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An Aboriginal History of the University of Sydney

1.0 Introduction

When the University of Sydney was built, its architects and scholars were trying to link this new colonial university to an older European tradition. They wanted Sydney people and international visitors to connect the university to British institutions like Oxford or Cambridge. We can see this in the design and layout of the buildings. But the University of Sydney was also built on the traditions and land of Australia's first peoples. Aboriginal knowledge, resources and labour are embedded in the foundations of Australia's oldest university.

2.0 Land

2.1 A University Built on Aboriginal Land

The site of the University of Sydney belongs to the Cadigal people of the Eora nation, but it was known to early settlers as the 'Kangaroo ground'. It is worth remembering that this was a very European name, as James Cook and Joseph Banks imported the Murri word 'kangaroo' to New South Wales from Endeavour River: Sydney Aboriginal groups had never heard of 'kangaroos' before and assumed the word also referred to sheep, horses and cows.¹

Early colonial officers Watkin Tench and David Collins both wrote of the agricultural potential of the 'Kangaroo Ground', with Collins recognising that 'the ground lay well for cultivation; but it had hitherto been neglected, from its being deficient in the very essential requisite of water.'² On 28 May 1793 the land was divided into grants for John White, Thomas Rowley and George Johnston: they were located side-by-side between Parramatta Road in the north and the line of Stanmore Road in the south, and between Long Cove Creek in the west and Grose Farm, the current site of Victoria Park, in the east.³ All three grants were later expanded. These grants suggest that the 'narrow strip' of the Kangaroo grounds followed the watershed and encompassed a slightly smaller area than that outlined by Val Attenbrow and Cheryl Stanborough in 2002 the 'University of Sydney Grounds Conservation Plan'.⁴

Dennis Foley, lecturer at the Koori Centre in 2005, collected the following oral history for the area from his grandmothers, Clarice Lougher (née Morris) and Ruby

¹ Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 38.

² Watkin Tench, *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* (London: G. Nicol and J. Sewell, 1793), 161; David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, Volume 1* (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1798), 266-267.

³ R.J. Ryan, *Land grants, 1788-1809* (Sydney: Australian Documents Library, 1981), 14

⁴ Pearson, Marshall, Ellsmore, Attenbrow, Rosen, Kerr, and Betteridge, 'University of Sydney Grounds Conservation Plan' (2002), A12-A13.

Foley, her half-sister Eunice Watson, and their cousin, Willie De Serve (an initiated man of the Hawkesbury who was over 70 when he disappeared in 1959):

To the east of the great court, down the hill (near the current swimming pool) there was a marsh area where a spring was located, this was an important site for the women folk as two Koori Roads joined just down the hill near where City and Parramatta Roads meet. This was a sit-down spot where the southern clans would come and sit and do business with the Cadigal.

Where the east wing of the great court stands was a paint up spot, perhaps a circle as this adjoined an open forest of mature trees that went to the north, over the Parramatta Road cutting, past Arundel and Ross Streets, along the ridge. This was a sorry site as after a cremation, wrapped bones were placed in some of the trees, not all of the trees as this was also a possum area and was important to the Cadigal. It is said the Great Hall and the Macleay Museum stands on what is a part of the Cadigal cemetery, perhaps this is why it is so cold there?

Another fresh water site was located approximately where the tennis courts are off the Physics Road which also fed a small marsh. This water was also very important as there were two more sit down sites, one on the western side of St Johns oval, which was where the western clans would trade and meet with the Cadigal. The ridge that Missenden Road follows is roughly the divide between Cadigal and Wongal land and has a story that is based on the spine of a giant monitor who once lay there. The other important site was on the hill top, at the highest point near St Andrews College, this was purportedly a men's sit down site as it was a high point and the hill top was kept cleared as it gave a view of the surrounding country. I do not know if it was an initiation site, highly unlikely in view of the two major sit down sites close by.

There used to be two scar trees on the University. My father's mother, Ruby Foley worked at the Uni for approximately 20 years often spoke of them. I looked for them in the 1970s but they are long gone.⁵

The two 'Koori Roads' to which Dennis Foley refers were developed into Parramatta Road and King Street/City Road. There is no specific mention in the sources that Parramatta Road was an Aboriginal track, but settlers quickly formed a reliable route to Rose Hill/Parramatta and could travel along it much faster than they could traverse other parts of the landscape. It is marked as a route on William Dawes' 1792 map of the colony.⁶ The King Street route is also not explicitly referred to as a 'native path' in the primary sources, though it may have linked up with the well-used 'Aboriginal track' further south which became known in the early colony as the 'Path to Botany Bay' (roughly the route of today's Botany Bay Road). The Botany Bay Road route is marked on Charles Grimes' map 'A topographical plan of the settlements of New South Wales, including Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay', 1799.⁷

⁵ Dennis Foley, as quoted in John Cleverley and Janet Mooney, *Taking Our Place: Aboriginal Education and the Story of the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2010), 3.

⁶ William Dawes, 'A map of all those parts of the territory of New South Wales which have been seen by any person belonging to the settlement established at Port Jackson', 1792, National Library of Australia, MAP NK 2456/126.

⁷ Charles Grimes, 'A topographical plan of the settlements of New South Wales, including Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay', 1799, National Library of Australia, MAP RM 711.

