 24) has noted that Stirling's effect at the Adelaide Museum from 1889-1919 was similar to that of Robert Etheridge at the Australian Museum (1895-1920) and of Baldwin Spencer at the Melbourne Museum (1899-1928). There is little doubt though, that Stirling's influence on transforming the Aboriginal collections was greater.

²⁵ Mulvaney evaluates Stirling's role on the Horn Expedition, and discusses the Spencer-Gillen partnership in Mulvaney and Calaby (1985).

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- ²⁶ See, for example, Service 1985: pp. 80, 140-41.
- ²⁷ W.B. Spencer to L. Fison, 30 Sept. 1901. Spencer Papers, Box 1, Envelope D, 4, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
- ²⁸ F. Gillen to W.B. Spencer, 1 Dec. 1891. Spencer Papers, Box 2, no.1, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
- ²⁹ F. Gillen to W.B. Spencer, 13 Mar. 1896. Spencer Papers, Box 2, no. 18, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
- ³⁰ W.B. Spencer to H. Balfour, 28 Aug. 1902. Spencer Papers, Box 4, no. 7, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
- ³¹ During the 1890s and 1900s the average price paid by Stirling for a boomerang remained at about four shillings; a spear, ten shillings; a shield, twelve shillings; a woman's bag or dish, four shillings; an armlet, threepence; a *tjurunga*, twenty shillings. These were prices paid to collectors. Amounts paid to Aborigines varied within a much lower range and payments usually took the form of goods in kind. Sticks of tobacco, pipes and metal axes were most popular. [Specimen documentation, S.A. Museum Anthropology Archives and GRG19/5 SRSA].
- ³² I have discussed this point further in Jones and Sutton 1986: pp. 19-50.
- ³³ Bean 1987: p. 552.
- ³⁴ Stirling did complete one monograph on the Swanport material. See Stirling 1911.
- ³⁵ For a discussion of the South Australian effort to have the Chair located in Adelaide, see Jones (1987).
- ³⁶ Jones 1987: 88.

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