

Colonial Ambitions and Collecting Anxieties on Western Australian Frontiers

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Declaration of authorship

I, Nicola Froggatt, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Nicola Froggatt

Date: 15 September 2021

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Author's note

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this thesis contains the names and images of deceased persons.

Other readers should be aware that amongst some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, seeing the names and images of deceased persons may cause sadness or distress, and in some cases offend against cultural protocols.

All readers are informed that this thesis describes discredited, distressing and offensive theories about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and cites historical sources in which racist language is used. Readers are also advised that several chapters, particularly Chapter Seven, discuss the mistreatment of Ancestral Remains.

Abstract

This thesis analyses the ensemble of Aboriginal objects in British and Irish museums to assess what, how and why Aboriginal cultural material from Western Australia was collected during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (c. 1828–1914). It explores the uses and meanings that Aboriginal belongings accrued in non-Aboriginal contexts, asking how British collectors understood and deployed them to uphold their own anxieties and ambitions.

The study begins by examining distinct yet intersecting impulses that fed much collecting activity: the notion of a ‘colonial frontier’; the interplay between individuals’ experiences across different British colonies; and the significance of mining activity. Each offers a different view of how the personal and the political informed collecting. ‘Ethnographic’ collections are often discussed in relation to material acquired at similar points in time. However, within Western Australia it is thematic lenses rather than chronological parameters that offer the richest insights into collectors’ motivations.

Collectors frequently related their activities closely to Aboriginal peoples’ perceived capabilities, ‘usefulness’ and potential for assimilation into colonial society. For many, ideological narratives emphasising Aboriginal peoples’ supposed temporal and spatial ‘remoteness’ from Europeans intersected with closer personal experiences. Subsequent chapters develop this argument by examining how items were curated at international exhibitions in France and Scotland at the turn of the twentieth century, and how some British and Irish anthropologists operated in Western Australia between 1910 and 1912. These events were marked by a complex interplay between the personal and the political, and by strategic attempts to obscure the agency of Aboriginal actors.

The experiences, ambitions and anxieties of collectors and others involved in collecting offer important insights into colonial processes and ideologies. Tracing these reveals how ideas about the supposed past, present and future life of Western Australia’s Aboriginal peoples were upheld, complicated and subverted.

List of contents

Declaration of authorship	2
Acknowledgements	3
Author's note	4
Abstract	5
List of contents	6
List of figures, tables and maps	8
On language use	10
Questioning colonial relationships and collecting	15
Theoretical context	20
Enabling collections to 'speak'	27
Sources and methods	30
People, objects and identity	38
Western Australian frontiers	40
Structure	42
Chapter Two: Western Australian collections in Britain and Ireland	46
Researching collections	46
Chronology	52
The collections	64
Changes in the museum sector	69
Conclusions	72
Chapter Three: Collecting on colonial frontiers	75
A government official in Noongar Country: Alexander Collie	83
A private settler in the Swan River 'neighbourhood': Samuel Talbot	92
A geologist in the Kimberley: Edward Hardman	100
Collecting and colonial anxieties	109
Conclusions	116
Chapter Four: Colonial 'careerists'	118
A colonial couple: Frederick Broome and Mary Barker	124
Travellers in the Western Desert: David Carnegie and Warri	133
A bishop's picture of the north-west: Gerard Trower	148
Collecting the 'remote'	155
Conclusions	165
Chapter Five: Mining materials (c. 1880–1910)	167

Aboriginal mining	174
Breaking and remaking the telegraph	182
Intersections between professional and collecting practices	189
Conclusions	194
Chapter Six: Collections on a world stage (1900–1901)	198
Physical presences in exhibition spaces	206
Choosing ‘the necessary local colour’	214
Display strategies	219
Conclusions	231
Chapter Seven: The Cambridge Expedition to Western Australia (1910–1912)	233
‘Magic’ and message sticks	251
Objects and ideas of cultural change	257
‘What was not known about was not grieved over’: taking Ancestral Remains	262
Conclusions	274
Chapter Eight: Conclusions	279
Appendix 1: Selective chronology	293
Appendix 2: Extant Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in British and Irish institutions	296
Appendix 3: Extant Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in the British Museum	299
Appendix 4: Key material discussed in chapters	307
Abbreviations	318
Bibliography	319

List of figures, tables and maps

Figures

Figure 1: Extant Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in British and Irish museums	31
Figure 2: <i>Kodj</i> (axe) from the south-west	50
Figure 3: 'Weapons &c. of the Natives of Hanover Bay' and some objects today.....	54
Figure 4: Named individuals or institutions giving, selling and exchanging items with British and Irish museums.....	63
Figure 5: Number of items from Western Australia transacted in known donations, sales and exchanges with the British Museum	65
Figure 6: <i>Kodj</i> (axe) acquired by Alexander Collie in the south-west	83
Figure 7: <i>Taap</i> (knife) acquired by Alexander Collie in the south-west	89
Figure 8: Dance ornament acquired by Samuel Talbot in the south-west	92
Figure 9: Shield acquired by Samuel Talbot in the south-west.....	96
Figure 10: Historic illustration of bottle-glass point acquired by Edward Hardman in the Kimberley	100
Figure 11: Historical illustration of points from the Kimberley acquired by Edward Hardman	106
Figure 12: Message stick, 'extreme N.W.', acquired by Frederick Broome (detail)	124
Figure 13: Bark container taken by David Carnegie in the Western Desert	133
Figure 14: 'Members of the Carnegie Expedition'	134
Figure 15: Glass point acquired by Gerard Trower from 'Forrest River'	148
Figure 16: Asbestos block linked to Marble Bar, pearl shell knife linked to Perth and stone and glass points linked to Forrest River.	151
Figure 17: Bag holding <i>wilgee</i> (ochre) acquired by Samuel Talbot in the south-west	174
Figure 18: Bottles of red and yellow ochres acquired by Emile Clement in the north-west.....	178
Figure 19: 'Yandying for Tin at Moolyella'	180
Figure 20: Ceramic and chalcedony spear points 'from the natives of the Kimberley Goldfields' acquired by William Mansbridge	182
Figure 21: Historical photograph showing Aboriginal objects from Western Australia displayed at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886.....	208
Figure 22: Detail of <i>Wunda</i> shield displayed at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901.....	214
Figure 23: Pounder 'for crushing Mulga seed' displayed at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901.....	219
Figure 24: Western Australia's pearl shell trophy at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901.....	225
Figure 25: Detail of historical photograph showing chair in Western Australia's court at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901	227
Figure 26: Message stick acquired by Alfred Brown in the Pilbara	251
Figure 27: Carved boab nuts from the Kimberley acquired by Alfred Brown	257
Figure 28: Historical photograph of graves on Dorre Island.....	262

Tables

Table 1: Itinerary of Cambridge Expedition members, June 1910 to January 1912.....	248
Table 2: Collections associated with Alexander Collie.....	307
Table 3: Collections associated with Samuel Talbot	308
Table 4: Collections associated with Edward Hardman.....	308
Table 5: Collections associated with Frederick Broome and Mary Barker....	309
Table 6: Collections associated with David Carnegie and Warri.....	310
Table 7: Collections associated with Gerard Trower	311
Table 8: Collections discussed in Chapter Five	311
Table 9: Aboriginal items associated with Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901....	315
Table 10: Collections associated with the Cambridge Expedition.....	316

Maps

Map 1: Key locations discussed in Chapter Three.....	76
Map 2: Key locations discussed in Chapter Four.....	123
Map 3: Key locations discussed in Chapter Five	169
Map 4: Key locations discussed in Chapter Seven.....	237

On language use

‘Aboriginal’, ‘indigenous’, ‘settler’, ‘European’

I use the term ‘Aboriginal’ when referring to a person or community or language group that is part of the first peoples of mainland Australia and Tasmania.¹ I use this rather than ‘Indigenous Australian’, a term referring to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as my thesis does not cover any known Torres Strait Islander material. I use the lower-case form ‘indigenous’ to refer collectively to the first peoples of multiple countries.

I do not modify language in quoted sources, some of which use archaic and racist terms.

I use the term ‘settler’ to refer to Europeans who moved to and resided in Australia for an extended (and often permanent) period, and their descendants. My definition covers those who identified and were identified by contemporaries as ‘white’, and thus occupied a racially privileged place within settler-colonial power structures. In various contexts I also call them ‘newcomers’, ‘colonists’ or ‘invaders’, acknowledging diverse perceptions of their presence.

Ancestral Remains and culturally sensitive or restricted objects

I refer to bodily remains of deceased Aboriginal people as ‘Ancestral Remains’, recognising that these continue to hold deep significance to many descendants today. I primarily use this term when referring to skeletal remains and preserved tissue. However, some objects incorporate other culturally sensitive human material that may have come from then-living persons like hair (widely used in string) and fluids like saliva and blood.

Some objects were or are subject to cultural restrictions and protocols regarding which individuals or gender groups can see, know about or use

¹ ‘Indigenous Australians: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’, *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/indigenous-australians-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>> [accessed 18 December 2019].

them. I have not sought to access these and include no detailed descriptions or images of them, although some cited sources do. Chapters Five and Seven discuss how collectors acquired and understood some restricted items, however I intentionally limit my references to their characteristics. As other objects like message sticks and 'pointing sticks' can normally be seen publicly, I do discuss these where appropriate.²

'Ethnographic'

This thesis focuses on assemblages of material culture that museums have in different times and places classed as 'ethnographic' collections. These classifications, like the term 'ethnography', carry multiple potential meanings. I refer to the second sense of 'ethnography' offered by the Oxford English Dictionary: 'A description of peoples, societies and cultures, or an individual example of these'.³ I use the term 'ethnographic collection' loosely, to refer to assemblages that people have collected, curated and displayed primarily to represent aspects of Aboriginal peoples, societies and cultures.

Names, language or cultural groups, and nationalities

When identifying named individuals, I use spellings provided in historical sources. Where an Aboriginal person is known to have had Aboriginal and European names, I privilege the former. I use the specific names of Aboriginal language or cultural groups when known, in line with the AIATSIS *Map of Indigenous Australia* and *Austlang* dataset.⁴ I identify the nationality of non-Aboriginal people where it is known, and highlight whether individuals from the British Isles had close connections to England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales.

² Michael Pickering, "'The Big Picture': The Repatriation of Australian Indigenous Sacred Objects', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 30:5 (2015), 427–43 (p. 431).

³ 'Ethnography, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/64809> [accessed 19 December 2019].

⁴ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia* (1996), <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>> [accessed 3 March 2021]; and *AUSTLANG: Australian Indigenous Languages Database*, <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>> [accessed 3 March 2021].

Object and place names

Where a specific local Aboriginal word for an object is known this is privileged in the text, with an English translation following in brackets. Historic terms may differ from spellings used today. I generally use place names given by settlers (some of which are Aboriginal words), many of which are still used today in official documents and maps. Alongside place markers on maps I highlight the language, social or nation groups indicated by the *AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia*, but recognise that other Aboriginal peoples may also have close associations with the same country.

Chapter One: Introduction

From the ‘miserablest People’ to the ‘most beautiful spear points’

The Inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the World. The *Hodmadods* of *Monomatapa*, though a nasty People, yet for Wealth are Gentlemen to these; who have no Houses and skin Garments, Sheep, Poultry, and Fruits of the Earth, Ostrich Eggs, &c. as the *Hodmadods* have ...

William Dampier, 1697.¹

I sent some biface points made by the Worora tribe to the British Museum and the reply came back that they were the most beautiful spear points made by any natives in the world.

Harry Rainy Balfour, 1951.²

Read together, these two remarks might appear to suggest that British and Irish attitudes towards Western Australia's first peoples and their material culture improved between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. In his popular travel account *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697), the English ex-privateer William Dampier described meeting Bardi people on the north-west coast of 'New Holland' in 1688. Dampier acknowledged that they manufactured 'wooden swords' and 'lances' but took a dim overall view of their material culture, deeming nothing that he saw to be beautifully or skilfully

¹ William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World* (London: James Knapton, 1699), I, 464. Dampier was comparing Aboriginal people from Australia's north-west coast to the Khoi people of South Africa.

² H.R. Balfour, 'A Native Toolkit from the Kimberley District, Western Australia', *Mankind* 4 (1951): 273–74 (p. 274). The letter which Balfour refers to has not been located. The objects he refers to were likely made by Worora people living at or near the Presbyterian Kunmunya Mission on the north-west coast. Balfour visited Kunmunya Mission and worked closely with its superintendent James Robert Beattie Love. In 1936 he sent the British Museum a large donation of Worora objects collected by Love. Assistant-Keeper and H.R. Balfour, 29 February 1936. Correspondence File, BM AOA Archives.

made.³ European portrayals of Aboriginal material culture have always had political implications. Dampier's characterisation of Bardi people as 'the miserablest People in the World' rested in large part upon his belief that the use of certain technologies denoted racial and cultural superiority. His ideas were taken up by others and in the words of Dawn Casey, Aboriginal woman and former director of the National Museum of Australia, were 'echoed as a self-justification by the land-takers two centuries later'.⁴ More positive responses also existed. Two and a half centuries later, Australian anthropologist Henry (Harry) Rainy Balfour reported that no less a supposed authority than the British Museum in London was praising the great beauty of points made by Worora people in northern Western Australia.⁵ Yet despite these apparently polarising statements, both Dampier and Balfour held complex attitudes towards Aboriginal people. Although enthusiastic about their material culture, Balfour presented Worora makers as 'still in the stone age'.⁶ And Dampier's criticism of 1697 sits uneasily with entries in his earlier private journal that convey comparatively more nuanced thoughts about Bardi people.⁷

Many historical actors held no less wide-ranging, complex, and even contradictory attitudes towards Aboriginal material culture. This thesis, which focuses on items made in Western Australia and taken to the British Isles, interrogates some of these tangled relationships between people, objects, and ideas over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Appendix One). In doing so, I trace how individual personalities and broader cultural

³ Dampier, 466.

⁴ Dawn Casey, 'Being Collected'. Lecture given at the University of Sydney, 28 August 2006. Cited in M. McCarthy, '300 Years On: The Search for William Dampier and His Elusive Ship', *The Great Circle*, 37:1 (2015), 1–15 (p. 4).

⁵ It is worth emphasising that this more positive description still situated Aboriginal objects firmly within the realm of 'native' arts. Some nineteenth and early twentieth century collectors portrayed some Aboriginal objects as technically or aesthetically superior to certain 'European' ones (see, for example, Edward Hardman's descriptions of 'Kimberley points' in Chapter Three). Those praising such objects did not necessarily see their makers as equal to themselves, or Aboriginal culture as deserving or capable of surviving colonisation.

⁶ H.R. Balfour, 'Notes for Anthropological Society of Victoria Lecture given by H. R. Balfour' (1934), Eth Doc 909.b, BM AOA Archives, 2. Balfour's collaborator, J.R.B. Love, titled his book on the Worora *Stone-Age Bushmen of Today: Life and Adventure Among a Tribe of Savages in North-Western Australia* (London: Blackie & Son, 1936).