The Cadigal people regularly exploited the ecology of University of Sydney campus in pre-European times for food and other resources. The Long-leaf Mat Rush (*Lomandra longifolia*), for example, would have grown on the 'Kangaroo Grounds' and was a valued material for making baskets; the bark of the Sally Wattle (*Acacia falcata*) was often used to stupefy fish; and the sap of the Red Bloodwood (*Corymbia gummifera*) was extracted to treat fishing lines and stop them fraying.⁸ The fruit of the Native Cherry (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*) and the roots of the Clover Sorrell (*Oxalis corniculata*) were common sources of nutrients, while the leaves of *Clematis glycinoides* were often crushed and the scent inhaled to relieve headaches.⁹

2.2 The Great Hall: built from Cadigal and Wangal Stone

Early colonial officer William Bradley described the 'Kangaroo Ground' as being covered in 'Brown Bark'd Gum Tree, exceeding good Timber for large uses' and growing 'to the height of 80 to 100 feet without a branch'. He declared the wood to be 'fit for very large beams &c. boards for flooring, door frames & for every use in common: No Gum to hurt in it.'¹⁰ But when it came to constructing the University of Sydney in the 1850s, much of the timber had already been cleared and the building materials were sourced from elsewhere.

The Great Hall was built from sandstone carved out from Sydney's Pyrmont quarries on Cadigal and Wangal land, while the elaborately carved woodwork throughout the Great Hall and on the staircase leading to the Senate room is from the land of the Bundjalung people in the Richmond and Tweed River areas in the far north coast of New South Wales.¹¹ A range of imported materials were also incorporated into the structure, such as the Caen sandstone from Normandy used in the oriel window in the ante room doorway. And in 1874-75 the present floor of the Great Hall was installed using light grey marble from Marulan in the Southern Highlands, the territory of the Gundungurra Aborigines and a popular meeting point for members of the Wadi Wadi, Wandandian and Ngawal peoples.¹²

2.3 The wealth of the Darumbal, Wiradjuri and other Aboriginal Nations

Key bequests to the University of Sydney from wealthy residents and settlers in New South Wales enabled the university to be built and to establish important disciplines. The wealth that funded these bequests were derived from land appropriated from Aboriginal nations.

Sir Charles Nicholson's wealth included that derived from landholdings appropriated from the Darumbal people, near Rockhampton. Nicholson's fortune helped establish the Nicholson museum. John Henry Challis, who paid for the stained glass window in

⁸ Pearson, Marshall, Ellsmore, Attenbrow, Rosen, Kerr, and Betteridge, 'University of Sydney Grounds Conservation Plan' (2002), A12-A13.

⁹ Pearson, Marshall, Ellsmore, Attenbrow, Rosen, Kerr, and Betteridge, 'University of Sydney Grounds Conservation Plan' (2002), A12-A13.

¹⁰ William Bradley's Journal ('Account of the different kinds of Timber & the use it is fit for; in Port Jackson', inserted into journal between pages 232-233)

¹¹ Bertha McKenzie, *Stained Glass and Stone: The Gothic Buildings of the University of Sydney* (Sydney University Monographs Number Five, 1989), 12.

¹² Bertha McKenzie, *Stained Glass and Stone: The Gothic Buildings of the University of Sydney* (Sydney University Monographs Number Five, 1989), 13.

the Great Hall and chairs in anatomy, zoology, engineering, history, law, philosophy, and modern literature made his fortune from gold and trade, including Australian wool, and owned land appropriated from Aboriginal people in southern New South Wales and in Potts Point (Cadigal). The Macleay family, whose collection and wealth funded the Macleay museum, made some of their fortune from viticulture near Wagga Wagga, on land appropriated from the Wiradjuri nation.

3.0 Labour

3.1 Natural history collecting

Aboriginal labour has played an important role in the history of the university, from the activities of early staff through to the work of guides and field assistants.¹³ Entomologist Walter Wilson Froggatt, for example, regularly drew upon Indigenous labour to complete his collecting activities in the Kimberley in 1887. During this period in the Kimberley Froggatt identified a new species of flower which was named after Macleay and collected a diverse range of materials, including Aboriginal skulls.¹⁴ He applauded the assistance of one young boy, who ‘With his keen eyes and bush craft ... became a valuable assistant during my wanderings.’¹⁵

Edgeworth David’s geological survey notebooks are similarly filled with Aboriginal words, stories, encounters and tracings of rock art. On one expedition across the Nullarbor Plains he was guided by a group of Aboriginal people, including ‘Mailman Jimmy’, who would regularly conduct a three-week mail route across remote country relying on the water stored in Mulga roots for survival. David eagerly recorded this information, making careful reference to Indigenous names.¹⁶

3.2 Macleay and the Chevert expedition

Sir William Macleay, the founder of the Macleay Museum, regularly drew upon Indigenous knowledge, and on one occasion was accompanied by an Aboriginal person during his main Sydney collecting period in 1874-1875.¹⁷ He also purchased many artefacts and cultural remains – for example, on 27 March 1874, he bought the skeleton of an ‘Aborigine female’ in Sydney for three pounds.¹⁸

The 1875 Chevert expedition to New Guinea, which was organised and funded by Macleay, benefited from the labour of the Aboriginal people involved. It was the first

¹³ Dennis Foley’s grandmother, Ruby Foley, worked on the university grounds for around twenty years. See John Cleverley and Janet Mooney, *Taking Our Place: Aboriginal Education and the Story of the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁴ W.W. Froggatt, ‘A Naturalist in Kimberley in 1887’, *The Australian Naturalist* IX (4) (November 1934), 69-82; for Aboriginal knowledge and labour see pages 74, 75, 77, 78-9; for the collection of skulls see page 74.

¹⁵ W.W. Froggatt, ‘A Naturalist in Kimberley in 1887’, *The Australian Naturalist* IX (4) (November 1934), 69-82, 77.

¹⁶ Edgeworth David, Nullarbor Plains Survey Book, ‘23 July 1921 – 4 September 1921 [later than]’, in Edgeworth David Papers, University of Sydney Archives, P11, Series 25, Item 112, Box 36. The following pages contain word lists: 31, 32, 35, 38, 39, 41, 42, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50.

¹⁷ See entries for 9/1/74, 10/1/74 and 24/4/74 in William John Macleay, 1874 Diary, Mitchell Library, MSS 2009/115, Item 3.

