
**Paradox and Paradigms:
The Changing Role of Museums in Aboriginal
Cultural Heritage Management**

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About the Author

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INTRODUCTION¹

Over the last two decades, museums in many countries, including New Zealand, Canada, the United States and Australia, have been forced to re-assess their relationships with the indigenous people of those countries. In the attempt to redefine their rationale and role, museums may face the paradox of moving away from their traditional object oriented focus in order to maintain or enhance their viability and reputation, even to the extent of disbursing some, or much, of their collections. Contemporary debates have largely focussed on the paradox itself, that is, on issues about repatriation, indigenous control of heritage and the role of anthropology in museums. However, in order to resolve the paradox, it may be necessary to question whether existing paradigms under which museums operate, particularly those of natural science (especially biology), require adaptation or change to meet new challenges. These challenges, in turn, have implications for the way anthropology in museums is practised.

The 1995-1998 Mission Statement of the Queensland Museum, provides a typical perspective of how museums perceive their role:

The Queensland Museum will collect and interpret material items of the state's natural resources, history and development, and use it for the enjoyment, education and cultural enrichment of the community.

This mission statement is consistent with traditional concepts of what museums do **S** collect, store and preserve, research, communicate and exhibit. This perception of the role of museums has an eminent heritage extending back to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific paradigms **S** specifically those of natural science. This mission statement is, for example, reminiscent of the aims of the Philosophical Society of Australasia on its establishment in 1821, when it stated that its purpose was:

to collect information with respect to the natural state, capabilities and resources of the country and the adjacent regions and to publish, from time to time, such information as may be likely to benefit the world at large (Moyle 1986:71).

¹ The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author. They in no way reflect the opinions of the Board or Management of the Queensland Museum.

This perspective of museums is now being challenged, particularly in areas of cultural heritage. Museums are no longer perceived as quaint scientific backwaters with insatiable basements and ancient dusty displays. Issues concerning the role museums play in indigenous cultural heritage management are part of a larger, more complex contemporary debate about the function of museums in general. As Ames (1991:13) succinctly states:

Museum policy can no longer make undisputed claims for the privileges of neutrality and universality. Representation is a political act. Sponsorship is a political act. Curation is a political act. Working in a museum is a political act.

Post-modernist critiques have expanded on this theme, arguing that museums are monuments to capitalism (Harrison 1993:161) or institutions of knowledge and technologies of power (Kahn 1995:324). Anti-empiricism, by challenging Western notions of science and empiricist notions of truth in favour of more inclusive concepts that accept the “multiple realities of the world” (Harrison 1993:162), particularly from other cultures, is an important force challenging museum traditions. Harrison (1993:162) further identifies conservative opposition to any attempt to re-interpret history, as an anti-intellectual force threatening museum traditions.

At a more pragmatic level, critics have argued that the centralist and monopolist tendencies of major museums have resulted in the appropriation of funds and objects, resulting in the exclusion of community-based approaches to moveable cultural heritage management (Mauldon 1992). This is particularly the case with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Critics such as Fourmile (1989, 1990) have argued that museum control of heritage is effectively a denial of the fundamental cultural rights of indigenous people. Not only are they denied access, it is argued, they are also denied the right to determine how their culture is portrayed and presented to the community at large.

The role of anthropology in museums is pivotal to the debates about access and control, for it is anthropologists who are often perceived by indigenous people as the agents of cultural denial (e.g. Fourmile 1990:59). Criticisms of, and questions about, the role of anthropology in museums have been around for a long time, many from anthropologists themselves. Freed (1991:60) points out that criticism of museum anthropology occurred over

100 years ago. Early anthropological criticisms extended beyond debates about appropriate ways to display objects, to more fundamental concerns about the linkages between cultural objects and complex cultural processes. More recently, with the rise of anthropology in universities, the domain of the museum anthropologist, and in particular material culture studies, have come under critical review. Freed (1991:63), for example, states that the study of material culture is often “derided as a dead duck **S** nontheoretical, nonprogressive, intellectually low-grade, and generally to be avoided”. Other contemporary criticisms of museum anthropology include the relevance of collections to research, non-museum or ethnology based research being conducted by museum researchers, and the relevance of museums to contemporary society (Freed 1991:63). Kahn (1995) has also argued that museum anthropology is still strongly linked to, and inhibited by, natural science paradigms, particularly evolutionist paradigms of biology.

From the tenor of these criticisms it could appear that museums, particularly those that practise anthropology, are struggling to maintain their profile, purpose, and even their place, in contemporary society. Such criticisms certainly highlight problems that museums need to address including whether museums should continue to do what they have always done, whether there are better ways to do what they do, or whether they are anachronisms best consigned to history books and fading memories.

A remedial strategy advocated by some museum workers requires a paradigm shift away from ‘museum as authority’ inherited from taxonomic biology, to one of ‘museum as facilitator’ (Anderson 1990a; Griffin 1993; Haas 1996; Kahn 1995). Haas (1996:56, original emphasis) argues:

In the face of demands to include more voices in decisions about exhibits and research, *museums have the opportunity to gain strength by giving up power*. They give up power in the sense of granting authority to Native people in making decisions about the use and accessibility of relevant collections, and they become stronger through the support and insights of the people represented in their collections and exhibits.

Anthropology has a key role to play in the process of facilitation. It is a role that has the capacity to revitalise museum anthropology, advocate a positive image of anthropology to a broad general audience and possibly even play a critical role in stimulating academic anthropology in new directions (Haas 1996).