⁷ McCarthy, 10–11. Also see Adrian Mitchell, *Dampier's Monkey: The South Sea Voyages of William Dampier, Including William Dampier's Unpublished Journal* (Kent Town: Wakefield, 2010).

changes informed the creation of museum collections, and how collectors' attitudes were shaped by colonial ideologies and stories told about Aboriginal people and their material culture.

In 1968 the novelist Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson recalled Aboriginal makers he observed in the Sandstone district of the Mid-West region in 1910, reflecting that 'the people, so long as they escaped the influence of the white settlers, remained true to their ancient ways'.⁸ He was referring to how they worked with 'traditional' materials rather than the metal and glass that became much more common after permanent colonial settlement. But his words also continued traditions that had now developed amongst white commentators and collectors: ones with their own logic about what objects counted as 'authentically' Aboriginal.

Questioning colonial relationships and collecting

This thesis enquires into colonial relationships in Western Australia through the lens of objects made by Aboriginal people there during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and now in public museums throughout Britain and Ireland (see Appendix One). I broadly define these collections of objects as 'ethnographic' in nature, because of how non-Aboriginal people formed and used them.⁹ In calling an assemblage 'ethnographic', I therefore refer to whether it was primarily gathered in order to represent aspects of Aboriginal peoples, societies and cultures (see further discussion in Sources and methods). This thesis focuses on items frequently characterised as 'ethnographic', asking what, how and why they were collected and taken to the British Isles between 1828 and 1914.¹⁰ It considers times when they moved from Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal hands, the meanings that they

⁸ E.L. Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars* (London, New York, Toronto: Abelard-Schuman, 1968), 37.

⁹ Although ethnographic collections are not always indigenous collections (or vice versa), those in Australia have tended to comprise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material, including objects, photographs, postcards, sketches, sound recordings, and wordlists. John E. Stanton, 'Ethnographic Museums and Collections: From the Past into the Future', in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, ed. Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (Acton: National Museum of Australia, 2011) <https://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JStanton_2011.html> [accessed 9 January 2020].

¹⁰ In 1829 Britain formally proclaimed the creation of the Colony of Western Australia (also known as the Swan River Colony). In January 1901 the State of Western Australia, part of the new Commonwealth of Australia, formally came into existence.

accrued and the roles that they played. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, these movements could entail overt violence as well as exchanges that were more benign, or at least appeared so to some parties.¹¹ In doing so, this study seeks to develop fresh insights into contemporary relationships and attitudes. It also acknowledges the significant roles played by Aboriginal people in creating bodies of material not generally considered 'ethnographic'.¹²

Well into the twentieth century, the written and visual representations of Aboriginal Australians circulating in Britain and Ireland were overwhelmingly produced by non-Aboriginal people. Many were peripatetic British and Irish officials or travellers; some were settlers and their descendants.¹³ These depictions spoke more to their creators' and consumers' imaginations and concerns, than to the lives of their purported subjects. Closely entwined with contemporary ideas about race and the moral legitimacy of colonisation, they often emphasised perceived differences between Australia's first inhabitants and those who had invaded their home. Such texts and images were generally construed as reliable sources of knowledge, and granted an authority frequently denied to material created by Aboriginal people.¹⁴ But

¹¹ I avoid the use of loaded term 'gifts' when referring to acquisitions, recognising that these and other forms of acquisition such as sale and exchange may have taken place under varying degrees of duress.

¹² Aboriginal knowledge and physical labour has contributed to the collection of botanical, zoological and mineral specimens; as well as products often categorised as examples of 'European' or 'settler' art, science or industry (such as pearl-shell used in furniture and buttons; also see Chapter Six). Contemporary accounts have often downplayed their contributions, as well as the forces that encouraged, pressured or compelled them to do so. See, for example, Philip A. Clarke, *Aboriginal Plant Collectors: Botanists and Australian Aboriginal People in the Nineteenth Century* (Dural: Rosenberg, 2008); Philip A. Clarke, 'Australites: Part 1. Aboriginal Involvement in Their Discovery', *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 21:2 & 3 (2018), 115–33; Penny Olsen and Lynette Russell, *Australia's First Naturalists: Indigenous Peoples' Contribution to Early Zoology* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2019).

¹³ The term 'settler' is problematic because it suggests the idea of peaceful occupation rather than invasion and violence. Sarah Maddison and Sana Nakata, 'Introduction: Questioning Indigenous-Settler Relations: Reconciliation, Recognition, Responsibility', in *Questioning Indigenous-Settler Relations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Sarah Maddison and Sana Nakata (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 1–14 (p.7). It is also closely linked to Western cultural ideas about permanency, whereas Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have in fact been settled across all parts of Australia for thousands of years. I have nevertheless chosen to use this term primarily when describing European migrants and their descendants, because so many consciously identified with the word; and because the distinctive ideology of settler-colonialism sheds light on their approaches to Aboriginal cultures.

¹⁴ See ongoing denials of the Aboriginal provenance of the Gwion Gwion rock paintings in the Kimberley. Ian J. McNiven, 'The Bradshaw Debate: Lessons Learned

other kinds of material from and about Western Australia were also circulating, and not only ones of settler-colonial manufacture. Thousands of objects made and used by Aboriginal people speak compellingly to how individuals in the past and present have interacted with and imagined each other. They offer valuable insights into colonial relationships and the lived experiences of their first makers, users and owners.

I explore a range of interactions and attitudes amongst and between people in Western Australia and in the British Isles over time, by focusing on objects made by and acquired from Aboriginal people. These objects departed Western Australia between 1828, when permanent British colonial settlement started there, and 1914, when Britain and Australia joined World War One. I consider how the acquisition of material affected and was affected by changing concepts of value, place and identity. One set of questions revolves around the relationship between Aboriginal objects and non-Aboriginal 'field' collectors. Who collected these items in Western Australia, and how? In answering these questions, I consider how collecting complemented, complicated or even conflicted with collectors' personal motivations and professional duties. I also ask what was collected (both in and outside of Western Australia), and what was not. In doing so, I consider how collections have been used to reinforce or challenge European knowledge paradigms about Australia's original inhabitants. Another set of questions arises when looking not only at 'the collector', but others involved in collecting processes. When tracing the journeys made by objects (and the people associated with them), what diverse actions, perceptions and priorities are revealed? How and when do glimpses of individual agency emerge? And how can this inform our understanding of social relationships between different people in the British Isles and Australia?

Many objects passed through the hands of multiple non-Aboriginal collectors before entering a museum, including those of individuals who had never set foot in Australia or met an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. With the exception of exhibits displayed at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901 (see Chapter Six), however, I focus upon moments when objects passed from Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal hands. These are times

from 'Critiquing Colonialist Interpretations of Gwion Gwion Rock Paintings of the Kimberley, Western Australia', *Australian Archaeology*, 72 (June 2011), 35–44.

where the juxtaposition of direct experiences and colonial imaginings often scrape against each other most strikingly. When researching this phase of collecting, I have taken Alison Petch's useful definition of the 'field collector' as a starting point:

A person who obtains an artefact, or series of artefacts, directly from the person who manufactured it or else from the person owning and using it for its original intention and probably within its country of origin. The field collector also obtains first-hand information.¹⁵

Petch's definition focuses on direct transactions between a 'field collector' and someone who made, owned or used an object according to its 'original intention'. She also recognises some contexts where collectors acquired objects without such contact taking place:

This definition [of 'field collector'] would include archaeologists as 'field collectors' and should also include people who 'find' objects as well as those who deliberately seek them. My definition specifically excludes any collector who obtains artefacts through a non-'native' trader, dealer or auction house (I refer to this sort of collection as 'secondary collecting'). It does not necessarily exclude the collection of an item which has been used as trade and has moved from its country or place of origin but has not become a commodity or art object.¹⁶

Adding a further distinction, I here consider someone to be a 'field collector' of Aboriginal objects only if they have (or are likely to have) acquired them directly from an Aboriginal person.¹⁷ I do so because the matter of identifying objects' 'original intentions' is not straightforward. For example, most

¹⁵ Alison Petch, 'Collecting Immortality: The Field Collectors Who Contributed to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford', *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 16 (March 2004), 127–39 (p. 128).

¹⁶ Petch, 128.

¹⁷ I base this assessment on factors including collectors' own statements where available. For example, I accept Samuel Talbot's (Chapter Three) statement to the British Museum that he had acquired the objects in his 1839 donation, although he may have received extensive help from intermediaries. I also consider collectors' known travels and contacts with Aboriginal people when judging whether they are likely to have had sourced objects directly from Aboriginal people. Therefore although Gerard Trower (Chapter Four) did not specify how he obtained several points from Forrest River, his close links with the Forrest River Mission and other accounts of being given objects from Aboriginal people there mean it is likely that he acquired the points from an Aboriginal person during one of his visits.

historical accounts depict boomerangs being used primarily in hunting or fighting. However, Aboriginal people also used them in other ways, including in recreation. White settlers did not embrace the boomerang as a hunting or fighting weapon, but some took to boomerang-throwing with gusto and spent hours practising the art. In the British Isles, too, boomerang-throwing was not confined to visiting Aboriginal performers. In 1906 members of the Anthropological Institute of London put on a boomerang-throwing event at Wormwood Scrubs Common in London. An amused journalist recalled that Institute members 'were pursued all over the common by twirling semi-circular pieces of hard wood', which they had borrowed from the British Museum.¹⁸ They singled out Francis Howe Seymour Knowles, a participant who had 'spent three years practising with the erratic missile' and stated that boomerang-throwing 'ranks ... among the best exercises in the world, and it might be introduced into our schools with advantage'.¹⁹ He and others on Wormwood Scrubs Common were using boomerangs in a comparable (if doubtless less competent) way to some Aboriginal people, but someone who then acquired a boomerang from Knowles can hardly be considered a 'field collector' in any meaningful sense. This issue of 'original intention' is further complicated because some Aboriginal people made objects that were not intended to be used 'functionally', but to be traded or exchanged with other Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal markets.

My chronological focus is informed by the ways in which Aboriginal material arrived in British and Irish collections, as well as changing political, economic and social developments in Australia, Britain and Ireland. I am particularly interested in how collecting developed in Western Australia after the start of permanent British colonial settlement in 1828, when settlers began arriving with a view to living there permanently. As Chapter Two will show, the period between 1828 and 1914 saw a great growth of museums in Britain and the peak of many institutions' acquisitions of material from Western Australia. It was also a time when many people in Western Australia and the British Isles were experiencing wide-ranging changes to their political and scholarly

¹⁸ 'Boomeranging', *The South Eastern Times*, Friday 1 June 1906, 7. The specific boomerangs used have not been traced, but presumably came from the museum's collection of 'duplicates' rather than its accessioned collection.

¹⁹ 'Boomeranging'. Knowles lent boomerangs from his private collection to a similar demonstration at Wormwood Scrubs Common in 1905. 'London Personal Notes', *The Advertiser*, Thursday 28 December 1905, 7. Part of Knowles' collection was later sold to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.

systems as well as their everyday lives. Collecting was temporarily disrupted during World War One (1914–1918), and the interwar and post-war periods warrant their own investigation. After World War Two many more factors came into play, including collecting by the Western Australian Museum and the impact of some export restrictions. For these reasons, my study ceases before the outbreak of World War One.

Theoretical context

My approach is informed by scholars working on the transnational movements of people, discourse, and objects across the British empire.²⁰ The edited collection *Mobile Museums: Collections in Circulation* (2021) explored the importance of studying circulation as a fundamental aspect of how museum collections have been (and are being) formed and mobilised.²¹ Its editors Felix Driver, Mark Nesbitt and Caroline Cornish stressed that ‘it is impossible to conceive of a collection that is not marked in some way by the flux of human relationships, whether near or far, historical or contemporary’, be they ‘actual or potential, manifest or latent, remembered or forgotten, material or imagined’.²² Many historians have emphasised the need to consider the colonial ‘metropole’ and ‘peripheries’ in the same analytical frame, arguing that this is how it was experienced.²³ In their edited collection *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (2006), Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose stressed that ‘empire mattered to British metropolitan life and history in both very ordinary and supremely significant ways: it was simply part of life’.²⁴ Arguing that empire became ‘taken-for-granted as a natural aspect of Britain’s place in the world and its history’, they

²⁰ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002); *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, ed. Sarah Longair and John McAleer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

²¹ Felix Driver, Mark Nesbitt and Caroline Cornish, ‘Introduction: Mobilising and Re-Mobilising Museum Collections’, in *Mobile Museums: Collections in Circulation*, ed. Felix Driver, Mark Nesbitt and Caroline Cornish (London: UCL Press, 2021), 1–20 (p. 3).

²² Driver, Nesbitt and Cornish, 8.

²³ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, ‘Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda’, in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–56.

²⁴ Hall and Rose, 30.

challenged historians like Bernard Porter, who held that British people in the metropole were generally not influenced by or interested in the empire.²⁵

Objects were and are part of broader flows of people, things, ideas and practices between Australia and the British Isles. Karen Schamberger, Martha Sear, Kirsten Wehner and Jennifer Wilson note that 'rather than seeing these flows as distinct streams, a growing body of work argues that places, people, things, practices and ideas, constantly in motion, shape each other'.²⁶ I will emphasise how the study of collections can contribute to our understanding of the connections and tensions that developed between people in these places. Historian Maria Nugent argues that it is impossible to fully comprehend the histories of Australia's colonial frontiers through studying the archival record alone, due to its incomplete and often intentionally misleading nature.²⁷ Seeking out Aboriginal interpretations of the frontier through sources like material culture, 'illuminate[s] these colonial spaces of terror and death in important ways'.²⁸

Igor Kopytoff and Arjun Appadurai's approach in *The Social Life of Things* (1986) to mapping human identities through the biographies of things was widely influential for material culture studies.²⁹ Kopytoff highlighted the similarity between how societies construct individuals and things, pointing out that such constructions are not stable, but fluid and changing in terms of their social status, commodity value and cultural meaning. Collectors were interested in how objects were used and understood in Aboriginal contexts, but they also gave these objects new roles, values and meanings. In Aboriginal contexts, for example, strict cultural and gender restrictions have

²⁵ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Karen Schamberger, Martha Sear, Kirsten Wehner, Jennifer Wilson and the *Australian Journeys* Gallery Development Team, National Museum of Australia, 'Living in a Material World: Object Biography and Transnational Lives', in *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*, ed. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Canberra: The Australian National University Press, 2008), 275–98 (p. 276).