¹⁸ See entry for 27/3/74 in William John Macleay, 1874 Diary, Mitchell Library MSS 2009/115, Item 3.

Australian scientific mission to a foreign country. Macleay saw it as an opportunity to improve his natural history collections and to promote the study of science in Sydney. Over the course of the five-month voyage Macleay and other collectors drew upon Indigenous labour and expertise to aid their efforts, with people like ‘Tongataboo Joe’, a native of Warrior Island off Cape York, joining them as guides and interpreters.¹⁹

3.3 Astronomy

The Sydney Observatory and the University of Sydney were involved in a nation-wide project to observe the 1922 solar eclipse. The goal of these expeditions across the country was to test Einstein’s prediction that light passing the sun would be bent by gravity, by 1.76 seconds of arc. The University of Sydney was involved in observations at Goondiwindi in south-eastern Queensland, but it was the Wollal (or Wallal) expedition that produced the best results and confirmed Einstein’s theory. There is photographic evidence of Aboriginal people helping set up the observation equipment in Wollal.²⁰ The expedition to Goondiwindi consisted of two teams; one under the direction of Dr. J. Baldwin of Melbourne Observatory, the other from Sydney Observatory was under W. E. Cooke. There were also representatives from Sydney University, The British Astronomical Association, New South Wales, Branch, and a photographer Russell Grimwade. These groups set up their instruments on a racecourse near the township of Goondiwindi. The Goondiwindi plates were disappointing, as only two of the eight taken with the astrograph appeared to be free of distortion.²¹

4.0 Material Culture

Aboriginal cultural materials have long been used as teaching materials at the University of Sydney. Many departments had their own ‘ethnographic collections’ and Aboriginal artefacts were regularly passed around classes of students across the university. Today, most of these collections are consolidated in the Macleay Museum, and they include some of the earliest surviving bark-paintings from northern Australia, collected from Port Essington in the 1870s. Aboriginal artefacts also underpinned some classical teaching materials.

Griffith Taylor, who founded the University of Sydney Geography Department in 1921, conducted a range of expeditions with Aboriginal guides and amassed a collection of artefacts for the department’s ‘ethnographic collection’. These were passed around classes of students when the Geography department taught ethnology. The department’s collection of Aboriginal cultural materials was transferred to the Macleay Museum at some point in the mid-twentieth century (there seems to be no

¹⁹ Macleay Museum, ‘Great Expectations: The Chevert Expedition to New Guinea, 1875’, *The University of Sydney*, 1996 [summary online] at: <http://sydney.edu.au/museums/exhibitions-events/chevert-expedition.shtml> (accessed 28 November 2014).

²⁰ Geoff Barker, ‘Australian Eclipse expedition to Wollal 1922’, *Powerhouse Museum*, October 2008 [online] at: <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/////?irn=382144> (accessed 1 August 2014), see P3549-194.

²¹ Edgar H. Booth, *Notes on plate exposures, and the subsequent photographic treatment adopted by the Sydney University Eclipse Expedition* (Sydney: Royal Society of N.S.W., 1922), 185-192.

record of exactly when this occurred).²² There is evidence of some members of the department publishing studies on these materials. See, for example, Lesley Damaris Hall's (Science Research Scholar in Geography, 1926) studies on 'Aboriginal flakes from Morna Point, NSW'.²³

The old Geology building also housed the Anthropology Department's ethnology collection during the first half of the twentieth century, but as they moved away from using Aboriginal materials for teaching, the collection was gradually disbanded. In 1957 the Anthropology Department sent 5415 artefacts (at least 1792 of Australian origin) to the Institute of Anatomy in Canberra on 'indefinite loan'. In 1974 the Anthropology Department transferred the Yolngu paintings collected by Ronald Berndt to the Macleay and in 1978 a range of Kimberley artefacts were transferred to the Macleay. In 1985 the Anthropology Department transferred what remained of its ethnology collection to the Museum of Australia, now the NMA. And at some point in time the Anthropology Department transferred collections from Richard Aldous Arnold, "Mr Delbridge" (1923-1925), and A.P. Elkin to the Macleay.²⁴ Elkin's and Berndt's collections were regarded as 'cluttering up the Department'.²⁵

4.1 Macleay Museum

From 1875 onwards William John Macleay mostly acquired artefacts by paying field collectors such as Dr James C. Cox, Edward Spalding, Walter Wilson Froggatt and John Archibald Boyd. The bark paintings he acquired from Port Essington are some of the oldest in Australia and they remain in the University of Sydney collection, stored in the basement of Fisher Library. They were originally celebrated by the Macleays for their biological depictions of animals; now they are celebrated for their depiction of Dreaming creatures. They also are among some of the first Northern Territory barks to have been purposely sought out and collected for their aesthetic, exotic and unique cultural appeal. These transitional years are crucial to our understanding of early European acceptance of Aboriginal art and resulting changes towards art as commodity.²⁶

Froggatt, who later lectured on entomology in the Department of Agriculture from 1911-1921, was employed as a collector by Macleay in 1887. During an expedition in the Kimberley, he accompanied police in a violent raid on an Aboriginal camp. One man died and the camp was burnt – but not before Froggatt salvaged a 'large varied and curious collection of spears weapons of all sorts and many other curios' from the raided campground. These made their way back to the Macleay Museum and have since been repatriated.

²² Susan M Davies and Rosemary Stack, *Collected: 150 Years of Aboriginal Art and Artifacts at the Macleay Museum* (Sydney: Macleay Museum, 2002).

²³ Lesley D. Hall, 'Some Aboriginal Flakes from Morna Point, New South Wales', *Records of the Australian Museum* 16(5) (29 May 1928), 254.