Such a status will never be achieved, if paradoxically, museums continue to have a narrow focus on collections, collection-based research and collection-based exhibits. Collections are, and will continue to be, important, but only as the means to the end, and not the end itself. As Haas points out (1996:9):

However many new and interesting studies of material culture may emerge in the coming years, they will never be more than one subspecialty among myriad others in the fields of anthropology and art history. Studies of material culture, and with them the collections of anthropology museums, are not and never again will be at the core of anthropology.

and:

Although material culture is certainly a major component in all people's lives, material objects simply cannot reflect the richness and depth of those lives. Collections, no matter how vast and well cared for, will not reveal through research or exhibits the role of kinship in peoples lives, the complex human ecology of the Amazon rainforest or the origins of ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe.

Adoption of the role of facilitator may resolve the collection paradox for museums. Rather than be bound by the straitjacket of the past imposed by one particular perspective on the role of collections, adoption of a different paradigm will allow museums and their clients to experience greater freedom to explore directions and develop relationships in new and exciting ways. A paradigm change will only occur however, when there is recognition within the museum world of the pervasive nature of the natural science paradigm (particularly evolutionary biology) even within the areas of anthropology and social history, coupled with recognition of the need for multiple, alternative, and competing paradigms.

The following presents a brief case study of the role of anthropology in the Queensland Museum. Anthropology, albeit often only a rudimentary form of amateur anthropology, has been practised at the Queensland Museum for over a century. The Museum has, however, a long and robust tradition of natural science, an influence which remains as strong now as it did a century ago. An examination of the history of the Queensland Museum identifies, for the purposes of this argument, two distinct phases. The first phase, 1862-1986, is a period dominated by the natural history emphasis of the

Museum. It also reveals a complex history of collection and a legacy of unresolved issues, particularly concerning 'ownership' of cultural heritage. This complexity is illustrated by comparing the acquisition of human remains with other ethnographic material. The second period, 1986-1996, is associated with the move of the Museum to new premises. This move has had a dramatic impact on the functions and profile of the Museum. Significant gains have been made in areas relating to Aboriginal cultural heritage, including dramatic increases in the visitation and use of collections by Aboriginal people and increased Aboriginal employment and consultation. These changes attest to the possibilities of Museums as significant cultural institutions. These possibilities may be squandered if there is no recognition of the need to adopt new paradigms to meet new demands and challenges.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE QUEENSLAND MUSEUM 1862-1986

Personnel History

In many ways, the Queensland Museum represents an archetypal Victorian natural science museum in its approach to Aboriginal culture. The Museum was founded in 1862, when the Philosophical Society obtained permission from the Queensland Government to use the Windmill on Wickham Terrace for the purpose of a Museum. In 1868 the Museum was shifted to the Parliamentary building in Queen Street and in 1871 the Government took over responsibility for its operation. The Museum was moved to the Post Office Building in 1873, then to a purpose built Museum in William Street in 1879, later to an Exhibition Building in Bowen Bridge Road in 1900 and finally to its present location in the Southbank Cultural complex in 1986 (Mather 1986).

Records of 47 Aboriginal artefacts in the collections are to be found in the earliest Register dating between 1874 and 1876, however the 1876 inventory lists 171 items, implying the existence of earlier collections. Most have little or no associated information. William Haswell, the first Director, stayed only for a short period (1879-80) and made no substantial impact on the collections. The collections did not begin to expand until Charles de Vis was appointed Director in 1882. De Vis was educated at Cambridge and had varied interests in natural history, particularly mammals, reptiles, birds and fishes (Mather 1986:314), with a lesser interest in anthropology. Never-

theless, under his Directorship, which lasted until he retired in 1905, some 3,000 items were added to the anthropology collections. De Vis undertook no anthropological fieldwork and expansion of the collections depended on donation or limited purchase funds. For example, 78% of the items added to the Australian anthropology collections were from five collectors: W.E. Roth (Northern Protector of Aboriginals and Chief Protector of Aboriginals); Archibald Meston (Southern Protector of Aboriginals); Nicholas Hey (a Missionary); S. Buhot (Public Servant) and J.C. Coghlan (a grazier) (Mather 1986:206).

De Vis was not replaced until 1910, when Ronald Hamlyn-Harris was appointed Director. Hamlyn-Harris emigrated from England in 1903. He had been educated in England and Germany, and had a D.Sc. from Eberhard-Karls University in Tübingen, Germany, which he obtained for his work on cephalopods. He was, however, very interested in natural science and anthropology. Under his stewardship the Museum was regenerated; staff numbers increased, new collection management procedures were established, the Museum *Memoirs* started, the Library organised, displays revitalised and educational programs instituted (Mather 1986:55).

Importantly, he took an interest in anthropology, presenting lectures to learned societies and the general public, greatly expanding the anthropological holdings in the Museum library, fostering additions to the collections and publishing a series of anthropological articles in the *Memoirs* on topics such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mummification and similar customs (Hamlyn-Harris 1912), sacred sticks or bullroarers (Hamlyn-Harris 1913), and Aboriginal fish-poisons (Hamlyn-Harris and Smith 1916). However, he only undertook limited fieldwork, and the bulk of the Australian anthropological acquisitions at this time were as a result of his direct appeals to government officials (including Aboriginal protectors, police and school teachers), missionaries and the general public. His primary justification for increasing the collections was to ensure that as much as possible was documented about the Australian Aborigines before they died out (Mather 1986:209).