²⁷ Maria Nugent, 'Encounters in Country', in *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation*, by Gaye Sculthorpe, John Carty, Howard Morphy, Maria Nugent, Ian Coates, Lissant Bolton and Jonathan Jones (London: British Museum Press, 2015), 120–210 (p. 173).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁹ Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction' and Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3–63; 64–92.

governed who can see restricted wooden or stone ceremonial objects made or used by many groups in the central and western deserts of Australia. This secrecy was itself a source of fascination to non-Aboriginal collectors, many of whom valued restricted objects' earlier social function and significance (whether actual or imagined) as curiosities, source of ethnographic knowledge, or means of building bonds with Aboriginal people. At the same time, however, some collectors depicted, stole or otherwise acquired restricted material in ways that violated traditional restrictions (see Chapters Five and Seven). Many scholars have embraced Kopytoff and Appadurai's suggestion to use biography as a way of understanding objects' agency when moving across space, time and people. Examining an object's 'life history' can, in Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall's words, 'address the way social interactions involving people and objects create meaning' and understand how these meanings 'change and are renegotiated through the life of an object'.³⁰ This thesis fuses these approaches, through tracing the known movements of people and assemblages ('collections').

Many scholars have analysed the links between imperial agendas and the collection, display and 'museumisation' of material culture from around the world. In *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (1991) Nicholas Thomas focused on how Pacific Islanders and Europeans used objects to fashion identities for themselves and each other during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³¹ Other historians have also taken up this theme of cultural 'entanglement', the entwining appropriation and exchange of artefacts. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn's edited volume *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (1998) explored the impact of colonial contacts upon material cultures of coloniser and colonised groups alike.³² Sarah Longair and John McAleer's *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (2012) specifically addresses how museums and curators actively moulded and represented the British imperial experience.³³ Claire Wintle's *Colonial Collecting and Display: Encounters with Material Culture from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands*

³⁰ Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, 'The Cultural Biography of Objects', *World Archaeology*, 31:2 (1999), 169–78 (pp. 169–70).

³¹ Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

³² *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

³³ Longair and McAleer.

(2013) traced the ‘career’ of items made and collected in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through to their display in the Royal Pavilion and Museums in Brighton and Hove.³⁴ Wintle shows how a wide range of cultural, social, political, and economic forces and interactions shaped how audiences used and understood ‘ethnographic’ objects. Significant scholarly interest has thus focused on how objects mediated colonial relationships between and within different sites, however the Western Australian experience, especially of British and Irish collections, remains largely unexamined. This is starting to change, with Western Australian objects playing important roles in the recent edited volume *Ancestors, artefacts, empire: Indigenous Australia in British and Irish Museums* (2021).³⁵

Scholarship on the history of collecting Aboriginal material culture has mostly focused on single collectors, types of material, or institutions.³⁶ Collectively these approaches help to counter some potential challenges involved in researching the history of collecting: Ian Coates points out that even when considering multiple collections associated with a single ‘field collector’, one risks ‘ignoring the influence of the different contexts in which collection took place’.³⁷ The eclectic career of field collector and dealer Emile Clement (Chapter Five) vividly illustrates the difficulties of trying to reconcile diverse aspects of one individual’s collecting activity. Some overarching studies of material engagements across Australia have tried to identify particular chronological ‘modes’ of collecting. The editors of *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections* (2008) argued that ‘ethnographic’ collecting in Australia can be characterised according to several broadly chronological phases, each characterised by a predominant

³⁴ Claire Wintle, *Colonial Collecting and Display: Encounters with Material Culture from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

³⁵ *Ancestors, artefacts, empire: Indigenous Australia in British and Irish Museums*, ed. Gaye Sculthorpe, Maria Nugent and Howard Morphy (London: British Museum Press, 2021).

³⁶ For example, Ian Coates, ‘Lists and Letters: An Analysis of Some Exchanges Between British Museums, Collectors and Australian Aborigines (1895–1910)’ (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1999); Philip Jones, *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2007); Philip G. Jones, ‘“A Box of Native Things”: Ethnographic Collectors and the South Australia Museum, 1830s–1930s’ (PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 1996).

³⁷ Coates, *Lists and Letters*, 78.

motivation for collecting.³⁸ Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby suggest that the first phase began with 'unsystematic collecting' (occurring before c. 1880) before a greater focus on collecting influenced by social evolutionary theory (c. 1880 to c. 1920), and then collecting 'before it is too late' (c. 1920 to c. 1940).³⁹ Grouping Australian collecting activity under these broad headings can help to highlight overall patterns, and build a manageable structure within which to place particular objects, individuals and events. However, any overly rigid focus on identifying overarching chronologies risks obscuring how collecting played out in different ways within specific locales. *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections* does not extensively consider Western Australian material. Studying how people there experienced colonisation and ethnographic interest in different ways complicates existing chronologies about collecting in Australia, and is discussed throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter Three.

Different experiences of colonisation across the Australian colonies affected how collecting took place, as Tom Griffiths discussed in his influential book *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (1996).⁴⁰ Griffiths, who focused on collecting in the colony (later state) of Victoria from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (prior to 1851 this region was called the Port Phillip District of New South Wales), argued that scholars had largely ignored the role of Victoria's amateur historians, collectors, scientists and naturalists in shaping popular perceptions of Aboriginal peoples, landscapes and pasts. Significantly, he contended that local collectors were constantly confronted and sometimes troubled by evidence of longstanding indigenous occupation on the land, even if colonial imaginings usually minimised Aboriginal peoples' presence in Victoria.⁴¹ Over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European and Aboriginal experiences of colonisation varied dramatically across and within different

³⁸ Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen, and Louise Hamby, 'Introduction', in *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, ed. Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 1–26 (p. 8).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴¹ Griffiths, 55–85. Studying settler-colonists in Melbourne between 1839 and 1850, Penny Edmonds has highlighted the disjuncture between their ideas of a colonially ordered town space 'and the lived actualities of an urbanizing empire'. Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 113.

Australian colonies, and these differences deserve further analysis. For example, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Aboriginal people living in northern Western Australia attracted European scholarly and popular interest, whereas in Tasmania 'for over a century the descendants of those few [Aboriginal people] who survived the killings were largely denied even an existence'.⁴²

Studies on the history of collecting have often given comparatively little attention to the specific Western Australian experience; and those that do have (with important exceptions such as Ian Coates' work on Emile Clement) tended to concentrate on collections still in Australia.⁴³ Recently, renewed attention to the international journeys of Western Australian material has led to greater knowledge about these global stories.⁴⁴ Local contexts matter in important ways, with colonisation processes and peoples' lived experiences varying across and within individual Australian colonies. Although various studies explore the development of colonial power structures and their impact upon those living in Western Australia, many do not focus on material culture.⁴⁵ However, more work is being done into the relationship between

⁴² Howard Morphy, 'The Displaced Local: Multiple Agency in the Building of Museums' Ethnographic Collections', in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, ed. Kylie Message and Andrea Witcomb (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 365–87 (p. 371).

⁴³ Key works include Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby (eds.), *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008); Ross Chadwick, "'Your Obedient Servant' The John Tunney Collection at the Western Australian Museum', in *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, ed. Nicholas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 255–80; Gaye Sculthorpe, John Carty, Howard Morphy, Maria Nugent, Ian Coates, Lissant Bolton and Jonathan Jones, *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2015).

⁴⁴ *Yurlmun: Mokare Mia Boodjar (Returning to Mokare's Home Country): Encounters and Collections in Menang Country*, ed. Gaye Sculthorpe and Maria Nugent (Welshpool: Western Australian Museum, 2017); Serena K. Marner, 'Investigating the History of the Botanical Collections made by William Dampier in 1699 from "New Holland"', *Studies in Western Australian History*, 35 (2020), 5–20; Tiffany Shellam and Al Paterson, 'A Historical Stratum of Geological Collections from Western Australia in the Natural History Museum, London', *Studies in Western Australian History*, 35 (2020), 37–58; Daniel Simpson, *The Royal Navy in Indigenous Australia, 1795–1855: Maritime Encounter and British Museum Collections* (Acton: Palgrave, 2020).

⁴⁵ Studies include Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell, *Taking Liberty: Indigenous Rights and Settler Self-Government in Colonial Australia, 1830–1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Amanda Nettelbeck and Russell Smandych, 'Policing Indigenous Peoples on Two Colonial Frontiers: Australia's Mounted Police and Canada's North-West Mounted Police', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 43:2 (2010), 356–75.

colonial ideology and collecting in Western Australia.⁴⁶ This is particularly important given that relatively little attention has been given to collections formed during the later nineteenth century, a time of great demographic, economic and political change.

My choice to focus on Western Australia stems in part from how this project was originally envisaged. Based at the British Museum, it was conceived as a collaborative project by Zoë Laidlaw, a historian of Britain's empire and colonies; and Gaye Sculthorpe, a curator specialising in collections from Oceania. Funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, it was also undertaken in partnership with the Australian Research Council's Linkage Project *Collecting the West: How Collections Create Western Australia*.⁴⁷ This latter project is unique in examining collecting from pre-colonial to modern contexts, and at local, national and international scales, to understand how this has framed Western Australia's place in the world.

Many historic Aboriginal objects from Western Australia now lie off-Country, and this thesis provides the first history of the development of British and Irish 'ethnographic' museum collections from Western Australia. Its focus on the region is also meaningful in the sense that, unlike in some other Australian colonies, the formal boundaries imposed upon Western Australia stayed relatively fixed after permanent colonial settlement began. Most non-Aboriginal people, whether they lived in Western Australia or the British Isles, shared a similar definition of its territorial limits. Of course, these boundaries were imposed by an external power over Aboriginal peoples who already had their own distinct and pre-existing territories, spanning approximately 167 languages and dialects.⁴⁸ Yet over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their lives and freedoms were increasingly curtailed by decisions

⁴⁶ Works include Alistair Paterson and Andrea Witcomb, "'Nature's Marvels': The Value of Collections Extracted from Colonial Western Australia", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 45:2 (2021), 1–24; Andrea Witcomb and Alistair Paterson, 'Collections Without End: The Ghostly Presences of Captain Matthew McVicker Smyth', *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research*, 6 (2018), 94–111.

⁴⁷ Australian Research Council Linkage Project (2016-2020) LP160100078. Project Leaders: Alistair Paterson (University of Western Australia) and Andrea Witcomb (Deakin University).

⁴⁸ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *AUSTLANG: Australian Indigenous Languages Database*, <<https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/>> [accessed 23 June 2020].

made specifically by a 'Western Australian' settler colonial administration as well as British imperial concerns. Western Australia also took on significance in Australian and international discourse during this period, partly because of allegations that its officials were sanctioning the economic, physical and sexual abuse of Aboriginal people there. According to Walter Malcolmson, an Irishman who worked in the north-west before starting a 1901 letter campaign in the British and Irish press: 'I have no hesitation in stating that brutal slavery is in full swing in this part of the Empire'.⁴⁹

Enabling collections to 'speak'

This study seeks to improve our understandings of how and why Aboriginal material culture from Western Australia was collected over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through tracing these processes, we gain insights about how material accrued new uses and meanings in non-Aboriginal contexts, both in Australia and Britain. Aboriginal objects now in museum collections are often accompanied by little or no documentation concerning their makers or first Aboriginal owners. And whilst more information has been recorded about European collectors and other individuals, this is often sparse. Ian Coates points out how this knowledge vacuum may lead to stereotyping:

collectors can be reduced to broad categories such as missionary, scientist, and tourist. ... in the absence of specific information about individual collectors, museums and researchers inscribe particular sorts of relations between collector and objects on the basis of such categories. There is a tendency to simplify collectors as acting from scientific or commercial interest. Such a process can serve to 'write out' much of the 'unscientific', the irrational aspects of the process by which the objects end up in the museum.⁵⁰

This thesis therefore seeks a greater understanding of the tangled and multifaceted histories of collections, by exploring how individuals, particularly collectors, have understood and deployed objects to support their personal concerns and beliefs.

⁴⁹ 'Slavery in West Australia: What Our Readers Think', *Daily News*, Wednesday 4 December 1901, 8.

⁵⁰ Coates, *Lists and Letters*, 140.

As I explore how different individuals have engaged with Aboriginal material culture, I acknowledge my own partialness and the fact that my personal background and experiences have shaped my responses to the research sources. As someone with British and Irish cultural heritage, my initial knowledge regarding Aboriginal heritage was strongly influenced by the ways in which Australian material has been mediated through British and Irish museums. This was rarely presented in a prominent manner, despite the close connections that continue to exist between these countries and the many relevant objects present within museums. I also developed an interest in how museums have displayed and interpreted cultural heritage linked with Britain's colonial empire. This has coincided with extensive public debate over the role of museums, including a growing recognition that museums are far from neutral spaces, but places where societal inequalities and colonial violence have been upheld and perpetuated.⁵¹

My thesis often focuses on the attitudes and experiences of a relatively small group of named collectors, most of whom were white, European, male, and middle- to- upper class. One should ask why I pay so much attention to these non-Aboriginal voices. After all, over the last two hundred years extensive scholarly attention has been given to the perspectives of men like these. My decision to do so relates to the very dominance of these voices in historic discourse. Collectors have exerted great influence over the stories that Aboriginal material was (and still is) used to tell in museums. Their interpretations of what they collected impacted how museum workers subsequently curated objects, and some individual collectors continued to have a significant practical impact upon their donations after these were formally accessioned into a museum.⁵² I have sought to scrutinise and complicate their supposedly authoritative portrayals of material culture, suggesting that these stemmed from highly subjective experiences. Identifying some of these factors helps to explain why Aboriginal material was collected, and why it has often been interpreted in particular ways. This,

⁵¹ Miranda Lowe and Subhadra Das, 'Nature Read in Black and White: Decolonial Approaches to Natural History Collections', *Journal of Natural Science Collections*, 6 (2018), 4–14; Sumaya Kassim, 'The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised', *Media Diversified* (15 November 2017), <<https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/>> [accessed 5 March 2021].

⁵² Claire Wintle, 'Consultancy, Networking, and Brokerage: The Legacy of the Donor in Museum Practice', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 23 (2010), 72–83 (pp. 72–73).

alongside identification of where material is today, forms a counterpart to a vital and increasingly visible aspect of collections research, namely greater collaboration with indigenous communities and recognition of Traditional Custodians' expertise.

This study focuses on collections formed by settlers of European (mostly British and Irish) heritage, who were racialised as white. Lorenzo Veracini distinguishes settlers from other migrants, because they 'are *founders* of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them', whereas other migrants are not granted inherent rights and sovereign entitlement.⁵³ It is worth noting that 'whiteness' is an unstable concept, and that at times the racial 'whiteness' of various groups, including Irish, Italian and Jewish people, has been accepted or challenged by others who claim 'whiteness'.⁵⁴ ¹ Whilst none of the collectors whom I look at in-depth appear to have had their whiteness questioned by contemporaries, this underlying fragility of white identity is important to bear in mind when we consider how colonial anxieties manifested in the collection of Aboriginal material culture.