²⁴ Susan M Davies and Rosemary Stack, *Collected: 150 Years of Aboriginal Art and Artifacts at the Macleay Museum* (Sydney: Macleay Museum, 2002).

²⁵ Geoffrey Gray, "'Cluttering up the department": Ronald Berndt and the distribution of the University of Sydney ethnographic collection', *reCollections*, vol 2 (2), 2007.

²⁶ Paul SC Tacon and Susan R. Davies, 'Transitional Traditions: "Port Essington" Bark-paintings and the European Discovery of Aboriginal Aesthetics', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2004), 72-86.

Professor of anatomy and anthropologist Neil “Black Mac” Macintosh comprehensively surveyed the Macleay’s skeletal material in 1951. At that time ‘The skulls, were found scattered in different parts of the Museum, some wrapped in brown paper, some in canvas bags, some lying loose among a variety of other specimens (shells, grass skirts, etc.). The majority of the mandibles were found piled here and there in loose heaps. No catalogue could be found. A heavy coating of dust and other accumulations concealed any identification such as labels or markings on the skulls themselves.’²⁷ Macintosh did a similar survey of the skeletal material in the Institute of Anatomy in 1948, which was never published.²⁸ The Macleay Museum has been a strong participant in the University of Sydney Repatriation Project.

4.2 Indigenous Human Remains

Many Indigenous human remains have come to the university over time, after being exposed during construction and roadwork, by floods and drought, and through collecting activities. Since 1994, the University of Sydney has had a proactive role in repatriating all Ancestral remains, secret/sacred materials and culturally significant objects in its possession to communities across Australia. It is the only independent institution to do so. The Sydney University Repatriation Project has returned over three hundred Ancestral remains to around seventy communities from right across Australia. But in the past, these remains were eagerly collected and studied.

4.2.1 The Talgai Skull

The heavily encrusted ‘Talgai skull’, for example, was found exposed on the Darling Downs in southern Queensland in 1886. The discovery came at a time of international debate about how long people had lived in Australia – in 1891 one of the University’s Palaeontology exam questions was: ‘Have the Australian Aborigines a geological antiquity? What evidences might be found in Australia as to the early history of the Aborigines?’ The University of Sydney purchased the ‘Talgai skull’ in 1914 and James T. Wilson and Edgeworth David presented it to the British Association for the Advancement of Science as the first evidence of Pleistocene remains in Australia.²⁹ Neil ‘Black Mac’ Macintosh, the Challis Professor of Anatomy, later embarked on ten expeditions from 1963-1972 to further investigate the site and age of the skull.³⁰ He found it to be that of a young teenage boy who died from a blow to the head more than thirteen thousand years ago. The Talgai skull was the first strong evidence that humans had a Pleistocene antiquity in Australia. It is still held at the Shellshear Museum.

4.3 Exchanges, Nicholson Museum

²⁷ N.W.G. Macintosh, 'Crania in the Macleay Museum', *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* 74 (1949), 161-191.

²⁸ See N.W.G. Macintosh, 'Crania in the Macleay Museum', *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* 74 (1949), 161-191, 161.

²⁹ Tannant William Edgeworth David, ‘Geological evidence of the antiquity of man in the commonwealth; with special reference to the Tasmanian aborigines’, *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* (1923), 109-150.

³⁰ Jim Allen, ‘The Curious History of the Talgai Skull’, *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 20(2) (November 2010), 4-12.

Indigenous knowledge counter-intuitively underpins some of the classical collections held at the Nicholson Museum. It was common practice in the late nineteenth century and early to mid-twentieth century for Australian universities, museums and libraries to engage in a national and international network of artefact exchanges.³¹ At the University of Sydney, there is evidence of Aboriginal artefacts being exchanged or traded from 1939 through to 1967 by curators at the Nicholson Museum. These included stone tools, wooden tools, ceremonial objects and even bark paintings. Many of the plaster casts and pot sherds gained through this system of exchange were used in teaching and would have been regularly passed around tutorials on classics and ancient history.

4.3.1 The Anthropology Connection

The earliest reference to this artefact trade is from a 1939 exchange with the Department of Antiquities, Baghdad.³² It is unclear from the sources, but it seems that these artefacts were drawn from anthropologist AP Elkin's personal collection.³³ This is certainly the case for many other exchanges and Nicholson curator Dale Trendall talked openly with a journalist about this relationship in 1952. The article, published in the *Sunday Telegraph*, reported in exaggerated fashion:

Archaeologists, like school-boys swapping foreign stamps, add to their collections by a frank system of bartering. Professor Trendall is building up his 'bank' of exhibits, because he knows you cannot have too much of one thing. You can swap it for something else. And the best bank he's got is the Anthropology Department (Professor Elkin). Australia may not have much in the way of buried civilisations (apart from Canberra), but, through our aborigines, Australia is one of the world's major fields of anthropological research. So Professor Trendall says, in effect, to Egypt: 'I'll swap you seven nulla-nullas, three bark paintings, two corroboree records, an Arunta skull, and a didgeridoo for a shop-soiled mummy-case, in good condition,' and the deal is clinched.³⁴

Although this is certainly an embroidered interpretation of the relationship between Elkin and the Nicholson Museum, Elkin's archives confirm the trade. In December 1948, Nicholson curator James Stewart wrote to Elkin about '...the point which we were discussing yesterday – the provision of Australian flints to send away in

³¹ At the University of Melbourne, Leonhard Adam established a national and international network of artefact exchanges. This network is also referred to on work on the State Library of Victoria and the Museum of Victoria. See Greg Denning, *Readings/writings* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 98; Paul Fox, "The State Library of Victoria: Science and Civilisation", *Transition* 26, Spring 1988, pp. 14–26; Robert S. Merrillees, *Living with Egypt's past in Australia* (Melbourne: Museum of Victoria, 1990), 12; John Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011), 58.