When Hamlyn-Harris resigned in 1917 his place was taken by Heber Longman, his deputy. Longman, originally from England, was a natural scientist with broad interests. His interest in anthropology, however, was limited. Apart from presenting public lectures on Aborigines and evolution,

and publishing one paper on human crania in the *Memoirs* (Longman 1918), he restricted his interest to maintaining and improving the exhibitions and documenting the collections. He did not undertake fieldwork and most of the additions to the collections were through donations, although one significant purchase during this period was a collection of bark paintings and other Arnhem Land artefacts from the missionary W.S. Chaseling. In 1937, the cadet G.K. Jackson, a naturalist who had developed an interest in anthropology, took over the day to day running of the anthropological collections (Mather 1986:212). He enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces in 1939 and was killed in 1943. His brief service represents the first employment of a person, other than a Director, to a position responsible for curating the anthropological collections and for undertaking basic research.

Longman retired in 1946, and his position was taken by his deputy, George Mack, who remained Director until his death in 1963. Mack was originally from Scotland, and had emigrated to Australia after the First World War. He was a natural scientist, with qualifications in zoology and geology, and was a noted ornithologist. Under Mack, the ethnographic collections stagnated, and important opportunities to add, or in other ways improve the collections, were lost. In 1948, Ursula McConnells' important Cape York collection was passed on to the South Australian Museum because Mack could not store it, would not display it and could not provide suitable avenues for the publication of her research results. During this period, L.P. Winterbotham established what later became known as the Anthropology Museum at the University of Queensland. Members of the Anthropological Society of Queensland became active collectors, many members lodging their collections or parts thereof, with this Museum, thus assisting it to become the primary anthropological museum in Queensland for many years (Mather 1986:213).

In 1953, Malcolm Calley, an honours graduate in anthropology, was appointed assistant in anthropology, but he clashed with Mack, and resigned after only four months. Mack did not replace him and other museum staff, primarily geologists, curated the collection and undertook limited archaeological fieldwork (Mather 1986:203).

Soon after Jack Woods was appointed Director in 1964, he made moves to appoint an anthropologist as Curator. In 1965 Eleanor Crosby was appointed as Curator of Anthropology. With help from an assistant, Crosby

began the daunting task of re-organising all the anthropological and archaeological collections. She undertook a small amount of archaeological fieldwork, and some research and publication. Crosby resigned in 1967, largely out of frustration with her work situation and the general lack of support, and her position was filled by Michael Quinnell in 1968. Quinnell, with initially one, then two assistants, commenced the task of registering the backlog and organising the collections, although still hampered by a lack of space, resources and facilities. In 1975, Quinnell's assistant, Roger Hardley, was appointed Curator of Australian Anthropology, while Quinnell maintained responsibility for the Pacific collections and the Australian archaeology collections. The division of responsibility was accompanied by a re-arrangement in storage with the Australian anthropology collections being shifted to the south wing of the Queensland Museum. The total staff of the Anthropology Section (Australia and Melanesia) had by this time expanded to four, with each curator supported by a qualified assistant. This was the first time in the Museum's history that the Aboriginal collections were housed and managed as a discrete unit. It was also a period when funding and access to grants improved. This meant that staff could undertake more fieldwork, and active collection and research work commenced in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Cape York and the Kimberley Region.

In 1985 Hardley resigned and Richard Robins was appointed curator for all the Australian Aboriginal collections.

Collection Histories

For most museums, collections are at the centre of the business of being a museum. The acquisition of specimens in museums is the result of many factors. Key elements include notions of science, prevailing scientific paradigms, the personalities involved and public attitudes. Until recently, patterns of acquisition in the Queensland Museum depended heavily on the attitude of the Museum Directors **S** all of whom have been natural scientists.

Collections can also closely reflect prevailing community attitudes towards indigenous people, and in so doing they also provide an important device to understand the relationships museums have had with indigenous groups. Thus attitudes towards Aboriginal people through time can be elicited by examining when and how museum collecting was conducted, who collected what, and for what purpose (Robins 1980). By addressing such issues,

aspects of the history of anthropology in the Museum can be further illuminated, and issues about cultural ownership addressed. Just how variable acquisition circumstances may be, can be illustrated by using examples from both the general and physical anthropological collections.

The current Queensland Museum collection policy stresses the need to acquire contemporary items, preferably directly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists or craftspeople. Where offers for the sale of old or potentially significant objects are made, the offer is passed on to the appropriate Aboriginal organisation or, in the case of material from outside Queensland, to the appropriate State Museum. This policy also applies to donations. In the past no such general collection policy existed. As the following sample of archival correspondence indicates, acquisition of cultural items was by various means.

In 1886, Kendall Broadbent, a professional collector employed by the Museum wrote to the Director of the Museum from Herbert Gorge stating:

I shall stay here until the middle of July, then I shall have to come into Cardwell for more foods and trade. Do you want any weapons. I can buy here, swords, shields, and waddies (QM Correspondence 1886/394).

In 1896, C.J. Coghlan, manager of Glenormiston Station wrote to C.W. de Vis:

Herewith I enclose a list of the things sold to your Museum. I have packed them as carefully as I could and trust they will reach you speedily and in good order.

I only regret that I cannot afford to present them to the Institution. As it is I make a mere trifle, if anything, on them, as I am always careful not to take anything from the natives without giving anything in return (QM Correspondence 1896/5089).

In July, 1901, Walter Roth, then Northern Protector of Aboriginals, undertook a reconnaissance visit of the Wellesley Islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria. When visiting Bentinck Island he made strenuous efforts to meet with the Kaiadilt inhabitants, who were at the same time making strenuous efforts to avoid Roth and his party. While attempting to make contact with the Kaiadilt, he came across an abandoned campsite littered

with artefacts. After describing the artefacts in some detail he states:

In exchange for the articles taken away for subsequent and more accurate description, I left several handkerchiefs and about two lbs weight of beads: tobacco is unknown to these islanders (QM Correspondence 1901/11679).