As with contemporary written accounts, many factors affected the formation of collections. Collectors framed Aboriginal objects in ways that supported their own ideas about those who made them, but could never eliminate evidence of Aboriginal presences: indeed, the perceived value of these collections relied upon the sense that their contents were made or used by Aboriginal people. Not all objects made or used by Aboriginal hands were deemed to have 'ethnographic' value, though, and this has practical implications for the material that I can study: 'to be seen as having a biography objects must first be distinguished as things of interest and allowed to speak by human subjects'.⁵⁵ As the collecting of restricted material demonstrated, collectors' notions about objects' usage in Aboriginal communities affected what they sought to obtain. Collections were formed by

⁵³ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 3. Also see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1:1 (2012), 1–40 (pp. 6–7).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Bronwen Walter, 'Whiteness and Diasporic Irishness: Nation, Gender and Class', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37:9 (2011), 1295–312.

⁵⁵ 'What Do Objects Do? A Material and Visual Culture Perspective', *Object Retrieval Project* <<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/objectretrieval/node/266>> [accessed 10 January 2020].

colonial biases, and so help to reveal these attitudes and ideologies. They are also an important source of Aboriginal knowledge, which contemporary texts frequently misunderstood or downplayed. Aboriginal objects could be used by non-Aboriginal people in ways that supported colonial narratives, but they also possess disruptive potential. As material embodiments of Aboriginal expertise and innovation, they help to reveal the range of interactions that existed between Western Australia's first peoples and the colonists and other groups who arrived in their land. This thesis thus argues for the value of using 'ethnographic' museum collections to study colonial processes and ideologies. Considering their contents alongside other sources therefore highlights occasions when colonial narratives were complicated and subverted.

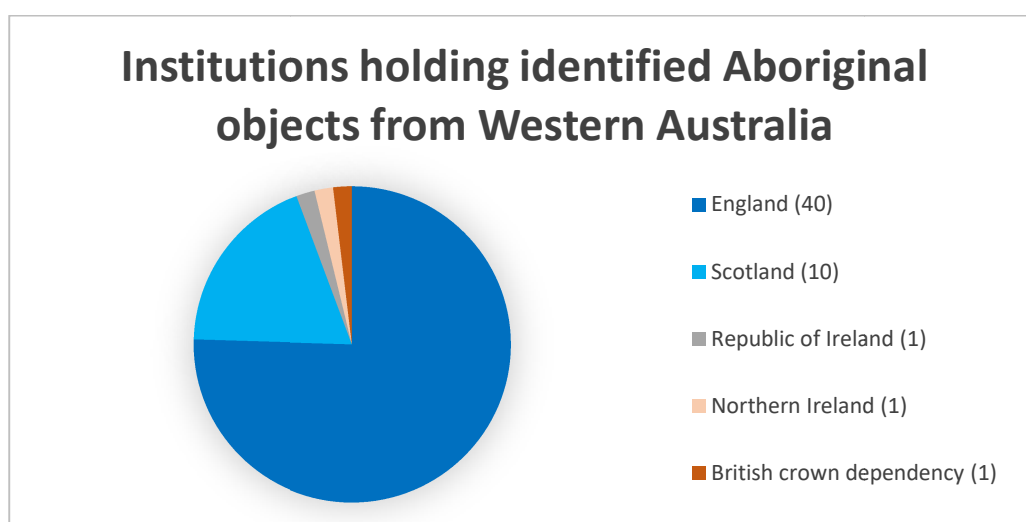
Tracing the journeys that objects have made, and the stories that they have been made to tell, has major implications for their future treatment and use. By shedding light on how colonial collections have been acquired, used and understood, this thesis could be of use to historians, museum workers and Aboriginal community workers as a starting point for future collaborative work involving collections. Aboriginal communities in Western Australia may also find this research useful in tracing and accessing their ancestral material overseas.

Sources and methods

My enquiries focus on three-dimensional ancestral property (which I call 'objects', except when referring to Ancestral Remains) made and used by Aboriginal people in Western Australia, and currently held in museums across Great Britain and Ireland (Figure 1). These total over 3,250 objects associated with more than 400 named individuals, most of whom are non-Aboriginal collectors or owners. They are spread across at least fifty-three institutions, mostly in English and Scottish towns or cities, but with a significant presence also in Dublin and Belfast (see Appendix Two). Over a quarter of known objects are in the British Museum in London (see Appendix Three).

Scholarship on museum collections has tended to focus on extant objects. I likewise focus on items that have physically survived, as these are generally of the greatest immediate importance to Aboriginal communities and museum workers today. However, I also discuss objects that have not survived, or whose current whereabouts is unknown. Leonn Satterthwait stresses the importance of seeing collections as artefacts in their own right, as distributed entities that may span multiple countries and include both present and absent material.⁵⁶ As Satterthwait and later Daniel Simpson point out, acknowledging and reading these absences and omissions has significant research value.⁵⁷

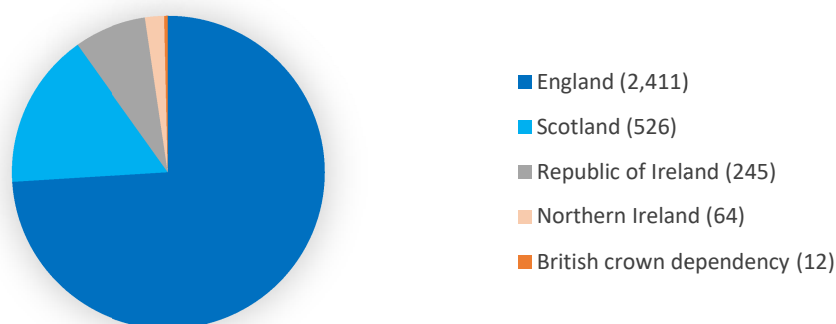
Figure 1: Extant Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in British and Irish museums



⁵⁶ Leonn Satterthwait, 'Collections as Artefacts: The Making and Thinking of Anthropological Museum Collections', in *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, ed. Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen, and Louise Hamby (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008), 29–60 (pp. 29–30).

⁵⁷ Satterthwait, 31–33; Daniel Simpson, 'Agency, Encounter and Ethnographic Collecting: The Royal Navy in Australia, c.1772–1855' (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2017).

Number of identified Aboriginal objects from Western Australia



I focus on objects that contemporary European collectors acquired from living peoples. Many of those whom I discuss portrayed their collections as to some degree representative of Aboriginal culture, presenting them to institutions (like the British Museum) with a particular interest in ‘ethnographic’ representations. Ethnographic collections often began ‘as exotic collections of “the other”’, a legacy that institutions holding them today are still dealing with.⁵⁸ However, making a sharp distinction between ‘ethnographic’ and ‘non-ethnographic’ material is not meaningful or helpful in the context of my discussions. Not all collectors consciously set out to engage with ethnographic discourse, meaning some objects and assemblages only clearly ‘became ethnographic’ at a later stage in their histories, such as when they entered an ethnographic museum. Discussing the presence of cultural material linked with her Yuwaalaraay Country in museums, Jilda Andrews highlights that traditional classifications like ‘ethnographic’, ‘archaeological’ or ‘osteological’ have often been applied arbitrarily, so that ‘whether a stone tool ends up in an archaeology or ethnographic collection is not clear nor consistent’.⁵⁹ Collectors and museum workers have categorised Aboriginal material in different ways, and Aboriginal cultural material from Western Australia therefore appears in museum collections defined as ‘ethnographic’, ‘archaeological’ and ‘anthropological’, as well as in geological and botanical ones (see Chapter Two). In 1898 Emile Clement sold the Economic Botany Museum in Kew Gardens nineteen plant-based objects, including fishing nets, netting needles, and spinifex resin beads (see Appendix Four). Biocultural

⁵⁸ Stanton, ‘Ethnographic Museums and Collections’.

⁵⁹ Jilda Andrews, ‘Encountering Cultural Material in Museum Collections: An Indigenous Perspective’ (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2018), 77.

collections like these 'were, and still are, very much concerned with the accumulation of ethnographic material culture'.⁶⁰ Given these complexities, I discuss a range of material relevant to the overarching question of how European collectors portrayed Western Australia's original inhabitants. Nonetheless, I focus on objects in collections that were classed as 'ethnographic' rather than, for example, Robert Stirling Newall's 1912 'archaeological' collection of 'found' or 'excavated' stone tools.⁶¹ It was around the former material that ideas about living Aboriginal peoples' supposed capabilities and prospects most explicitly coalesced.

Although this thesis focuses on three-dimensional 'things', it considers other types of material that have the potential to inform our understanding of Aboriginal object collections. Photographs, objects in their own right as well as two-dimensional images, are perhaps the most obvious example.⁶² During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most photographs in Western Australia were taken by non-Aboriginal people, although there are exceptions such as Balardung Noongar woman Mavis Phillips née Walley, a prolific amateur photographer thought to have been taking photographs from the 1930s.⁶³ Aboriginal people also played key roles as performers, intermediaries and other participants in the creation of photographs taken by various collectors, and in sound recordings of speech and song collected by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown in 1910 and 1911 (see Chapter Seven). Lastly, the taking of the dead must be acknowledged. Other scholars have examined the collecting of Ancestral Remains in Australia, and this topic is beyond the main scope of this thesis.⁶⁴ However, several of the collectors whom I discuss acquired Ancestral Remains. A few obtained objects incorporating modified human remains (for example, some pointing bones); others obtained remains that were stolen directly from burial places. The collecting of Aboriginal

⁶⁰ Mark Nesbitt and Caroline Cornish, 'Seeds of Industry and Empire: Economic Botany Collections Between Nature and Culture', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 29 (2016), 53–70 (p. 53).

⁶¹ I.C. Glover, 'Stone Implements from Millstream Station, Western Australia: Newall's Collection Re-Analysed', *Mankind*, 6:9 (1967), 415–25.

⁶² *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁶³ Lucy Van, 'Just Gold: The Mavis Walley Collection', *History of Photography*, 43:1 (2019), 2–26 (p. 4).

⁶⁴ *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation: Return, Reconcile, Renew*, ed. Cressida Fforde, C. Timothy McKeown and Honor Keeler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

objects alongside Ancestral Remains is an important concern when discussing the history of collecting in Australia.

I also make extensive use of surviving written records, almost all of which were produced by non-Aboriginal people. Moving 'away from treating the archives as an extractive exercise to an ethnographic one' allows us to scrutinise colonial agents' epistemologies, sentiments and anxieties.⁶⁵ In her work on Frans Carl Valck, a Dutch colonial administrator in Sumatra, Ann Laura Stoler used official records and surviving correspondence and reports ('these uneven traces of a life') to highlight the 'displaced inflections in stories retold in disquieted European voices, tangled by multiple meanings that fold awkwardly into the order of things. Then – as now – they could not be easily read'.⁶⁶

Close scrutiny of colonial writings can yield some insights about indigenous perspectives and actions.⁶⁷ In *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George's Sound*, Tiffany Shellam focused on interactions between Noongar people living at King George's Sound (now called King George Sound) at Albany in the south, and British arrivals in the 1820s and 1830s. Informed by Inga Clendinnen's work, Shellam searched the newcomers' writings about their interactions with Noongar people, seeking to reconstruct what was happening from Noongar perspectives rather than (in Clendinnen's words) 'the simple reaction to British actions the British "naturally" assume occurred'.⁶⁸ She also explored influences upon the newcomers, noting that 'I need to get to know the British too in order to exploit their writings to ethnohistorical ends'.⁶⁹ Through this, Shellam inverted traditional paradigms of colonial interactions to show how both British and Noongar actions stemmed from complex imperatives. The adoption of some settler objects or practices did not imply a simple or wholehearted acceptance of British culture, but its incorporation into some

⁶⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 47.

⁶⁶ Stoler, 233–34, 266.

⁶⁷ Inga Clendinnen, 'Spearing the Governor', *Australian Historical Studies*, 33:118 (2002), 157–74; Tiffany Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George's Sound* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2009).

⁶⁸ Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe*, 20–21; Clendinnen, 163.

⁶⁹ Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe*, 21.

Aboriginal contexts, a process leading to new meanings. *Shaking Hands on the Fringe* deals with a very distinctive local context and series of relationships, which were not replicated elsewhere in Western Australia. However, it and Shellam's later work on Aboriginal intermediaries in the north-west offer important reminders of the need to attend to the political, social, cultural and storied worlds of Aboriginal people and communities.⁷⁰ Shellam's methods and conclusions about colonial interactions stay relevant even when we scrutinise collectors far less interested in Aboriginal people than were many of the early colonists at King George Sound. This thesis takes inspiration from these approaches. Scrutinising material culture can also help to work against the dominance of colonial texts in the historical record, particularly as these tended to be written by white men predominantly describing Aboriginal men to other white men.

Through exploring the British and Irish dimensions to these collections, this study has the potential to complement other studies undertaken with the knowledge and methods of Traditional Custodians, 'getting out of the archives' and entering into shared conversations about the past.⁷¹ By identifying the nature and locations of cultural material in Britain and Ireland, I hope that its findings will help to support new engagements between these institutions and Traditional Custodians. In 2017 Minang Noongar objects held by the British Museum returned to Albany (Kinjarling) for the temporary exhibition project *Yurlmun: Mokare Mia Boodja* ('Returning to Mokare's Home Country'). They included seven objects collected by Alexander Collie, an early colonist who knew a leading Minang man called Mokare (see Chapter Three). The exhibition was driven by Minang people's desire to have these precious objects back in Country as well as 'to tell the story of the cross-cultural friendship between Mokare and Collie to both their young people and the broader community in which they live'.⁷² These perspectives offer an important counterbalance to how Collie portrayed both himself and Mokare in

⁷⁰ Tiffany Shellam, *Meeting the Waylo: Aboriginal Encounters in the Archipelago* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2020).

⁷¹ Len Collard and Dave Palmer, 'Noongar and non-Aboriginal people going along together (Ngulla wangkiny, ni, katitjin Noongar nyidyung koorliny, kura, yeye, boorda)', in *Indigenous Intermediaries*, ed. Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent and Tiffany Shellam (Acton: ANU Press, 2015), 189–205 (p. 202).

⁷² Gaye Sculthorpe, 'Same Objects, Different Stories: Exhibiting "Indigenous Australia"', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 30 (2017), 79–103 (p. 96).

letters and reports, demonstrating the importance of engaging with and learning from Traditional Custodians.

For this study I ultimately decided not to seek to conduct oral histories with Traditional Custodians, though I recognise their importance as a key source of knowledge and counterbalance to the perspectives conveyed in colonial texts. Oral history work requires a deep commitment from researchers and interviewees, particularly when discussing distressing historical events and legacies.⁷³ The need for sensitivity is particularly important when interviews focus on ancestral material taken out of Country, and which in most cases remains far away still. Because this project considers material connected to many different cultural groups, the work needed to agree mutual expectations and progress oral history interviews in collaboration with multiple groups could not be realistically achieved within my project timeframe. Furthermore, in many cases it was not possible to identify precisely where the objects in museums came from. This thesis therefore focuses on material culture and colonial texts as research sources.