³² Stewart: 'I believe we sent the Department some ethnographical material in 1938 or 1939, so I could rather imagine that they would not want any more of that sort of thing.' James Stewart to Seton Lloyd, Department of Antiquities, Baghdad, Iraq, 7 January 1949, in 'Trendall/Stewart (1947-1952), Exchange of Objects/Publications, Baghdad: Department of Antiquities', Exchange of Objects/Publications (Trendall), Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

³³ See 'List of Specimens suggested for exchange' and 'List of Specimens for Iraq', 1939, in 'Museum Gifts and Loans', AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, P130, Accession no. 664, Box 198, 4/2/584.

³⁴ *Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney), 11 May 1952, p. 9.

exchange to Copenhagen and Stockholm.³⁵ This source suggests the artefact trade was mostly conducted informally. The proposed exchange would not have come as a great surprise to Elkin, who had his own exchange business running through the Department of Anthropology. He had a long correspondence with Michigan State University between 1953 and 1963 in which he facilitated the purchase of a series of artworks and Aboriginal cultural materials.³⁶ Soon after this exchange Elkin was approached by the University of California with a similar appeal, leading him to exclaim, 'If we get any more of these requests we will have to appoint an agent for American Institutions.'³⁷ (The famous anthropologist Margaret Mead offered to courier some of these cultural materials back to America.³⁸)

4.3.2 The Scrounge

Stewart followed Trendall's lead at the Nicholson Museum and in 1947 offered to trade 'some Australian flints' with the Trocodero Museum in Paris,³⁹ and in 1949 he sent 'three parcels of stone implements' to the Museum of Ethnology and Archaeology in Cambridge as 'a small token of our gratitude and esteem' for a 'magnificent gift' (accessions 47.53-281).⁴⁰

In 1961, Vincent Megaw was appointed to the Nicholson Museum and, in advance of assuming his new responsibilities, sent letters around the world seeking to grow the Nicholson's collection. In a series of exchanges between June 1961 and October 1962, in what he referred to as 'the scrounge',⁴¹ Megaw traded Aboriginal cultural materials with institutions in Denmark, England, France, Ireland, North Rhodesia, Poland, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America. He initiated the new acquisitions on the suggestion of 'My colleague, Professor Stewart',⁴² and offered other institutions 'as a bait ... some Aboriginal stuff.'⁴³ The nature of the

³⁵ Letter from Stewart to Elkin about procuring Aboriginal materials to send to Copenhagen and Stockholm, 2 December 1948, 'Miscellaneous', AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, P130, Accession no. 664, Box 190, 4/2/484.

³⁶ Correspondence between W.S. Gamble of Michigan State College and A.P. Elkin about procuring Aboriginal art for a centennial exhibition in Michigan, June 1954 – 1953, 'Collections of Native Art, etc', AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, P130, Accession no. 664, Box 198, 4/2/586.

³⁷ Correspondence between Norman E. Gamble, Assoc. Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara College, and AP Elkin, August 1955, about procuring Aboriginal materials, in 'Collections of Native Art, etc', AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, P130, Accession no. 664, Box 198, 4/2/586.

³⁸ Margaret Mead to AP Elkin, Manus, October 25 1953, in 'Correspondence 1952-: Mead, Dr Margaret', 4/2/405, AP Elkin Papers, P130, Accession No. 664, Box 186, University of Sydney Archives, Sydney.

³⁹ J. Stewart to Dr P. Kelly, Trocodero Museum, Paris, 10 November 1947, in 'Stewart (1947), Request for Flints, Paris: Institut de Palaeontologie Humaine', Requests for objects (Trendall), Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁴⁰ In response to acquisitions 47.53-281. James Stewart to T. Paterson, Museum of Ethnology and Archaeology, Cambridge, 25 March 1949, in 'Loans to the Nicholson (Correspondence)', Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁴¹ European Material: Addenda and Corrigenda, 22 October 1962, Acquisitions (European): J.V.S. Megaw, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁴² J.V.S. Megaw to The Director [Dr Z. Rajewsky], Pantstwowe Museum Archeologiczne, Warszawa, 11 July 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Poland and USSR, Nicholson Archives, Sydney; JVS Megaw to Dr J. Majewski, Director, The State Archaeological Museum, Warsaw, 18 January 1962, Acquisitions correspondence: Poland and USSR, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁴³ J.V.S. Megaw to Stephen Rees Jones, Department of Archaeology, Queen's University, Belfast, N. Ireland, 7 December 1961, in Acquisitions correspondence: Ireland, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

exchange he suggested was simple: classical artefacts for Aboriginal artefacts. As he wrote to one curator at the Pitts Rivers Museum: 'I hope we can offer you some suitable swops.'⁴⁴

The response was mixed. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to trade 'a small amount of Aboriginal material from Australia' for 'pot sherds' with Państwowe Museum Archeologiczne and The State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw,⁴⁵ and the curator of the Schweiz Landesmuseum, Zurich, was only interested in 'aboriginal material ... we could use for exchange with other Swiss archaeological collections.'⁴⁶ He received resistance to a proposed exchange of Aboriginal material from W.C. Braat at the Rijksmuseum van Ouderheden te Leiden in Holland, with Braat writing emphatically 'as I told You already, this Museum is not interested in artifacts of the Australian aborigines'.⁴⁷ Braat's correspondence is especially interesting as it gives us insight into the informal and unofficial nature of this network of exchanges: 'All the pieces are counted so eg 20 pieces of this form, 15 of that form etc. So I cannot subtract any piece without officially asking the authority of the minister of Education.'⁴⁸

Other institutions, such as the Historiska Museum at Lunds University, Sweden, approached Megaw about an artefact exchange, offering 'a collection of South Swedish objects, the different types of axes, some megalithic ceramic and smaller objects' for 'a small collection of Australian objects'.⁴⁹ Likewise, Harvard University approached Megaw 'to discuss the possibilities of exchanging material with you for items of "New South Wales aboriginal material of the early (i.e. prehistoric sensu) Australia."⁵⁰