In 1911, Charles Whiteford wrote to Hamlyn-Harris, Director of the Queensland Museum from the Native Mounted Police Camp at Coen:

I may state **S** for your information **S** that the aboriginals will not part with their implements, unless paid in tobacco, or in some other kind **S** tobacco for preference **S** nor would I or Sergt. Whelan care to take any implements from the blacks without giving them tobacco in payment for same. The usual rate of payment is: half stick of trade tobacco for a spear, a whole stick for a womera, dilly-bag, etc (QM Inwards Correspondence 11/887).

In 1911, C.E. Gore, responding to a newspaper report, wrote to the Director of the Museum outlining a commercial venture to procure artefacts. He states:

I see by the papers some person writing about the scarcity of native weapons and curios in Australia saying that they are mostly sent out of the country those collected.

I have been 30 years up and down this coast carrying cargo and at times trading with the natives for tortoiseshell and pearls on my trips but in those days the "Macassan Proas" were constantly on the coast trepang fishing and so they got the bulk of the trade. Now for the last 6 years they have been stopped from coming and so I reckon there is a rich harvest to be reaped now. My idea is as follows and backed by 30 years experience. Two white men besides myself, three blackboys from Port Essington who speak good english, are good boatmen and also speak "Malay". I have always carried them and Malay is the universal language all along the coast from here to McCarthur River. I thought you might know of a couple of white men who would go into the spec if so you would be doing me a great favour by speaking to them about it.

I enclose a rough estimate of the expense of said trip.

Hire of lugger for 6 months at 8 per month sails and gear only	£ 48.00
three boys at 1 per month. said boys have to buy their own tobacco out of wages	£ 18.00

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rations for trip	£ 50.00
trade for natives	£ 30.00

Items for trade
16 lbs of beads
2 doz cheap tomahawks
12 doz wooden pipes
50 lbs of tobacco twist stick 26 to the lb
100 yards turkey red
2 gross matches
1 gross clay pipes
10 lbs coloured wool in skeins
4 doz elastic coloured belts

Everything of the commonest and cheapest class.

... What with pearls, tortoiseshell curio weapons etc. I cannot see its possible to fail being remunerative (QM Inwards Correspondence 11/288).

In 1912, the Deputy Chief Protector of Aboriginals wrote to the Director of the Queensland Museum in response to a rejection by the Museum to a request to purchase Aboriginal artefacts:

Sir,

I am equally sorry that your Department has not seen fit to approve of the small expenditure necessary for the purchase of the native implements and ornaments.

As the natives themselves fixed the prices at which they desired to sell the artefacts, I am afraid I cannot suggest any other way by which they might be retained for the Museum, which is really the most suitable place for them.

Yours Obediently

Deputy Chief Protector of Aboriginals (QM Inwards Correspondence 12/850).

In 1915, A. Atkinson wrote to Hamlyn-Harris (the Director of the Queensland Museum) offering for sale two eel bone charms:

how I got them was this way. The aborigine had them in a dillybag in or near Atherton, he was willing to sell the bag to the man but not the charms which I think they called "Ebak Kee", so the fellow took them or

commandeered them, he said he paid for them, I believe he did, he said it was the only way he could get them, I bought them from him anyhow, it is the first I have seen of them, I have not offered them to anyone else, they are only small things and you can have them at 2/6 each if you want them, the use of them was told me by the man that got them from the nigger, he got the nigger to explain to him before he annexed them (QM Inwards Correspondence 15/00851).

As can be seen from this brief selection of correspondence, the means whereby the Museum acquired items varies considerably; from legitimate sale to outright theft. The point has to be made that in many cases the transaction between Aboriginal owner and purchaser was a legitimate one, and one that was often part of a more complex social interplay. In other cases, objects were deposited in museums after a complex series of events, many of which may have had nothing to do with an indigenous person after the initial creation of the object. That is, the object may have acquired as much or more significance for non-indigenous people than the original owner.

The possession of human remains in museums, particularly indigenous remains, is a more contentious issue. There can be little doubt that these collections can be scientifically important, and have a major role in such studies as the documentation of human diversity and origins. There are, however, issues relating to their collection and use that transcend arguments about their current scientific value. Specifically, these are the manner in which they were acquired, the manner and outcomes of the scientific research done on them, and, the lack of indigenous control over the collections and involvement in research.

Throughout its history the Queensland Museum has acquired just over 500 sets of remains, about two thirds of them Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Figure 1 compares the acquisition of Aboriginal with non-Aboriginal remains over time.

The influence of Directors, particularly during the first 100 years of the Museum's existence can be clearly illustrated with reference to Figure 1. During de Vis' Directorship, more Pacific Islander remains were acquired than Aboriginal. This is a trend consistent with the rest of the collection and represents an interest in the exotic 'otherness' of the Pacific. De Vis' directorship was followed by a short period when there was no Director, and



Figure 1. Comparison of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal skeletal remains acquired by the Queensland Museum, 1870-1990.

no collection was undertaken. This is succeeded by an active collection period initiated by Hamlyn-Harris, in turn followed by the slightly less vigorous but more sustained effort of Heber Longman. George Mack showed no interest in acquiring things anthropological and the collection remained static. In the late 1960s, relics legislation resulted in the Museum acquiring some remains followed by a policy of non-acquisition. The last small increase is as a result of people and institutions cleaning out their cupboards and store rooms and depositing them with the Museum to be included in the repatriation process.