My methodological approach was also influenced by Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles' *Collecting Colonialism: Museums and Cultural Change* (2001).⁷⁴ This examined four collections of 'ethnographic' material from Papua New Guinea and their attendant documentation, attempting to reconstruct the intellectual and institutional histories of their colonial collectors. The authors developed methods to systematically analyse objects and collections, and to facilitate quantitative and qualitative comparisons between them (for example, tracking the number of particular 'types' collected over time). Such approaches can risk over-emphasising apparent similarities between diverse material, an issue that is compounded when we reflect that the objects in museums were made, used and collected by different individuals across Western Australia, a region twenty times the size of England. However, as this study will demonstrate, efforts to gather systematic quantitative data for analysis still have the potential to offer important insights.

⁷³ Alison Clark discussed some of these issues in relation to research with contemporary Tiwi and Yirandali people on material held at the British Museum. Alison Clark, 'Conversations in Country: Tiwi and Yirandali Indigenous Australian Collections in the British Museum' (PhD thesis, King's College London, 2013).

⁷⁴ Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles, *Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

My subsequent chapters all include quantitative data about the major collections under discussion, such as the number and nature of objects within them. As I indicated, classing multiple objects according to a common rubric (defining them as 'axes', for example) downplays and potentially obscures individual and cultural characteristics and contexts. There is also great variation in the names with which Aboriginal objects have been recorded in museum catalogues.⁷⁵ Furthermore, how something has been categorised obscures the fact that items frequently had multiple purposes in Aboriginal contexts, so can mislead or 'flatten' important differences in how objects have been made, used and understood. Deploying some of the categories that have been applied to classify Aboriginal material does not, therefore, reveal special insights about objects or makers. It does, however, help to reveal ways of thinking and categorisation that informed collecting. My methodology therefore combines quantitative analysis using museum catalogue records with qualitative research that adds vital nuance, and is focused on the case study collections. As well as written sources, I make use of other relevant evidence including photographs, recordings; and assessments of the objects themselves, their materials, styles and signs of use.

I frequently use named collectors as a starting point for research, often because doing so enables access to further associated data. However, they are not the only people whose roles I consider. Many studies stress the importance of looking at the wider intellectual and personal networks within which objects have circulated, mediated, and been impacted. Several studies in the edited volume *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum* (2011) reconceptualise museum objects using Actor-Network Theory, which recognises the inherently *distributed* nature of agency: in short, that individuals require the scaffolding of other people and objects in order to make actions happen.⁷⁶ Reflecting on Australian material in ethnographic museums, Howard Morphy emphasised the agency of Aboriginal people in the building of collections as well as the complex relationships between the 'two locals': that of the museum currently housing

⁷⁵ In Appendix Four I occasionally quote where relevant historical object terms taken from museum catalogue records.

⁷⁶ *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*, ed. Sarah Byrne, Anne Clarke, Rodney Harrison and Robin Torrence (New York: Springer, 2011).

the object and the 'displaced local' of the Aboriginal community (or communities) from whom it originated.⁷⁷ Whilst most of the individual objects discussed in this thesis have been linked to a single recorded 'collector', they were in fact part of much wider networks of people, ideas and objects in and beyond Western Australia. I begin each introduction to the case studies by highlighting an Aboriginal object linked closely to the collections under discussion and an aspect of its earlier history. In doing so, I position collectors' responses as one of a long series of mediations between people and objects over time. Whilst this thesis focuses on the perspectives of field collectors, I want to show that the material being discussed can, and should, also be read in ways that decentre these perspectives.

People, objects and identity

This thesis argues for the importance of analysing collecting processes through the myriad personal anxieties and ambitions of people involved. This contributes to a much larger body of scholarship exploring the complex relationships between collecting and self-identity.

Russell Belk's 1995 study based on his interviews with approximately 200 collectors suggested that people have very diverse individual motives for collecting, but that one widespread benefit is to gain 'a feeling of mastery, competence, or success'.⁷⁸ Collecting can 'demonstrate our relative prowess and the effects of superior knowledge, tenacity, monetary resources, cleverness, or luck', demonstrate one's uniqueness, enlarge one's sense of self, and express things that would be socially unacceptable to say aloud.⁷⁹ Susan Pearce situates Western collecting as a tradition of material practice, arguing that 'collections are psychic ordering, of individuality, of public and private relationships, and of time and space'.⁸⁰ Colonial collecting histories have the potential to add additional insights into this process of psychological self-fashioning. Focusing on some imperial collectors in India, Maya Jasanoff argued that this 'calls attention to an aspect of empire, and a kind of person who flourished within it, that tends to be obscured by an emphasis on racial,

⁷⁷ Morphy, 'The Displaced Local', 367.

⁷⁸ Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 1995), 87.

⁷⁹ Belk, 87–90.

⁸⁰ Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 279.

social and national exclusion' and that the individuals she profiled, 'marginal figures all – sought to reinvent themselves by collecting, in terms of class, nationality, culture, or sometimes all three'.⁸¹ Michael O'Hanlon argues that many collectors have not regarded being a collector as their primary identity, but that for historians a biographical focus on them is nonetheless helpful because it brings 'into the same frame of reference both the peoples among whom the collecting was originally done, and the metropolitan institutions in which the collections were subsequently lodged'.⁸² Most of the people discussed in my thesis did not see or position themselves primarily as collectors, but I argue that studying their lives nonetheless reveal how individuals and objects, ideas and emotions can intersect and diverge.

This thesis also embraces Sharon MacDonald's contention that:

Collecting is the performance of a certain form of human–object relations: a particular approach to the material and social world. For this reason, it needs to be understood also in relation to other kinds of human–object relations; and ... its development and moral evaluations of it are intertwined with other modes of relating to both things and people.⁸³

The collections to be discussed suggest not only how colonial collectors constructed particular representations of Aboriginal people, but their complex psychological motives for collecting. Attempts to understand the motives of these collectors will always fall short. Even the few who were willing to explicitly record some of their most personal desires and anxieties always left some things unknowable and inexpressible. Self-erasure went hand-in-hand with institutional erasure. In 2001, Anthony Shelton noted that although scholars were then commonly acknowledging frequent erasure by museums of 'the identity of the collectors who have assembled their holdings', this

⁸¹ Maya Jasanoff, 'Collectors of Empire: Objects, Conquests and Imperial Self Fashioning', *Past & Present*, 184 (2004), 109–35 (pp. 111, 135).

⁸² Michael O'Hanlon, 'Introduction', in *Hunting the Gatherers: Ethnographic Collectors, Agents and Agency in Melanesia, 1870s-1930s*, ed. Michael O'Hanlon and Robert L. Welsch (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 1–34 (p. 8).

⁸³ Sharon MacDonald, 'Collecting Practices', in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 207–42 (p. 211).

erasure was still insufficiently examined.⁸⁴ He suggested that personal motives had a much larger impact on the formation of collections than was widely believed. Discussing so-called 'systematic' collectors, Shelton argued that 'the aims and breadth of making collections may not have been so much fixed by pre-existent theories as has often been thought. Instead, while systematic considerations may have determined the core of a collection, more comprehensive or individual interests might explain its more general elaboration'.⁸⁵ He noted that the implications of this for museums were enormous; the same is also true of how histories of collecting are written.

Two decades after Shelton was writing, increasing attention has been given not only to exploring collectors' personal circumstances and motives, but to breaking down the primacy of the 'field collector' and instead situating these individuals as one node in a complex web of relationships extending across time and place.⁸⁶ In seeking to learn from Traditional Custodians, museums have opportunities to reconceptualise the narratives they tell about people and objects alike. In 2018 Arrernte Elder Cleophas (Lofty) Katakarinja travelled to Finland to visit his peoples' objects there. Hearing his personal farewell to items in the storerooms of the National Museum in Vantaa, curator Matt Poll suggested that 'in this moment, these Arrernte objects that have lain dormant for more than half a century, shifted the narrative from a historical representation of collectors acquiring objects to that of objects collecting people'.⁸⁷

Western Australian frontiers

Elizabeth Furniss points out that academics use the concept of a colonial frontier in two different ways: as a term describing a supposedly empirical reality, or as a social construction with 'no reality outside of the cultural

⁸⁴ Anthony Shelton, 'Introduction: Doubts Affirmations', in *Collectors: Individuals and Institutions*, ed. Anthony Shelton (London: Horniman Museum, 2001), 13–22 (p. 19). Also see Shelton, 'Introduction: The Return of the Subject', in *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, ed. Anthony Shelton (London: Horniman Museum, 2001), 11–22.

⁸⁵ Shelton, 'Introduction: The Return of the Subject', 19.

⁸⁶ See, for example, *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*, ed. Sarah Byrne, Anne Clarke, Rodney Harrison and Robin Torrence (New York: Springer, 2011).

⁸⁷ Matt Poll, 'Objects Collecting People', in *Objects Collecting People*, ed. Kristina Tohmo, Johanna Perheentupa and Matt Poll (Espoo: Helinä Rautavaara Museum, 2019), 19–28 (p. 19).

imaginings of colonial societies'.⁸⁸ This thesis primarily engages with Furniss's second definition, asking how *imagined* frontiers can help us to understand collections formed in colonial spaces. It engages closely with the concept of the 'colonial frontier' as an imagined liminal space in and across which diverse people lived, worked, competed and co-operated.⁸⁹ I make no attempt to narrowly define physical 'frontiers' in Western Australia, for this obscures important local and individual experiences.

The once-dominant conceptualisation of colonial frontiers as distinct boundaries between two realms, each with closely defined geographic and temporal limits, has fallen out of favour amongst historians.⁹⁰ Yet despite questions over the 'frontier' and its validity as a trope through which to study colonial experiences, it has proven remarkably adaptive to changing academic discourse.⁹¹ Kerwin Klein argues that despite its flaws, it offers a useful and reasonably flexible model precisely because it embodies a sense of duality and the meetings of different cultures.⁹² Many reformulations present the frontier not as a boundary line clearly delineated by a specific time and place, but a more ambiguous cultural or psychological entity that also exists today.⁹³ In Lynette Russell's words:

the frontier zone is a hybrid space, a place where both indigene and invader come together on land that each one believes to be their own. It is a place where indigenes become incorporated into the European

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Furniss, 'Imagining the Frontier: Comparative Perspectives from Canada and Australia', in *Dislocating the Frontier: Essaying the Mystique of the Outback*, ed. Richard Davis and Deborah Bird Rose (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005), 23–46 (p. 30)

⁸⁹ See, for example, *Dislocating the Frontier: Essaying the Mystique of the Outback*, ed. Deborah Bird Rose and Richard David (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005).

⁹⁰ For instance, Inga Clendinnen, *True Stories: History, Politics, Aboriginality* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2008), 40; Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

⁹¹ Kerwin Lee Klein, 'Reclaiming the "F" Word, or Being and Becoming Postwestern', *Pacific Historical Review*, 65:2 (1996), 179–215; Nathan Wolski, 'All's Not Quiet on the Western Front: Rethinking Resistance and Frontiers in Aboriginal Historiography', in *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies*, ed. Lynette Russell (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 216–36.

⁹² Klein, 210.

⁹³ Wolski, 232; Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 238.

society and perhaps where Europeans are brought into indigenous society.⁹⁴

Luke Godwin also cautions against seeing the frontier as a clear and short-lived line or zone of tension, arguing that ‘the perceived zone of tension’ had more to do with colonists’ attitudes than it did their physical proximity to newly ‘settled’ areas.⁹⁵ This thesis discusses material originating from diverse colonial contexts, from objects linked to the so-called ‘friendly frontier’ thought to be in place at King George Sound during the 1820s (Chapter Three), to those linked with frontier violence in the north-west in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century (Chapters Four and Five). Perceptions of living ‘on the frontier’ could fuel colonists’ and collectors’ anxieties long after physical dominance in a region was established. As I will show, exploring these histories informs our understanding of material whose entangled relationship with ‘the frontier’ have not yet been scrutinised (see particularly Chapters Six and Seven).

Structure

My argument develops across six chapters, each of which share some connections in terms of the individuals or places involved. Chapter Two starts to explore the presence of Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in British and Irish museums. It provides important detail and context for subsequent chapters, which all focus on one or more collections. I explore some of the journeys made by objects and some individuals associated with them, a process that helps to reveal how collections have been assembled and deployed.

Chapter Three considers collections formed in three parts of Western Australia during early phases of the colonial invasion: the 1820s and 1830s in the south-west; and the 1880s in the north. I ask what bridges we can build between material separated through time and space, but whose collectors

⁹⁴ Lynette Russell, ‘Introduction’, in *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies*, ed. Lynette Russell (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 1–16 (p. 12).

⁹⁵ Luke Godwin, ‘The Fluid Frontier: Central Queensland 1845–63’, in *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies*, ed. Lynette Russell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 101–18 (pp. 101, 103, 116).

shared affinities of experience centred around the idea of a colonial 'frontier'. Many collections could speak to this theme, but those of Alexander Collie, Samuel Talbot and Edward Hardman were chosen for analysis because they include some of the earliest material acquired during permanent British settlement in these respective regions. Bringing these men, their writings and collections into conversation illuminates connections and differences in how they thought about and tried to represent themselves and Aboriginal people.

Chapter Four focuses on entwined relationships between collecting practices in and beyond Western Australia. I ask why and how individuals' actions were affected by their collecting at other times and in other places, looking at the elite couple Frederick Broome and Mary Barker's engagement with Aboriginal material culture during the 1880s; a journey taken through the Western Desert in the 1890s by British 'adventurer' David Carnegie and Warri, an Aboriginal servant from the MacDonnell Ranges (in the Northern Territory); and Bishop Gerard Trower's feelings about his north-west diocese in the early twentieth century. As with Chapter Three, a wealth of potential case studies were available to explore. However, through the lives of Broome, Barker, Carnegie and Trower we see how four collectors and writers, each with distinctive backgrounds and professional trajectories, responded to wider concerns over the issue of settler abuses against Aboriginal people. Warri's experiences have until now received very little scholarly attention. Discussing his involvement not as an expert guide or local intermediary but as a servant likewise entering new territory, stresses the need for historians to acknowledge the role of a fuller range of individuals in collection formation.

Chapters Three and Four focus on collections that are either associated with well-known individuals or are comparatively well-documented. Chapter Five draws upon a wider group of collections and asks how we might understand assemblages in light of contemporary changes to Western Australian landscapes and economies. Knowledge of these collections' provenance ranges considerably, but most are associated with collectors involved in mining work from about 1880 to 1910. Although research into the provenance of specific objects remains important, I suggest that tracing the manifestation of mining activity across multiple collections reveals some common priorities and concerns. Mining's importance to Western Australia's settler economy, the number of collectors associated with this industry, and

its continuing impact on the lives of people in the state, informed the selection of this theme. Chapter Five further explores how the presence of spear points made from broken electrical telegraph insulators, a product that helped to support the settler mining industry, were used to uphold and to complicate ideas about colonial dominance.