Archaeologist Brian Fagan at The Rhodes-Livingstone Museum, Northern Rhodesia was eager for 'some Australian Aboriginal stone implements in exchange ... esp. to illustrate hafting and use'.⁵¹ Megaw promised to 'arrange some Australian telegraph pole insulators'⁵² as well as other Aboriginal cultural materials 'As soon as I get the opportunity to go out and do a little bit of local scrounging.'⁵³ Fagan was happy with the exchange and put Megaw in touch 'with Mr J.F. Eloff of the Department of Social

⁴⁴ JVS Megaw to TK Penniman, Curator, Pitts Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 3 May 1961; JVS Megaw to Nicholas Thomas, City Museum, Birmingham, 23 August 1961; Megaw to Nicholas Thomas, 29 August 1961.

⁴⁵ J.V.S. Megaw to The Director [Dr Z. Rajewsky], Państwowe Museum Archeologiczne, Warszawa, 11 July 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Poland and USSR, Nicholson Archives, Sydney; JVS Megaw to Dr J. Majewski, Director, The State Archaeological Museum, Warsaw, 18 January 1962. Acquisitions correspondence: Poland and USSR, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁴⁶ Dr Rene Wyss to J.V.S. Megaw, 24 July 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Switzerland

⁴⁷ W.C. Braat (Rijksmuseum van Ouderheden te Leiden) to J.V.S. Megaw, 7 July 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Holland, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁴⁸ W.C. Braat (Rijksmuseum van Ouderheden te Leiden) to J.V.S. Megaw, 7 July 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Holland, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁴⁹ Professor Holger Arbman, Lunds Universitets, Historiska Museum, Lund, Sweden, to JVS Megaw, 10 July 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Sweden, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁵⁰ J.O. Brew, Director, Museum, Harvard University, to JVS Megaw, 12 July 1962, Acquisitions correspondence: USA, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁵¹ Brian Fagan, Keeper of Prehistory, The Rhodes-Livingstone Museum, Northern Rhodesia, to JVS Megaw, 7 June 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Rhodesia and South Africa, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁵² Megaw to Fagan, 12 June 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Rhodesia and South Africa, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁵³ Megaw to Fagan, 2 November 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Rhodesia and South Africa, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

Anthropology at the University of Pretoria, who is building up a teaching department there. He is particularly anxious to obtain some Australian Aborigine material and is prepared to offer Pietersburg Middle Stone Age and Smithfield Later Stone Age tools in exchange for some typical Aborigine objects.⁵⁴ In the ensuing correspondence with Eloff, Megaw refers to finding ‘a “cache” of local stone work which we would be able to deal out soon and I must say that on our part we should be most grateful for anything you might let us have.’⁵⁵

Megaw passed through Denmark in 1961 on his way to Australia and established personal relationships with members of the Forhistorisk Museum in Aarhus and the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen. Both institutions expressed an interest in ‘an exchange of Australian and Danish prehistoric material’. The Forhistorisk Museum sought ‘a collection of recent native artefacts as e.g. boomerangs, stone or glass arrowheads, shields etc. ... for exhibition and teaching purposes,’⁵⁶ while the Nationalmuseet asked for ‘some material from the north: Arnhem Land, Kimberley, etc.’⁵⁷ Megaw tried to source material for these exchanges from John Mulvaney’s landmark excavations at Kenniff Cave in Queensland, and, when that failed, he proposed ‘perhaps stealing it from the excavations which we are now doing’ in Botany Bay.⁵⁸

In response to the Forhistorisk Museum’s request, Megaw wrote: ‘We have at least one boomerang for you as well as a spearthrower and quite a few of the miserable stones, which is all the Abos ever produced until the age of telegraph-pole insulators.’⁵⁹ But Poul Kjærum at the Forhistorisk Museum pushed for more:

‘we would very much like to get as representative and complete a collection as possible, so if you can in any way obtain some more objects such as: digging sticks, pointed and burned, shields, baskets of palm leaves, primitive mortar stones, bark objects, fire drills, knives and primitive axes, belts plaited in human hair, and, of course, churingas (if possible) and arrows with spear points in jin-bottle glass (or whiskey!) and whatever you can find.’⁶⁰

For such items, Megaw was forced to look further afield and, in 1963, he stumbled upon an ideal source:

‘when I was in Melbourne recently with our exhibition on Europe I met a Mrs. Dorothy Bennett, who has been collecting aboroginal [sic] material in

⁵⁴ Fagan to Megaw, 3 January 1962, Acquisitions correspondence: Rhodesia and South Africa, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁵⁵ Megaw to J.F. Eloff, Dept of Volkekunde, University of Pretoria, 22 January 1962, Acquisitions correspondence: Rhodesia and South Africa, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Munksgaard, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, to Megaw, 20 June 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Archives, Sydney; Poul Kjærum, Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology, Forhistorisk Museum, Aarhus, to JVS Megaw, 6 April 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Archives, Sydney.