During the Directorships of Haswell and de Vis, a review of the correspondence gives an impression of frenetic collecting in order to compile an inventory and to scientifically describe the natural history of a new and exciting country. They appealed widely for contributions to the collections, contributions which included Aboriginal remains. Neither of these Directors devoted much, if any, time to study of the remains once they had acquired them.

W.T. Birkbeck wrote from Colloy to Haswell in 1880:

Kindly let me know by return what you think of it as you must admit it is not a very nice thing to go digging up dead bodies (in fact body snatching) and I shall have to see that there are no darkies about when it is done else I shall incur their enmity. As I have lived 7 years in perfect amity with them and they have treated me very well during our intercourse, I feel a repugnance to hurt their feeling willingly. Tho at the same time I am aware it is to further the interests of science (QM Correspondence, 18 October 1880).

In 1882, C.T. Bedford wrote to de Vis:

I notice by your circular letter to the B.M. that the Museum wants Aboriginal skulls. Had I known this I could have brought you in several from my last trip out as I came across several Native Police grave yards (or rather I took them to be such) with splendid specimens of skulls lying about (QM Correspondence 1882/195).

During this period, exchanges were a common way of enlarging collections. Again, indigenous people were treated as natural history specimens. The letter from A. Morton to de Vis is not atypical for this period. He asks of de Vis:

How are you off for Tasmanian Tigers. If you would like one or two I may be able to send you a good example and I think later on I may be able to send you a skull of a tasmanian aboriginal which you may possibly not have in your museum. We have not got a skull of a Queensland Native considering the large number I have collected in the Torres Strait. I often wish I had a few of them. However, anything you can make up will be greatly received (QM Correspondence, 24 April 1889).

In 1889, James Dall wrote to de Vis:

Dear Sir, I have forwarded from here a shipment to Brisbane 1 case containing
1 skeleton of Maori
a lot of Moa bones S all I have been able to get
1 skeleton of a Huia
1 skeleton of a Blue duck (QM Correspondence 1889/2820).

Hamlyn-Harris was concerned with what he considered was the demise of Aboriginal people, particularly before as much information as possible was collected from and about them. In a newspaper article in 1914 (Anonymous 1914) he was quoted as saying of the Tasmanian Aborigines that:

It was a standing disgrace that this race had been allowed to die out without having obtained any information which would help in the study of anthropology, and he hoped the same would not be done with regard to the present Australian Aborigines.

It is worth noting that the disgrace lay not with the dying out of Aboriginal people, but with the failure to collect the information. To obtain anthropological information, he pursued an active armchair collection policy and wrote circular letters to government officials, missionaries and interested individuals throughout Queensland. In 1916, for example, he wrote:

We are now making a special effort to obtain and conserve all articles which are in any way associated with Australian Aborigines and we would greatly appreciate any help in this direction ... The actual bones of the native are also of the greatest scientific interest. As the Aborigines are rapidly dying out in almost every district it is imperative that we get together all possible records in connection with them (Mather 1986:209).

Hamlyn-Harris' pleas elicited some startling responses, not the least of which was from F. Story of Alroy Downs in the Northern Territory, in 1915. In a letter to Hamlyn-Harris referring to an accompanying photograph he states:

The nig I marked is the official rainmaker and I dont think it would be hard to cure him and send him along when he dies which will be soon now (QM Inwards Correspondence 15/49) (NB The Queensland Museum did not acquire these remains).

Although Hamlyn-Harris was an active collector, and published relatively extensively on Aboriginal culture, he did not research any of the human remains, although he produced a descriptive article on mummies and cylinder burials (Hamlyn-Harris 1912), most of which had been collected before he was Director.

Heber Longman continued to build the collections through appeals in the newspapers and to various individuals. Unlike previous Directors, whose aims appear to have been to acquire specimens to expand the collections (although for different reasons), Longman was, for a time, interested in human evolution. He espoused his ideas on the evolutionary status of Aborigines in newspaper and scientific articles, often mixing dubious biological arguments with sociocultural ones.

To give an illustration, in an article for the *Memoirs* describing an Aboriginal cranium he wrote:

A male aboriginal cranium (Q.E. 16/1157), from an unknown locality - unfortunately - illustrates a palate with approximately parallel sides, recalling those of anthropoid apes (Plate 1). This characteristic has, of course, been previously noted for certain Australian and Tasmanian crania, but in this specimen it is present to a surprising degree (Longman 1918).

In an article in the *Brisbane Courier* in 1925, he is reported as stating that:

The Aborigines had remarkably thick skulls, and their brains were less developed in the frontal and parietal regions than those of Europeans. In some respects the aborigines were more nearly allied to the extinct Neanderthal, than to modern Europeans (Anonymous 1925).

and that

In their primitive condition ... the aboriginals were stone age men, but we must remember that some three hundred generations ago, our ancestors used stone axes, arrow-heads, knives and hammers. The Australian aborigines were devoid of art except for rough carvings on wood, stencils on walls and roofs of caves, and crude decorative material (Anonymous 1925).

For the Queensland Museum, the common thread that binds these facets together is not archaeology or anthropology, but natural history. Hamlyn-Harris exemplified a common attitude of his time towards Aboriginal people when he was reported as stating in a public lecture that “it was always the spirit of a thing which the native worshipped, not the thing itself. Thus primitive man personified and symbolised Nature” (Anonymous 1914:21).

It is all too easy to criticise the work of predecessors with the benefit of hindsight. They were, after all, men of their time. We might also contemplate whether Directors with other than natural science backgrounds would have behaved differently. Yet, in the end, it has to be acknowledged that Aboriginal people were commonly regarded as specimens of nature. They were collected as natural history specimens, described as them, stored as them, and often displayed as them.