Chapter Six investigates how Aboriginal objects were used to inform perceptions of Western Australia abroad, and focuses on the curation of material at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901. Glasgow Museums holds former exhibits from this display, the largest extant collection of Aboriginal objects from Western Australia to have been displayed at a British international exhibition. This chapter explores how settler authorities controlled Aboriginal presences so as to avoid humanitarian criticism and promote a particular vision of the new state that simultaneously emphasised settler modernity and Aboriginal obsolescence.

Finally, Chapter Seven explores interactions and tensions between Europeans and Aboriginal people during a British expedition to north-west Australia between 1910 and 1912. I discuss how the expedition's three researchers emphasised or downplayed certain aspects of Aboriginal material culture, and argue that their acquisitions complicated their stated ideas about Aboriginal people. This expedition resulted in the donation of a substantial collection to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, making it a logical choice for someone studying anthropological collecting in Western Australia. Although I had intended to focus primarily on this extant collection, it quickly became apparent that the expedition cannot be properly discussed without understanding the researchers' illicit collecting. This chapter therefore closes by considering expedition members' taking of Ancestral Remains, showing that whilst these actions were inextricably bound with the idea of Aboriginal extinction, the perpetrators' stated justification for these thefts failed to withstand even their own logic.

This thesis demonstrates the vital contribution that material culture can make to assessments of intercultural interactions over time. In particular, it explores how and why settlers and Europeans have used Aboriginal bodies and objects to construct ideas about Australia, Europe, and the past and

future of humanity, often to the complete disregard of the concerns of Aboriginal peoples.

Chapter Two: Western Australian collections in Britain and Ireland

This chapter provides, for the first time, an overview of Aboriginal objects from Western Australia currently housed in British and Irish ethnographic museum collections.¹ A wide range of factors, planned and otherwise, affected the survival of objects and records. These include cultural ideas about what material and knowledge is deemed worthy of preservation. I begin by acknowledging some of the challenges involved in researching these collections, also showing that despite the fragmented nature of what survives it is still possible to identify some commonalities in what has entered museums over time, and how. Finally, I consider the geographic movements of Aboriginal material within the British Isles. Whilst later chapters focus on how individual collectors engaged with material culture *in* Western Australia, this chapter shows that generations of museum workers also shaped the journeys of collections. In many cases, as I will discuss, objects' journeys did not stop once they entered a museum.

Researching collections

More than 30,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander objects are estimated to survive in Britain and Ireland museums.² Of these, over 3,250 have been identified as coming from Western Australia (Figure 1).³ Some challenges involved in researching their provenance will be familiar to those working with other ethnographic collections. Although this thesis focuses on Aboriginal objects that have survived in museums (see Appendix Two), these represent

¹ I include known collections in the Republic of Ireland, as they date predominantly from before the establishment of the Irish Free State (1922) and independent republic (1948).

² Gaye Sculthorpe, 'A Corroboree for the Countess of Kintore: Enlivening Histories through Objects', *Aboriginal History*, 42 (2018), 55–71 (p. 56). This figure includes the Ernest Westlake collection of 13,033 Tasmanian stone artefacts, now at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Rebe Taylor, 'A Journey of 13,033 Stones: The Westlake Collection and Papers', *Collections*, 8:1 (2012), 7–37.

³ Because colonists defined Western Australia's territorial limits, its boundaries do not map neatly onto the territories of Aboriginal cultural groups. This creates problems in identifying the provenance of items acquired in so-called 'border' areas. For example, between 1912 and 1915 Daisy Bates was collecting near Eucla, close to the state border with South Australia. I only include objects that can be identified with reasonable certainty as made and used in Western Australia within this figure.

a fraction of the material that circulated within the British Isles. Collectors acquired many items that did not enter museums but passed between private individuals, societies and auction houses, often then disappearing from the records. The current whereabouts of many objects acquired by museums are also unclear. Factors including staff changes, institutional closures, pest or bomb damage and theft have led many objects and museum registers to be destroyed or separated from each other. This is true for the Royal Navy's Haslar Hospital Museum founded in 1827 at Gosport, near Portsmouth. In 1855 the British Museum acquired seven Noongar objects from Haslar, which former naval surgeon Alexander Collie had collected in the 1830s (see Chapter Three). Haslar Hospital Museum's original catalogue is now lost, and these seven objects are likely part of a larger collection sent by Collie to Haslar.⁴ Collie's friend, the Surveyor-General of Western Australia (and ex-midshipman) John Septimus Roe co-founded the 'Roeval Museum' in Newbury to house his own ethnographic collection, but neither that museum or its records now exist.⁵

Indigenous peoples' cultural knowledge and individual identities have frequently been distorted and obscured within and beyond museum archives. Wiradjuri librarian and essayist Nathan Sentance highlights these misrepresentations and absences:

My ancestors are in these memory institutions, but their voices are missing from the words written, the art created and the cultural objects taken. All of their cultural knowledge and their history is recorded and interpreted through the colonisers' lens. We are part of the memory conveyed by galleries, libraries, archives and museums, but we have had no say or agency in construction of it.⁶

⁴ Simpson, 'Agency, Encounter and Ethnographic Collecting', 183.

⁵ The museum collection was dispersed after Roe's father's death in 1838, and no items with confirmed provenance have been traced. Simpson, 'Agency, Encounter and Ethnographic Collecting', 168–79; Matthew Fishburn, 'The Private Museum of John Septimus Roe, Dispersed in 1842', *Archives of Natural History*, 47:1 (2020), 166–82.

⁶ Nathan Sentance, 'My Ancestors are in our Memory Institutions, but their Voices are Missing', *The Guardian*, Tuesday 6 March 2018
<<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/06/my-ancestors-are-in-our-memory-institutions-but-their-voices-are-missing>> [accessed 19 February 2021].

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries most British and Irish museum workers had no first-hand knowledge of Aboriginal groups and cultural forms, instead relying on information from non-Aboriginal field collectors, donors, auction houses, or other supposed authorities.⁷ Flawed or inadequate information entered museum records concerning places and circumstances of acquisition, peoples' and objects' names, and descriptions of how objects were used. As far as we know, there were no direct engagements between British museums and Aboriginal people from Western Australia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The comparatively late start of British colonial involvement in Western Australia, combined with heavy restrictions upon Aboriginal peoples' movements from the late nineteenth century onwards, made it extremely difficult for them to travel to Britain. A few did make the journey. Oral accounts passed down to Badimaya/Yamatji academic Carol Susan Dowling record that her great-great-grandmother, a Badima woman called Melbin, visited England in the early 1880s.⁸ During the 1900s the Sydney-born activist Anthony Martin Fernando (1864–1949) lived in the Murchison region (see Chapter Six) before travelling to Europe and settling in London from the 1920s onwards.⁹ In 1910, the Western Australian government allowed some Aboriginal people to perform boomerang-throwing in London, 'reasoning that their healthy appearance might help foster a better impression of Aboriginal conditions in Australia'.¹⁰ These visitors were unlikely to have seen European 'ethnographic' displays, although it is not impossible. In 1884 Billy and Jimmy, two Biyaygirri and Manbarra performers from North Queensland, visited Berlin's Royal Museum. Their 'apparent delight' in identifying Australian objects on display abruptly ended once they were confronted by the sight of a mummified Aboriginal body.¹¹ In 1925 Fernando was arrested for mounting a protest close to the Vatican Mission Exposition, which he probably visited (unlike the exhibitions I discuss in Chapter Six, this event displayed Aboriginal

⁷ Philip Jones, 'Australian Ethnographica in European Collections: Circles of Accumulation During the Long Nineteenth Century', in *Acquiring Cultures: Histories of World Art on Western Markets*, ed. Bénédicte Savoy, Charlotte Guichard and Christine Howard (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 123–52 (p. 151).

⁸ Carol Susan Dowling, "'Find One of Your Own Kind": Auto-ethnography and My Aboriginal Women Ancestors' (PhD thesis, Curtin University, 2017), 171.

⁹ See Fiona Paisley, *The Lone Protestor: AM Fernando in Australia and Europe* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹¹ Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 140.

objects from the Spanish Benedictine monastery of New Norcia, near Perth).¹² However, museum documentation about collections has been mediated largely through non-Aboriginal voices.

Museum records frequently describe Aboriginal objects as being from 'Australia' (or in some cases simply 'Oceania') with few specific details about their place of production and early life. Scientific analysis can help to identify the material origins of some objects, such as variable pressure scanning electron microscopy to identify wood species.¹³ However, these methods alone cannot conclusively answer questions of provenance. Objects can be made or used hundreds or thousands of kilometres from where raw materials like ochre and pearl shell were sourced.¹⁴ In addition to issues of cost, time, expertise and the need to obtain appropriate permissions, scientific analysis may cause physical damage. These factors rule out many methods as practical or acceptable ways of identifying objects' origins, and very few Australian objects in British and Irish museums have been subjected to scientific analysis. The quantitative data and case studies discussed in this thesis therefore focus on material identified through other means as probably or certainly made by Aboriginal people in Western Australia before 1914. These identifications rest primarily on museum registers, documentary evidence, and curatorial judgements including the analysis of visual characteristics. Many objects can be identified with relative ease as probably originating from Western Australia due to stylistic characteristics, even when their provenance was not specified in museum registers. For example, the

¹² Fiona Paisley, 'Arrested in St Peter's: Anthony Martin Fernando, Aboriginal Australia and Fascist Italy', *Cultural and Social History*, 9:4 (2012), 569–88 (p. 576); Katherine Aigner, 'The Making of a Collection', in *Australia: The Vatican Museums Indigenous Collection*, ed. Katherine Aigner (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2017), 41–111 (p. 80).

¹³ For example see Valerie J. Attenbrow and Caroline R. Cartwright, 'An Aboriginal Shield Collected in 1770 at Kamay Botany Bay: An Indicator of Pre-Colonial Exchange Systems in South-Eastern Australia', *Antiquity*, 88:341 (2014), 883–95. The debate generated over this shield, which has been linked with the Gweagal people of New South Wales, demonstrates the difficulty of assigning provenance based on scientific analysis alone. Maria Nugent and Gaye Sculthorpe, 'A Shield Loaded with History: Encounters, Objects and Exhibitions', *Australian Historical Studies*, 49:1, 28–43.

¹⁴ Kim Akerman, 'From Boab Nuts to Ilma: Kimberley Art and Material Culture', in *Images of Power: Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley*, by Judith Ryan and Kim Akerman (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2007), 106–13 (p. 108); Howard Morphy and John Carty, 'Understanding Country', in *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation*, by Gaye Sculthorpe, John Carty, Howard Morphy, Maria Nugent, Ian Coates, Lissant Bolton and Jonathan Jones (London: British Museum Press, 2015), 30–119 (p. 40).

distinctive *kodj* (axe) made by fastening stone axe-heads with resin to a wooden handle is only made by Noongar peoples of the south-west (Figure 2), and carving seed pods of the boab tree is an industry unique to peoples of the Kimberley.¹⁵ Certain styles of shields, spear-throwers and boomerangs are distinct to particular regions, although in other cases it is impossible to ascribe objects to a specific region or period on the basis of appearance alone.



Figure 2: *Kodj* (axe) from the south-west

Maker or collector unknown. Registered into the British Museum's collection in 1980, but probably acquired in the nineteenth century.

BM, Oc1980,Q.725. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Objects that entered museums during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are often accompanied by scant documentation. Occasionally thefts are clearly documented, such as when David Carnegie admitted stealing a paperbark container and its contents in 1896, later given to the British Museum (see Chapter Four). Others were reportedly freely purchased from, bartered with or 'given' by Aboriginal owners or makers. Phillip Parker King wrote that during a visit to Oyster Harbour (within King George Sound) in 1821, Minang people traded hundreds of weapons with his crew in return for commodities like ship's biscuit.¹⁶ Aboriginal traders were

¹⁵ Kim Akerman, 'Observations on Edge-ground Stone Hatchets with Hafting Modifications in Western Australia', *Australian Archaeology*, 79 (2014), 153–61; Akerman, 'From Boab Nuts to Ilma', 106.

¹⁶ Tiffany Shellam, "'Thro' the Medium of Biscuits": Phillip Parker King and the Menang, 1821', in *Yurlmun: Mokare Mia Boodjar (Returning to Mokare's Home*

also interested in iron tomahawks or other metal goods.¹⁷ Terms like ‘trade’, however, do not necessarily do justice to what were potentially complex transactions involving wide-ranging individual motives and expectations. For most of the British and Irish collections, field-collectors did not leave detailed (or often, any) written accounts of how they acquired objects, and surviving accounts are also plagued with gaps and distortions. Even if collectors identified the region in which material was acquired, they often did not describe, or understand, the exact circumstances through which it changed hands.

Details about from whom objects were acquired in Western Australia are often absent from archival records. As they changed hands, the identities of makers and earlier owners were frequently lost. Individual names recorded in museum records belong largely to the people who directly donated or sold objects to the museum itself. Until well into the twentieth century, the names of Aboriginal people were almost entirely unrecorded. For many collectors, it was not important to record the name of individuals, because the objects represented Aboriginal ‘people’ in a general sense. Two exceptions are Jilyee and her husband Noong-ul-lee, who lived in the Kimberley during the 1930s. In 1953 Mary Montgomerie Bennett, a teacher and activist, gave the British Museum a human hair belt and carved boab nut that she had obtained from the couple, as well as emu-feather ornaments from a woman called Wonau.¹⁸ Colonial racial hierarchies of value undoubtedly played a role in deciding what information non-Aboriginal collectors and museums chose to record or preserve, but other factors also came into play, including white collectors’ relationships with Aboriginal people. Several mission workers like Love and Bennett stayed in places long enough to get to know residents, and took some concern for their welfare; with some exceptions like William Dugald Campbell (see Chapter Five) many mining workers, explorers or police had very different relationships. Social status was also important. The British Museum holds a message stick intercepted by warders at Perth Gaol at some point before 1891.¹⁹ Its donor, Sir William Henry Flower; and a former owner,

Country): *Encounters and Collections in Menang Country*, ed. Gaye Sculthorpe and Maria Nugent (Welshpool: Western Australian Museum, 2017), 10–17.

¹⁷ Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 125.

¹⁸ BM, Oc1953,03.14, Oc1953,03.15, Oc1953,03.8, Oc1953,03.9.

¹⁹ BM, Oc1895,-.20.

Sir George Macleay, are identified in museum records; but not the names of either the white warder(s) or the Aboriginal prisoners.

As the issues discussed in this section demonstrate, today's surviving collections are deeply marked by absences of many kinds. In particular, written sources describing the circumstances in which Aboriginal objects were acquired and taken to the British Isles are non-existent, incomplete, inconsistent or inaccurate. Nevertheless, they remain a rich resource that speaks to many kinds of interactions and meanings.