⁵⁷ Kaj Birket-Smith, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, to Megaw, 23 June 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁵⁸ Megaw to Kaj Birket-Smith, 26 June 1961, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney; Megaw to Poul Kjærum, 27 November 1962, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁵⁹ Megaw to Poul Kjærum, Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology, Forhistorisk Museum, Aarhus, 26 July 1962, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁶⁰ Poul Kjærum to Megaw, 1 September 1962, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

Arnhem [sic] Land and the northern parts of Australia – bark paintings, bull-roarers, spear throwers, totems, etc. Mrs Bennett on hearing of the Museum's interest in such things has suggested that if you could authorize the payment of approximately \$40 Aus (£30 Stg) to cover the general expense and so forth (most of these objects are exchanged through the various mission stations), she could pass on to me quite a good representative collection of aboriginal decorative art – perhaps some ten pieces in all. I have examined the material and consulted people who know much more about such things than I and the general opinion here is that this is a most reasonable offer. Of course, the stone material is not such a problem, although at long last it is becoming more difficult to export such material from Australia. However, the recent ethnographic craze and the onslaught of American dealers has pushed up the prices of decorative art to a ridiculous degree and also led to an unfortunate commercialisation. So I think Mrs Bennett's offer is a good one ... I might also be able to get some things for free, if you are prepared to spend this amount.⁶¹

Klaus Ferdinand, taking over the correspondence from the holidaying Poul Kjærum, accepted the exchange, but was not entirely happy with the limited range of materials involved, despairing that 'it is hard to make a substantial exhibition giving an impression of the material life of these people!'⁶² Megaw sent photos of the items and promised to 'send a real spear-thrower from Cape York as well as the model. Mrs Bennett is now up north, and will certainly have more stuff available as soon as she gets back.'⁶³ On 20 September 1963 Megaw shipped 'One case Aboriginal Motifs' to Denmark, including a 'Snake totem', 'Ceremonial Spear', 'Model woomera', 'Didjeridoo', 'Wooden club' and 'Four bark paintings'.⁶⁴ The Ny Carlsbergfondet (New Carlsberg Foundation) supported the purchase of the paintings.⁶⁵ The Forhistorisk Museum responded: 'We are very happy for the things you have brought, and I can tell we have already had them on exhibit. Thank you ever so much for your trouble. If you again see barkpaintings etc. for sale, do not hesitate to make us an offer.'⁶⁶ In 1966, Megaw sent a further six bark paintings to the Forhistorisk Museum at the price of 'one pound sterling for each one'.⁶⁷

5.0 Knowledge

5.1 Medicine

⁶¹ Megaw to Poul Kjærum, 5 June 1963, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁶² Klaus Ferdinand to Megaw, 11 June 1963, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁶³ Megaw to Klaus Ferdinand, 17 July 1963, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁶⁴ JVS Megaw to Mr. Wiggins, East Asiatic Co., Sydney, 8 August 1963, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁶⁵ Klaus Ferdinand to Megaw, 11 June 1963; Klaus Ferdinand to Megaw, 8 July 1964, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁶⁶ Klaus Ferdinand to Megaw, 8 July 1964, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

⁶⁷ Megaw to Ole Klindt-Jensen, 17 September 1966, Acquisitions correspondence: Denmark, Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

Indigenous knowledge has been harnessed by scholars throughout the University's history. Aboriginal medical practices, for example, were keenly observed and studied in the early twentieth century, with John MacPherson, a Sydney graduate who became a lecturer in Materia Medica and Therapeutics, publishing a range of articles on Aboriginal poisons and treatments, including 'The gum tree and wattle in Australian aboriginal medical practice' (*Australian Nurses Journal*, 1925), 'Poisoned spears of Australian aborigines' (*Medical Journal of Australia*, 1931), and 'Aboriginal fish and emu poisons' (*Mankind*, 1933).⁶⁸ This thread of research continued through to the 1970s, with LJ Lawler and M Slaytor publishing 'Uses of Australian Orchids by Aborigines and Early Settlers' (*Medical Journal of Australia*, 1970).

Other medical research focused on Aboriginal bodies. As well as the skeletal remains that Macintosh surveyed in the Institute of Anatomy and Macleay Museum, researchers such as Henry Sloane Halcro Wardlaw (Lecturer in Physiology) and Gilbert Edward Phillips (Demonstrator in Physiology) published a range of studies on Aboriginal blood types, metabolism, perspiration. Warwick Anderson traces the activities of the 'Sydney physiologists' in the 1920s and 1930s in *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health, and Racial Destiny in Australia*.⁶⁹ Wardlaw saw racial characteristics in diets, metabolism and living conditions, emphasising racial differences in his studies, rather than similarities.⁷⁰ Gilbert Phillips was the first to study the blood groups of Indigenous Australians and Maoris.⁷¹ The subject of his master's thesis was 'An Introduction to the Study of Iso-Haem-Agglutination Reactions of the Blood of Australian Aborigines'.⁷² From 1934 Gilbert was a Lecturer in Neurology and Applied Neurophysiology in the Department of Anatomy. From 1947 to 1951, he was instrumental in establishing the diagnostic neurological centre later to be called the Northcott Neurological Centre.⁷³

5.2 Scholarships

⁶⁸ John MacPherson, 'The gum tree and wattle in Australian aboriginal medical practice', *Australian Nurses Journal* xxiii (12) (15 December 1925), 588-96; 'Poisoned spears of Australian aborigines', *Medical Journal of Australia* (27 June 1931), 780-82; 'Aboriginal fish and emu poisons', *Mankind* 1 (1933), 157-61.

⁶⁹ Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health, and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 214.

⁷⁰ Henry Sloane Halcro Wardlaw and W.J. Lawrence, 'Further observations on the basal metabolism of Australian aborigines', *Australian Journal of Experimental Biology and Medical Science*, x (1932), 157-66; Henry Sloane Halcro Wardlaw, H.W Davies and M.R. Joseph, 'Energy metabolism and insensible perspiration of Australian aborigines', *Australian Journal of Experimental Biology* xxii (1934), 63-74; Henry Sloane Halcro Wardlaw, H.C. Barry, I.W. McDonald and A.K. McIntyre, 'Haemoglobin and solids of blood of Australian aborigines and whites', *Australian Journal of Experimental Biology* xiii (1935), 1-7; Henry Sloane Halcro Wardlaw, 'Part played by water in energy metabolism of Australians', *Australia and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science* xxii (1935), 381-5.