In summary, it can be argued that during this period, anthropology as a discipline was incidental to the function of the Museum as a natural history museum. Many of those responsible for the acquisition and maintenance of the collection were natural historians with little training in anthropology, archaeology or history. While appeals are often made to the 'scientific' nature and value of the ethnographic collection, there are a number of factors that argue against this perception. The collections have been largely compiled in the 'armchair science' tradition. Little active collection was done by staff working in the field with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Much of the collection was acquired in an incidental manner by government officials, missionaries or graziers. As a consequence, the documentation for much of the collection is very poor. There are few items, for example, which have the name of the individuals who made them, a precise locality, or a language name, let alone more complex information relating to social affiliations and networks.

The collections are relatively small, and over the 120 year period of acquisition less than 10,000 items have been collected. Many areas of Queensland are poorly represented, if at all. Most of the collections relating to Queensland Aborigines are held in interstate museums (Fourmile 1990).

This *ad hoc* approach to collecting has resulted in major biases in the geographical representation of artefacts. There are, for example, few artefacts represented in the collection from southeast Queensland, while there is an extensive collection from parts of Cape York Peninsula. There was, however, no consistent collection from particular localities over time. While relatively good collections may exist for some localities in Cape York, they represent short and widely separated periods of time.

There was a general emphasis on collecting only artefacts that represented 'the real' but fast dying out Aborigine. There was no recognition of Aboriginal societies as adaptable and enduring, and consequently objects that reflect change and adaptation were rarely added to the collection. Prior to 1986, contemporary collecting focused on 'traditional' items.

Most of those responsible for managing and adding to the collections were men. Women donors or collectors are in the minority. As a consequence there is a significant gender bias in the objects represented in the collection. While there is a reasonable representation for some items, such as baskets,

the diversity of objects representing womens' technology, artistic traditions and material culture is impoverished.

A CONTEMPORARY HISTORY 1986 - PRESENT

In 1986, the collections were moved to the new (and present) premises at the Cultural Centre at South Bank. The move was significant for a number of reasons. It meant that the collections could be properly housed, organised and assessed in a dedicated environment for the first time in their history. Conservation work, both preventative and remedial could be undertaken. Better access was provided to the collections for researchers and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Volunteer labour could be accommodated, and schemes to use this labour were implemented, thus enabling major collection management projects to be undertaken. Most importantly, the profile of the Museum was raised, resulting in increasing public, and particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, demands and expectations. This meant profound changes to the way the Museum operated, and for the first time collaborative ventures were undertaken with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to produce displays and to improve the documentation of the collection.

The area with the greatest potential for impact was in the displays in the public gallery. To ensure an Aboriginal presence in the gallery, a display project on the Jirrbal language speakers in the northeast Queensland rainforest was initiated in conjunction with the Jumbun community. The display illustrated aspects of past and contemporary life, and was completed with the full co-operation of the Jumbun community, which has led to the establishment of lasting relationships between the community and the Museum.

In 1988, Judith Bartlett, then Assistant Curator of Anthropology, initiated a selling exhibition entitled "Ageless Art". Ten communities and individuals from throughout Queensland and northern Australia were invited to contribute to a selling display designed to illustrate the diversity and dynamic nature of Aboriginal art in contemporary Australia. Works from communities such as Maningrida and Utopia, and individuals such as Ron Hurley, Banduck Marika and Thancoupie were included. Profits from the exhibition were used to purchase items for the collection. "Ageless Art" illustrated the increasing overlap between art gallery and museum, and demonstrated that

they are not mutually exclusive in their display and collection content. It also demonstrated the importance of the use of art to document contemporary aspects of Aboriginal Australia.

This was followed in 1989 by another innovative exhibition, again initiated by Bartlett, entitled “You Came to my Country But Didn’t Turn Black”. The centrepiece of this exhibition was a play based on selected works of Oodgeroo Noonuckle and Maureen Watson. Commissioned art works, based on the themes of the play, were hung around the edge of the display space, framing a small theatre, constructed in the centre of the space, in which the play was performed.

In 1991, Michael Aird, then a freelance curator with a particular interest in photographs, approached the Museum with a proposal to mount a photographic exhibition contrasting Aboriginal perceptions of themselves with those of non-Aborigines, around the turn of the century. This exhibition, entitled “Portraits of Our Elders”, used photographs from the collections of the John Oxley Library, the Museum and Aird’s own collection, which included many family photographs. This exhibition has become a travelling exhibition and has travelled extensively throughout the country. It was also the basis for a book by the same name (Aird 1993).

In 1990, an interim Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee was established to advise the Museum Board on policy issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. A permanent committee was formed in 1993, with Bob Anderson as Chairperson, a Ngugee (Moreton Island) descendant. It is comprised of community and government representatives from throughout Queensland and the Torres Strait. In 1994, in response to community pressure, the Government appointed an Aboriginal person to a position on the Board of Trustees.

In 1995, the collection responsibilities were split. An Australian Archaeology Section was created, with Robins taking on responsibility for all the archaeology collections in the Museum. A new Section, called the Aboriginal Studies Section, was created, with the intention of fostering conditions that saw an increasing emphasis on Aboriginal people documenting and managing their own history and culture. Michael Aird was appointed as the first Curator of this Section.

Aird is now placing emphasis on providing better access to collections, and on increasing Aboriginal understanding about what Museums do and why. This has been accompanied by an active program to repatriate human remains and secret/sacred objects held in the collection, and to initiate discussions about care and control of other parts of the collection. In addition, the historical photographs have been re-organised, and are now more accessible. As a result of these initiatives, Aboriginal visitation to the collection is increasing. In 1984, only about 20 Aboriginal people visited the collection storage areas compared to over 1,000 in 1995.