Chronology

Despite gaps and absences in the archive, it is possible to identify some broad patterns in terms of how collectors operated at particular times and places. No surviving Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in European collections have been conclusively dated to before the nineteenth century, although some early European travellers to the coast had opportunities to interact with those already living there. In 1658 Yuat Noongar people on the south-west coast and Dutch sailors on a passing ship signalled to each other, although the sailors were too afraid to accept the Yuat's apparent invitation to rest on the mainland.²⁰ They, like other early Dutch travellers, are not known to have collected Aboriginal objects. In 1688 William Dampier, the first British person known to have set foot in Western Australia, spent two months living near King Sound on the north-west coast. In his book *A New Voyage Around the World* (1697), Dampier described some objects belonging to Bardi people but did not report collecting any.²¹ He said that 'neither did they seem to admire anything that we had'.²² Evidently, contact did not always lead to interest in or opportunities to acquire objects.

²⁰ Liam Benison, 'Reduced to a Map: Poetic Geographies of "Australia", 1606–1708' (PhD thesis, University of Kent and University of Porto, 2020), 173–74.

²¹ Dampier, 464, 466. Oxford University Herbaria holds plant specimens collected by Dampier in the north-west in 1699: these are the earliest known surviving Australian plant specimens with an overt provenance now in Europe. A.M. Lucas, 'Evolving Contexts of Collecting: The Australian Experience', in *Naturalists in the Field: Collecting, Recording and Preserving the Natural World from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Arthur MacGregor (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 806–62 (p. 808); Marner, 'Investigating the History of the Botanical Collections ...'.

²² Dampier, 468. If Dampier did collect Bardi objects, he presumably lost them when marooned on the Nicobar Islands later in 1688.

The earliest objects still identifiable in British or Irish collections today were acquired during Phillip Parker King's 1817–1822 survey of the Australian coastline (see Appendix Three). His crew sometimes traded and sometimes stole objects. Most of what was collected can no longer be traced, but it is possible to identify some Minang objects probably traded at King George Sound. On 8 August 1821 King's crew violently stole Worora objects from Hanover Bay in the Kimberley, including at least six that are now in the British Museum.²³ Daniel Simpson suggests there is a 'strong possibility' that the Worora had intended to present these objects to King's crew as an apology for the spearing of their surgeon the previous day, itself an incident that seems to have stemmed from a misunderstanding.²⁴ King's *Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coasts of Australia* (1827) contains sketches of some 'weapons etc. of the natives at Hanover Bay', including a spearhead and spear-thrower that correlate with examples in the museum's collection (Figure 3).²⁵ Simpson notes that in its visual and textual positioning of objects *Narrative of a Survey* makes 'an arbitrary but powerful distinction – based on very similar types of object', in that 'the Worora are depicted as warlike, whereas the Minang are shown to be imaginative, civilised, and worthy of ethnographic analysis'.²⁶ This distinction between different Aboriginal peoples is one of many that occur throughout this study.

²³ Philip Parker King, *Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coasts of Australia Performed Between the Years 1818 and 1822*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1825–1827), II, 69.

²⁴ Simpson, *The Royal Navy in Indigenous Australia*, 107–10 (p. 109).

²⁵ King, *Narrative of a Survey*, II, 69; Tiffany Shellam, 'Ethnographic Inquiry on Phillip Parker King's Hydrographic Survey', in *Expeditionary Anthropology: Teamwork, Travel and the 'Science of Man'*, ed. Martin Thomas and Amanda Harris (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018), 205–34 (pp. 221–22); Shellam, *Meeting the Waylo*, 137–57.

²⁶ Simpson, *The Royal Navy in Indigenous Australia*, 152.

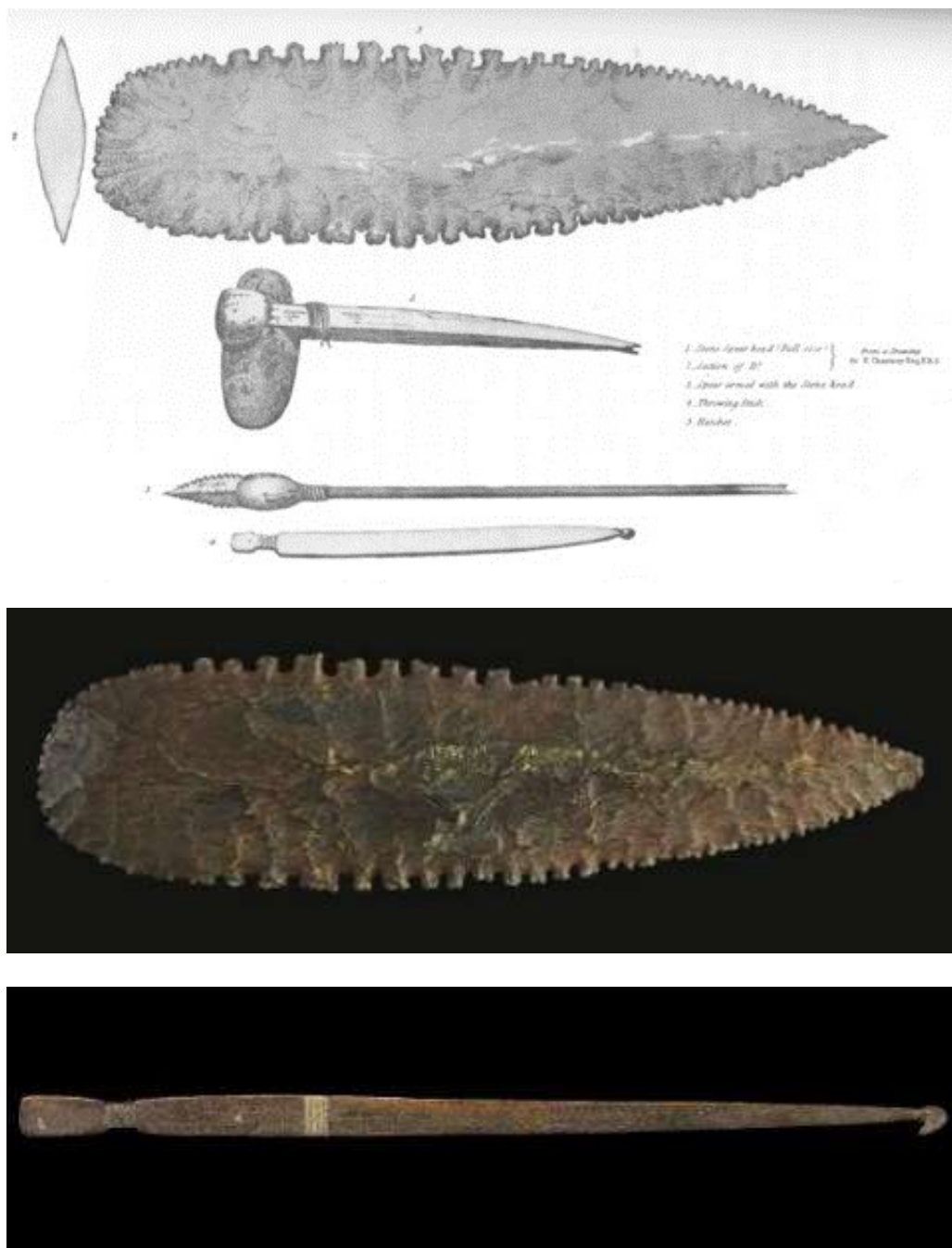


Figure 3: 'Weapons &c. of the Natives of Hanover Bay' and some objects today

Top: Illustration from Phillip Parker King, *Narrative of a Survey*, II, p. 69.

Middle: Stone spear-head. Unidentified maker; thought to have been taken at Hanover Bay by King or one of his crew in 1821. Acquired by the British Museum in 1873 from the Royal United Service Institute (United Services Museum). BM, Oc.8767. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Bottom: Wooden spear-thrower. Unidentified maker; collected at Hanover Bay by Frederick Bedwell in 1821. Acquired by the British Museum probably in the 1860s from Arley Castle. BM, Oc.982 © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, most objects entering British and Irish museums were acquired from Aboriginal people living near the coastline such as at Swan River and King George Sound. This reflects the wider pattern of colonial settlement, as early settlers initially formed communities in the well-watered areas of the south and south-west. Some colonists visited the northern coasts, particularly those working in the Royal Navy, but had no need to venture far inland. Many of those collecting 'ethnographic' objects from Australia at this time were closely associated with the Royal Navy.²⁷ Phillip Parker King; John Matthew Robert Ince (of the HMS *Fly*, a surveying vessel that visited Australia in the 1840s); and Alexander Collie (see Chapter Three) are notable examples. Some naval workers were highly motivated to collect: not only for their own entertainment or to sell onwards, but as 'part of a wider state effort ... to facilitate new colonial and imperial knowledge'.²⁸ The Admiralty increasingly encouraged and required these collectors to present at least part of what they acquired during naval voyages to a public collection like the Navy's Haslar Hospital Museum or the British Museum.²⁹ These stricter demands partly stemmed from disappointment at the dispersal into private ownership of collections formed during Phillip Parker King's Australian voyage, which had arisen due to 'ambiguous understandings of the Admiralty's ownership of collected specimens'.³⁰ Many collectors subsequently gave material not to the British Museum, but to institutions like Haslar.³¹ This frustrated John Edward Gray of the British Museum's Zoological department, who told an 1835 parliamentary select committee that 'being a national institution,' the British Museum 'ought at least to have the first choice when collections have been made at the expense of the nation'.³²

Few civilian names crop up in British and Irish museum registers between the 1830s and 1850s. Samuel Talbot, who in 1838 made the largest of the early surviving collections now in Britain (see Chapter Three), is a

²⁷ Ibid, 3.

²⁸ Ibid, 3, 276.

²⁹ Ibid, 90–93.

³⁰ Ibid, 180, 262–63.

³¹ See Daniel Simpson, 'Medical Collecting on the Frontiers of Natural History: The Rise and Fall of Haslar Hospital Museum (1827–1855)', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 2017, 1–15.

³² *Report from the Select Committee on the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum* (London, House of Commons, 1835), 243.

significant exception. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, more Aboriginal objects from Western Australia arrived in Britain and Ireland. Colonists and other visitors gained new opportunities to collect as colonial expeditions and settlements expanded northwards and inland. Museum acquisitions were increasingly linked to pearling, pastoral and mining settlements around the Pilbara and Kimberley, including Roebourne ('founded' in 1866), Broome (Rubibi) and Derby ('founded' in 1883); the Western Desert (from the early 1890s); and the Goldfields-Esperance region from sites like Kalgoorlie ('founded' in 1893). More civilian collectors also appear in museum records. Some of these visited the colony temporarily; others were permanent settlers. Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many individuals associated with the Western Australian mining industry donated or sold items to museums (see particularly Chapter Five). Their presence shows how mining work, and particularly the boom of the 1890s, helped to drive settler incursions across the colony. Some collections are strongly linked to intense and violent intercultural conflict. In 1899 Craven Henry Ord donated at least 97 items, mostly weapons, to the British Museum. He had acquired them whilst working as a police officer in the Kimberley during years of heightened violence. Ord was closely involved in suppressing the Punuba people's resistance to colonial invaders in the West Kimberley, and wrote that the weapons had been 'taken by police from native camps'.³³

Whilst British and Irish museums did not organise ethnographic collecting expeditions in Western Australia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some proactively sought Aboriginal objects. In 1839 the *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal* published a request by the trustees of the British Museum for residents of British colonies to collect 'rare and curious objects' for the museum.³⁴ Aboriginal material had value in the British antiquities market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sales catalogues for J.C. Stevens, a London-based auction house, show a stream of objects from Western Australia arriving over this period.³⁵ Material

³³ Craven Henry Ord, letter to Charles Hercules Read, 6 October 1899. Correspondence file, BM AOA Archives.

³⁴ 'Classified Advertising', *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, Saturday 16 March 1839, 44.

³⁵ A full run of J.C. Stevens catalogues is unavailable; I consulted 128 sales catalogues dating from 23 June 1885 to 30 June 1939, which are held at the British Museum's Anthropology Library and the Horniman Museum. Also see Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke, 'Suitable for Decoration of Halls and Billiard Rooms':

also continued to be available to curators through individual collectors. Moreover, nearly a third of the Aboriginal objects now in British and Irish collections arrived through the salesmanship of one man. Between 1896 and 1928, Emile Clement (1844–1928) and his network of collectors sent some 1,600 Aboriginal objects from Western Australia to museums across Europe. Clement (see Chapter Five) was skilled at persuading museums to buy his offerings, and over 900 are dispersed in British and Irish museums, with large numbers going to the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin; the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford; the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow; and the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.³⁶ Clement prepared numbered lists of object ‘types’ for his clients to pick from, and collected almost exclusively from a few Aboriginal communities along the north-west coast.³⁷

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Western Australian settlers’ and politicians’ international ambitions for their colony increased. The colony began participating more energetically in international exhibitions, where its displays frequently featured Aboriginal weapons and other objects. Many returned to Australia, but some were sold or given to institutions in host countries. These include a large collection displayed at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 and Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901, and then given to Glasgow Corporation Museum (see Chapter Six).

Objects’ journeys to Britain were neither inevitable or straightforward. As Philip Jones notes, ‘a simple “centre and periphery” model, by which objects were extracted from Australia and drawn towards Europe as if by some magnetic force, provides only a partial explanation’.³⁸ Some objects passed through many hands before leaving Australia, and in the early twentieth century the Western Australian government started to take an interest. In 1901 the Chief Protector of Aborigines reported receiving ‘a large number of communications, asking where weapons and other curios used by Western Australian natives, could be purchased’.³⁹ He volunteered to be an

Finding Indigenous Agency in Historic Auction and Sales Catalogues’, in *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*, ed. Sarah Byrne, Anne Clarke, Rodney Harrison and Robin Torrence (New York and London: Springer, 2011), 29–53.

³⁶ Data taken per Coates, ‘Lists and Letters’, 123–24.

³⁷ Jones, ‘Australian Ethnographica ...’, 147.

³⁸ Ibid, 126–27.