⁷¹ See, for example, Gilbert Edward Phillips, 'Blood groups of full blood Australian aborigines', *Medical Journal of Australia* (September 1928), 296-303.

⁷² Later published as: Gilbert Edward Phillips, 'Introduction to study of Iso-Haem-Agglutination of the blood of Australian aborigines', *Medical Journal of Australia* (April 1928), 429-34.

⁷³ Max Lake, 'Phillips, Gilbert Edward (1904-1952)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2000, accessed online 24 November 2014.

An appeal for Aboriginal Scholarships was held on the University of Sydney campus in late September 1953.⁷⁴ It was led by the National Union of Australian University Students through a body known as 'Abschol'. Since 1950, Abschol had been agitating for Aboriginal involvement in tertiary education and seeking to raise money to fund scholarships for interested recipients. Historian Jennifer Clark underlines the importance of this early scholarship movement: 'Outside of academic interest in Departments of Anthropology – and even then there were limitations – Abschol provided the only opportunity for students to explore seriously, if unofficially, unsystematically and somewhat sporadically, the experiences of Aborigines and the conditions under which they lived.'⁷⁵ AP Elkin was a great enthusiast about the scholarships appeal and in his correspondence with NUAUS he helped identify possible scholarship recipients.⁷⁶

Melbourne University would become the main driver of this appeal, but the University of Sydney seems to have had the earliest scholarships available.⁷⁷ This was due to the benefactions of Mrs J. W. Jackson, who, in 1952, offered '£200 per annum for three years to assist a male student of aboriginal descent to attend the University.'⁷⁸ The Christian Spiritualist Church of Marrickville donated £500 in 1956 for the 'Education of person of aboriginal descent at University';⁷⁹ in 1964 Alice Mary Wingrove's estate made a bequest of £500 to provide 'assistance for education at the University in any Faculty for an Aborigine student';⁸⁰ and in 1965 the Association for the Protection of Native Races donated £356 9s 10d 'To assist persons of Aboriginal descent to attend the University of Sydney.'⁸¹ But the largest scholarship fund of \$5000 over five years came in 1966 from an anonymous source 'for the purpose of: (i) providing scholarships for Australian Aborigines whether they be full-bloods, half-castes or quarter-castes...'⁸²

From the late 1950s, many Aboriginal people accepted scholarships to enrol in apprenticeships and at Business colleges,⁸³ but it wasn't until 1958 that a Malara-

⁷⁴ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 September 1953, 2.

⁷⁵ Jennifer Clark, *Aborigines and Activism: Race, Aborigines and the coming of the sixties to Australia* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2008), 142.

⁷⁶ Jennifer Crew to AP Elkin, 29 June 1955, pp. 7-10, in 'N.U.A.U.S. Aboriginal Scholarship Appeal', AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, P130, Accession No. 664, Box 184, 4/2/361. See also: Jennifer Crew to AP Elkin, 3 September 1954; AP Elkin to Jennifer Crew, 7 September 1954 in 'N.U.A.U.S. Aboriginal Scholarship Appeal', AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, P130, Accession No. 664, Box 184, 4/2/361.

⁷⁷ Jennifer Crew to AP Elkin, 29 June 1955, in 'N.U.A.U.S. Aboriginal Scholarship Appeal', AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, P130, Accession No. 664, Box 184, 4/2/361. See also Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 17-18.

⁷⁸ The University of Sydney, *Calendar of the University of Sydney for the year 1954* (Sydney: A.H. Pettifer, Government Printer, 1954), 1004.

⁷⁹ The University of Sydney, *Calendar of the University of Sydney for the year 1958* (Sydney: A.H. Pettifer, Government Printer, 1957), 640.

⁸⁰ The University of Sydney, *Calendar of the University of Sydney for the year 1965* (Sydney: V.C.N. Blight, Government Printer, 1964), 391.

⁸¹ The University of Sydney, *Calendar of the University of Sydney for the year 1967* (Sydney: V.C.N. Blight, Government Printer, 1966), 661.

⁸² The University of Sydney, *Calendar of the University of Sydney for the year 1967* (Sydney: V.C.N. Blight, Government Printer, 1966), 487.

⁸³ Co-operative for Aborigines Scholarship Fund, *List of scholarships awarded* (Sydney: The Co-operative, 1964), NLA Bib ID 3031438.

Bandjalang woman first used an Aboriginal scholarship for tertiary education. She enrolled in a Diploma of Physical Education at the University of Melbourne and in 1959 became the first Indigenous person to complete a full-time university course.⁸⁴ In 1963 similar scholarships were awarded to Charles Perkins and Gary Williams at the University of Sydney, with both students enrolling in a Bachelor of Arts.⁸⁵ They rose to prominence as national Aboriginal leaders through the ground-breaking 'Freedom Ride' in 1965. Perkins graduated at the end of 1965 and took a position as manager of Sydney's *Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs*.⁸⁶

6.0 Conclusion

The University of Sydney continues to benefit from Aboriginal land, labour, materials and knowledge. It still acquires Aboriginal art and cultural materials, but these days with due payment and engagement, purchasing and commissioning works from old masters as well as contemporary Indigenous artists. The Koori Centre, which has been a mainstream education initiative since 1994, provides a culturally safe place on campus for Indigenous students and staff, while its library and the exhibitions at the Macleay Museum provide a rich source of information on Indigenous history and culture. The university is committed to ongoing relationships with Indigenous Australians and flies the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags each year during Reconciliation Week and the Vivid light festival. But as this preliminary investigation suggests, there is still much work to be done towards understanding the role played by Indigenous people in university life.

⁸⁴ Her name has not been used at her request. Jennifer Clark, *Aborigines and Activism: Race, Aborigines and the coming of the sixties to Australia* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2008), 141.

⁸⁵ Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 18.

⁸⁶ Peter Read, *Charles Perkins: A Biography* (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 1990), 230.