The emphasis of the collection has moved away from one of collecting old or 'traditional' items, although these are still acquired through donation. The collection emphasis is now on documenting aspects of contemporary Aboriginal Australia, particularly from Queensland, in a variety of forms. Included in the collection now are photographs, posters, t-shirts, flags, pottery, carvings, prints on paper, paintings on paper and bark, linocuts, drawings, and prints on textiles. The intention has not been to change the Museum into an art gallery, but rather to recognise that Aboriginal society is changing, while retaining its unique and distinctive elements. The role of the Museum is to document this and explain it to the wider society, using a range of appropriate material. As long as Aboriginal social perspectives are reflected through these various art forms, there will always be a place for them in the Museum's collections.

DISCUSSION

The contrast between the first 124 with the last 10 years of the Museum's history is marked. During much of the former, Aboriginal people were treated as part of the fauna, and a doomed part at that. They were studied, but only in an *ad hoc* and amateurish way, or they were ignored. The emphasis was on collecting 'traditional artefacts', while alternative, contemporary perspectives were ignored.

During the last decade the Museum has moved significantly away from the trends of previous years. Consultation in a number of areas has increased dramatically, and the mechanisms for consultation improved. Collection and research emphases have changed, and Aboriginal control over crucial parts of their cultural heritage has improved.

These changes have occurred largely outside the dominant natural science paradigm, and serve as an illustration of the effective role museums can play as facilitator. The following points restate the argument for the need for museums to adopt new paradigms to meet new demands:

- (1) Many museum workers, particularly those in the cultural heritage area, argue that museums are essentially about people, not about objects. According to this argument, a fundamental feature of a museum is the social relations it creates with communities through interaction with them. This is particularly so in the case of Aboriginal people (Anderson 1990a, 1990b).
- (2) The primacy of the object can be further questioned when we consider that, unlike the case of specimens in natural science, objects made by people can be interpreted as symbols with an infinite variability of meaning. In this framework, the interpretation of social contexts can be as important, or more important, than the object itself. There is little room in a modern museum for the descriptive material culture studies that characterised much of anthropology at the turn of the century and which formed the rationale for collection at that time. This role stands in direct contrast to the museum role in the field of natural science where systematic taxonomic investigations are seen as paramount and, in some areas, are undertaken almost exclusively by museums.
- (3) Museums traditionally have had strong associations with notions of the past. Museums are perceived as places where old things are collected, stored, studied and displayed. This perception is exacerbated by the taint of Social Darwinism reflected in early museum research and collection which saw Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as indicative of a lower stage of development. Museums are really about the present in at least three important ways:
 - ! The objects exist in the present, and their interpretation demands a contemporary perspective (Robins 1990).
 - ! There is a need for an emphasis on the contemporary so that concepts of culture do not become static (Mundine 1990).

- ! There is a need to collect and document objects in the present to provide an ongoing source of data for current and future interpretation.
- (4) The concept of museum collections as being a research base for scientists, as in the case of natural science collections, needs to be re-evaluated (Johnson 1993). The fact is, that of the people who visited the Queensland Museum Anthropology Section in 1995 (over 1,000), 90% were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and only about 1% of visitors were research scientists.
- (5) There is an expressed and manifest desire by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to connect with their culture in appropriate ways which they themselves define, and to determine for themselves appropriate contexts for its public dissemination (e.g. Foley 1993).
- (6) There is an expressed desire by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to own their own culture, and not to see it possessed by others. This is particularly so in the case of museums, where, however implicit, racist and derogatory views of Aboriginal culture have done so much damage in the past (e.g. Fourmile 1990).
- (7) There is an expressed desire by the public to interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. A recent survey by the Australia Council revealed that, for example, 49% of visitors to Australia are interested in seeing and learning about Aboriginal culture (Arts Research 1990).
- (8) The concept of the anthropologist as a neutral scientist who explains cultures through the interpretation, ordering and presentation of objects can be questioned, in the words of Johnson (1993:16) as “specious humanist nonsense **S** or worse, a stubborn survival of scientific colonialism”.

The immediate issue for museums is to devise strategies that respond, in a practical sense, to the arguments for change. Generally speaking, three courses of action are open to museums.

The first is to treat contemporary issues and concerns as ‘problems’ and hope they go away. Given the importance of cultural heritage issues and their political implications, this is an unacceptable and unlikely solution.

The second is to abrogate any responsibility in the area of Aboriginal heritage, repatriate all collections, and quit the field altogether. This is a solution advocated by some Aboriginal people (Fourmile 1990) and some social anthropologists. It is also an extreme solution, and one which ignores the reality of both the nature of museum collections and the importance of the museum as a cultural institution. To continue to argue that all (or most) museum collections have been obtained under dubious circumstances (theft or exploitation), that the continued role of anthropology is an act of exploitation or that museum anthropology is necessarily intellectually barren, is to ignore historical reality and contemporary practice. Such arguments avoid difficult questions by glossing over complex issues such as ownership. If decisions to repatriate all Aboriginal artefacts are to be made by museum boards, they are only likely to be made in the face of significant political and legal pressure.

The third is to explore the potential of museums to play an important and relevant role in Aboriginal cultural heritage and to enhance the general community’s access to, and understanding of, those cultures. It is possible to do this without detracting from the range of alternative strategies that Aboriginal communities may embark on, or without those communities abrogating their primary rights over their cultural material. However, such an alternative requires a common vision with negotiated goals.

From a museum perspective, advocating such a strategy is based on the belief that museums can be viable, important, cultural institutions that have the ability and authority to educate, stimulate interest, effect public opinion, and change community attitudes. They are institutions that have the capability of assisting Aboriginal people to achieve a wide range of goals in a number of areas in a variety of ways. Before this can be done, however, there are three essential issues that need to be addressed.

The first is the difficult and complex issue of cultural ownership. This concept has been widely canvassed in the literature (e.g. Fourmile 1990). The replies from museums to ownership demands are sometimes ambiguous and clouded in uncertainty. For example, in response to Aboriginal criti-

cism about the Queensland Museum's retention of artefacts, the report of the Queensland Museum Policy Review Panel (1992:16) recommends:

that the Queensland Government recognises that cultural ownership of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material held in the Queensland Museum remains with the community of origin.

The use of the term 'cultural ownership' is, however, vague and undefined and can mean a number of things. It can imply indigenous ownership of all of the cultural aspects associated with museum collections, including the right to say what goes on display and how it is interpreted, determining the significance of objects, maintaining copyright and determining policy. It does not necessarily imply physical ownership or possession. Such a policy, therefore, can be cynically interpreted as an attempt to limit and manipulate the effect of Aboriginal concerns about museums, particularly object ownership, whatever the original intention of the recommendation.

However, as the examples given above illustrate, museums have acquired items in a variety of ways, many of them legally. Arguments about ownership based solely on the legal status of museum collections will ultimately lead to conflict between museums and indigenous people. More importantly, any outcome directed solely to the ownership of objects threatens to detract from the larger issues about cultural heritage and its most effective management. The legal status of objects in museums notwithstanding, museums need to recognise Aboriginal interests in their culture and that they have primary rights over that cultural material (CAMA 1993). An alternative to erecting non-negotiable barriers by creating classes of repatriatable artefacts would be to recognise that all objects are potentially claimable. Such a strategy could then cater for a variety of negotiated outcomes that could include transfer of ownership, loans of various types including loans to museums, ownership by individuals, the museum as custodian for Aboriginal groups or individuals, and the rejection of particular claims. It may also require museums to acknowledge that relationships, not objects, have primacy.

Even if museums can develop ways to create meaningful partnerships, they will probably be involved in litigation as Aboriginal people and communities seek to explore and define their rights in contemporary society. Litigation is likely to extend beyond case by case claims for ownership of particu-

lar objects, to broader issues that explore particular forms of cultural property rights. Such litigation is likely to include attempts to define means of property ownership that cater for Aboriginal concepts of property rights, including communal ownership and responsibilities, based on traditional models. It would be of some advantage to museums if they had explored these possibilities in concert with Aboriginal people, instead of adopting an adversarial stance and bearing the brunt of litigation as has happened, for example, in the United States with the passing of the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 1990*.

The second consideration that needs to be addressed is that of the role of anthropology. The ethnographic collection (as opposed to the archaeology collections) of the Queensland Museum is small and generally poorly documented. The number of human remains and secret/sacred objects in the collection is relatively small. The priorities of the Museum are directed as much to the detailed documentation and collection of aspects of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as it is to the documentation of earlier collections and the dissemination of information about them. Under these circumstances, social history plays as important a role as anthropology.

An argument can therefore be made that the emphasis of the business of the Museum needs to be directed away from filtered knowledge derived from the 'expert' (the anthropologist), to one of assisting Aboriginal people address issues of interest and concern to them. The perspective that sees curators of cultural heritage collections as facilitators and/or managers, rather than the exclusive source of expertise, is an increasingly common one in museums. This perspective in no way reduces the need for high quality anthropological and historical research, effective displays and for ongoing collection, although the emphasis and priorities may change in a number of ways. Nor does it argue for the demise of anthropology as a viable museum discipline. In fact, it may strengthen the case for an active role for anthropology as facilitator between relevant groups, the museum and the broader community.

The third factor that needs to be addressed is one of resources. Notions of equity and access have no meaning unless they are backed up with the wherewithal to implement the necessary strategies. That is to say, the effective implementation of any cultural heritage strategy ultimately depends

on government support, particularly financial support. The bottom line is the need to implement a viable, cost effective service that addresses a broad base of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community needs. An example of the extent of initiatives required in Queensland comes from the Policy Review of the Queensland Museum (Queensland Museum Policy Review Panel 1992) where it was recommended that there be:

- (1) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the Board;
- (2) the employment of two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officers to undertake a range of duties including negotiation with communities over the repatriation of collections or objects;
- (3) employment and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so that they can take over the primary role in the care of collections;
- (4) Museum branches in Cairns and Townsville with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus and where collections from Brisbane can be relocated; and,
- (5) support for local keeping places.

CONCLUSION

Museums are faced with an increasingly complex world where they must manage multiple and often conflicting claims from various community and professional interests. Despite this, museums have the capacity to be vital cultural institutions. To remain effective however, they can no longer appeal to the primacy of entrenched paradigms, particularly that of biological evolution and taxonomy. Anthropology can exist in a museum environment **S** not as the source of received wisdom, but more in the role of facilitating interaction between particular social or cultural groups and the wider society in the quest for knowledge and better understanding. A similar case can be extended to the practise of social history in museums. It is important to stress that the argument presented here is not about one paradigm supplanting another, rather, the capacity for museums to accommodate multiple paradigms. Implementation of these changes in perspective will ensure that museums remain vibrant, relevant and contemporary institutions with the

capacity to address a broad range of social issues while still undertaking their traditional role of collection, research, display and education.

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