³⁹ ‘News and Notes’, *The West Australian*, Saturday 12 June 1901, 4.

intermediary and sell objects on behalf of settlers and mission stations wishing to capitalise on this demand.⁴⁰ Aboriginal people were also increasingly aware of these markets, which could have 'affected their own production in various ways, aside from the effects engendered by exposure to European motifs, images and actions'.⁴¹ In 1907 John Laybank Glascock, a chemist in Laverton (in the Goldfields-Esperance region) gave a 'replica' message stick to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, saying that it was 'never actually used but ... made for me by a tribal craftsman'.⁴²

Many Aboriginal objects continued arriving in Britain and Ireland over the first half of the twentieth century, although their flow was disrupted by the two World Wars. War efforts, along with changes in export legislation, curtailed the ability of many collectors to acquire new material and transport it overseas.⁴³ Anthropological interest in Aboriginal peoples of Western Australia, particularly those living in more remote regions, was sustained throughout the early twentieth century. European and Australian commentators characterised these communities as amongst the last remaining 'authentic' Aboriginal cultures. However, although researchers collected Aboriginal objects from Western Australia during this time, few were acquired from organised excavations; Millstream Creek (in the Pilbara) is a notable exception.⁴⁴ In 1912 Robert Stirling Newall was mustering sheep nearby when he excavated the site and sent stone tools to the British Museum and Perth Museum (in Western Australia), the latter of which then exchanged some with Reading Museum.⁴⁵

Several collections made by British anthropologists entered British and Irish museums. They include material given by Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-

⁴⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁴¹ Jones, 'Australian Ethnographica ...', 149.

⁴² 'E 1907.555', *Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, <<https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/objects/567764>> [accessed 3 March 2021].

⁴³ Key proclamations in 1910 and 1913 prohibited the export of Ancestral Remains and 'aboriginal anthropological specimens, including articles of ethnographic interest'. 'Proclamation', *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, 39 (Saturday 20 May 1911), 1448; 'Proclamation', *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, 77 (Saturday 22 November 1913), 3062.

⁴⁴ J. Clarke, W.C. Dix, C.E. Dortch, and K. Palmer, 'Aboriginal Sites on Millstream Station, Pilbara, Western Australia', *Records of the Western Australian Museum*, 6:2 (1978), 221–257 (p. 226).

⁴⁵ Glover, 416.

Brown to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge in 1914 and 1915 (see Chapter Seven); and items acquired by amateur anthropologist Daisy May Bates, which passed to the Pitt Rivers Museum (via the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1909), the British Museum (via the Empire Press Union, in 1926) and possibly the National Museum of Ireland (via Reverend L.M. Hewson in 1936). Bates lived amongst Aboriginal communities over the first half of the twentieth century but remains a polarising figure, partly because of her repeated unsubstantiated claims that cannibalism was a widespread practice. Ralph Piddington also acquired objects during fieldwork with Karajarri people in the north-west during the early 1930s, some of which he later arranged to have transferred from the Australian National Research Council to the University of Aberdeen's anthropology museum.⁴⁶ The Western Australian state heavily restricted the lives of Aboriginal people during the early twentieth century, fragmenting families and confining many to government or church-run settlements.⁴⁷ In order to access research subjects, anthropologists therefore relied upon the goodwill of officials like Auber Octavius Neville, the state's Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1915 to 1936.⁴⁸ In 1932 Piddington infuriated Neville by publicly accusing the government of indifference to the abuse of Aboriginal people in the north-west.⁴⁹ The fall-out from this event was particularly high-profile, but other anthropologists also faced difficulties when dealing with officials.

Tensions were present not only between government officials and anthropologists, but with some missionaries.⁵⁰ Aboriginal missions operated from the colony's early years, when a Wesleyan mission at Mount Eliza (Perth) opened in 1834.⁵¹ Yet few objects explicitly associated with missions

⁴⁶ Acquisition note (16 July 2001), 'ABDUA:5248', *University of Aberdeen*, <<https://calm.abdn.ac.uk/museums/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=ABDUA%3a5248&pos=1>> [accessed 15 June 2021].

⁴⁷ See Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families, 1800–2000* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Gray, "'Piddington's Indiscretion': Ralph Piddington, the Australian National Research Council & Academic Freedom', *Oceania*, 64:3 (1994), 217–45 (p. 220).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ See, for example, Geoffrey Gray, 'Dislocating the Self: Anthropological Field Work in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1934–1936', *Aboriginal History*, 26 (2002), 23–50.

⁵¹ Regina Gantor, *The Contest for Aboriginal Souls: European Missionary Agendas in Australia* (Acton: ANU Press, 2018), 20.

entered British and Irish museums before the twentieth century, and this cannot be wholly explained by missionaries' discouragement of some traditional practices. The Spanish Benedictine New Norcia Mission (established in 1847 north east of Perth) was the most high-profile mission in Western Australia for most of the nineteenth century. Its Aboriginal residents continued following some of their traditional cultural expressions, and were somewhat encouraged by the mission's first superintendent Rosendo Salvado.⁵² In 1868 *The Herald* reported that 'to attempt eradicating at once the deeply rooted customs of the race, even in the rising generation, is not deemed expedient', and that mission children were permitted 'harmless native habits' such as spear throwing games.⁵³ Aboriginal objects from New Norcia went to Italy and Vatican City, but none, apparently, to a British or Irish museum.⁵⁴ The lack of early missionary material in British and Irish museums is probably linked to the high proportion of Catholic missions and non-British mission workers in Western Australia during the nineteenth century. Very few missionaries in Australia's Catholic missions were from Britain or Ireland; the Spanish, Italian, French, Belgian and German Catholic missionaries at sites like Beagle Bay Mission (founded 1895) and Drysdale River Mission (founded 1908) in the Kimberley 'never saw themselves as part of the British colonial project', and had different networks through which to send material.⁵⁵ The National Museum of Ireland has two stone points from the Kimberley acquired by Spanish Catholic missionary Nicholas Emo, but he did not donate them directly.⁵⁶ Instead, they seem to have formed part of a 1914 exchange with the Western Australian Museum, to which Emo had given 433 Aboriginal objects in 1911.⁵⁷ No other items linked to Catholic or non-British missionaries have so far been identified in British and Irish museums.

⁵² Tiffany Shellam, "'A Mystery to the Medical World': Florence Nightingale, Rosendo Salvado and The Risk of Civilisation', *History Australia*, 9:1 (2012), 110–35 (pp. 116, 122).

⁵³ 'The Native Mission of New Norcia, Victoria Plains', *The Herald*, Saturday 4 January 1868, 3.

⁵⁴ Katherine Aigner, 'Vatican and Italian Collections', *ReCollections*, 10:1 (2015), n.p.

⁵⁵ James Franklin, 'Catholic Missions to Aboriginal Australia: An Evaluation of their Overall Effect', *Journal of the Australian Catholic History Society*, 37:1 (2016), 45–68 (p. 53); John Kinder, 'Missionaries From Many Lands: the Nineteenth-Century Foundations of the Catholic Church in Western Australia', *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, 39 (2018), 57–72 (p. 59).

⁵⁶ NMI, 1914.76–77.

⁵⁷ Chadwick, "'Your Obedient Servant'", 275.

During the early twentieth century, some British and Irish Protestant mission workers did send important Aboriginal material to the British Isles. These items mainly came from the Kimberley: a place that, as later chapters will discuss, was also attracting the interest of anthropologists. Two key settlements represented in British and Irish collections are Forrest River Mission (later renamed Oombulgurri), operated by Anglican missionaries in the east Kimberley; and Kunmunya Mission, established in 1920 by Presbyterian missionaries in the west Kimberley. In 1936 Reverend James Robert Beattie Love, superintendent of Kunmunya Mission, donated forty-three Worora objects to the British Museum; his wife Beatrice donated three more in 1959.⁵⁸ A collection bequeathed to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1935 contained items linked with Forrest River Mission (see Chapter Four). Teacher and activist Mary Montgomerie Bennett also spent time living at Forrest River and Kunmunya Missions, and she donated twenty-three mainly Worora objects acquired during the 1930s to the British Museum in 1953.⁵⁹

Although mission workers and anthropologists collected many of the same objects, they sometimes interpreted them in different ways. In 1932 Bennett went to teach at Mount Margaret Mission (established in 1921 by the Australian Aborigines' Mission) in the Goldfields-Esperance region. She and its pastor Rodolphe Samuel Schenk distrusted anthropologists, accusing some of deliberately encouraging Aboriginal people to practise aspects of traditional ceremonial life like 'sorcery practices' and 'devil devil [sic] corroborees'.⁶⁰ Yet mission workers' attitudes were not wholly negative. James Love admired how Worora people living near Kunmunya Mission made spear-points and included twenty-nine in his 1936 donation to the British Museum. Love described how 'the actual collecting and putting together of them really means nothing at all, beyond a pleasant interchange of tobacco and talk with our native men'.⁶¹

Western Australian material also spread to other institutions via dispersals such as those that followed personnel changes in the Royal Navy

⁵⁸ BM, Oc1936,0310.1–40 and Oc1936,1030.1–3; and Oc1959,04.1–2.

⁵⁹ BM, Oc1953,03.1–22. Alison Clark, 'Conflict and the Christison Collection: Representing History in a Museum Exhibition', *Melbourne Historical Journal*, 41:1 (2013), 82–102 (p. 96).

⁶⁰ Gray, 'Dislocating the Self', 34, 36.

⁶¹ James Robert Beattie Love, letter to Hermann Justus Braunholtz, 27 July 1936. Ethdoc 909b, BM AOA Archives.

and at Haslar Hospital Museum, which suddenly dispersed most of its collection in 1855.⁶² Another significant wave of dispersals followed the death of pharmaceutical entrepreneur Henry Wellcome in 1936. Wellcome had opened the Wellcome Medical Museum in London in 1913 to display some of several million artefacts that he had acquired from around the world.⁶³ His trustees arranged for many items deemed to be 'non-medical' (and thus seen as surplus to need) to be offered to museums in Britain and abroad.⁶⁴ The Wellcome transfers took place over five decades, resulting in Aboriginal objects from Western Australia moving to institutions like National Museums Northern Ireland (eighteen items), the British Museum (fifteen items) and Great North Museum: Hancock (nine items).

During the mid- and late-twentieth century, Aboriginal art also began to be displayed in Britain. Most notably, art made by Noongar children featured in exhibitions organised by Florence Rutter in London, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow in the early 1950s.⁶⁵ The artists were members of the Stolen Generations, and had been taken away from their families to be brought up at Carrolup Native Settlement in the south-west. Some of their exhibited drawings were sold in the 1980s to the British Museum.⁶⁶ Since the 1960s, however, very few contemporary Aboriginal objects from Western Australia have been acquired by British and Irish museums. Despite Aboriginal art gaining prominence on the international art market since the 1980s, few works of art have been acquired by British or Irish museums in recent decades (the British Museum being an exception). This contrasts with the earlier eagerness of many museums to accept donations or in some cases buy 'ethnographic' material from collectors like Emile Clement. Multiple factors lie behind this shift, including reduced budgets for many regional and local museums and a prioritisation of local audience interests over engagement with source communities. Most museums also relied heavily on

⁶² Simpson, 'Medical Collecting on the Frontiers of Natural History', 12.

⁶³ Wellcome and his assistants acquired material from auction houses, shops, markets and private individuals. I have found no evidence that he visited Western Australia. See *Medicine Man: The Forgotten Museum of Henry Wellcome*, ed. Ken Arnold and Danielle Olsen (London: The British Museum Press, 2003).

⁶⁴ For a summary of the dispersals between 1936 and 1983, see Georgina Russell, 'The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum's Dispersal of Non-Medical Material, 1936 to 1983', *Newsletter (Museum Ethnographers Group)*, 20 (1987), 21–45.

⁶⁵ See David Clark with John Stanton, *Connection: Aboriginal Child Artists Captivate Europe* (David Clark, 2020).

⁶⁶ BM, Oc2006,Drg.681–687.

donations of material (see Figure 4). Between 1900 and 1949 at least 159 named individuals or institutions gave, sold or exchanged Aboriginal objects from Western Australia with British and Irish institutions. Many of the individuals were born or had studied in the town or city where the museum was based, suggesting that personal connections informed where their collections were offered. Between 1950 and 1999, however, the total number of individuals and institutions giving, selling or exchanging Aboriginal objects had shrunk to 59.

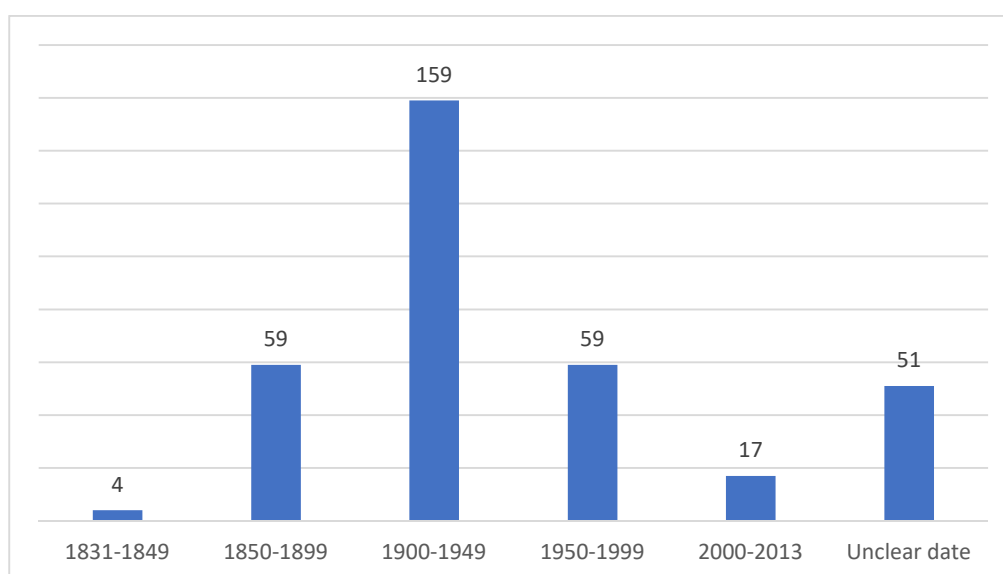


Figure 4: Named individuals or institutions giving, selling and exchanging items with British and Irish museums

Although few Aboriginal objects from Western Australia have been acquired by British and Irish museums since the mid-twentieth century, there have been increased efforts made to document what is already present. Ian Coates (1996) and others have produced valuable reports focusing on collections held at single institutions.⁶⁷ In 1989 Carol Cooper published an important survey of Aboriginal material in overseas museums, and Philip

⁶⁷ Ian Coates, *A Report on Documents Relating to Australian Aboriginal Ethnographic Collections, Held by the Museum of Mankind, London, and the Museum of Economic Botany, Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, United Kingdom: Final Report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, August 1995*. BM Anthropology Library; Howard Morphy and Elizabeth Edwards, *Australia at Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); National Museum of Australia, *Encounters: Revealing Stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Objects from the British Museum* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2015); Gaye Sculthorpe et al, *Indigenous Australia*; Simpson, *The Royal Navy in Indigenous Australia*.

Jones undertook further research on European collections in 2001.⁶⁸ Such surveys have identified the locations of many collections, connections between them, and patterns in what was collected. Alongside ongoing moves towards intellectual engagement and exchange with Aboriginal communities, they provide an important foundation for my research.⁶⁹

The collections

The material now in Britain and Ireland stems from a wide range of individual contexts, and their journeys reflect decisions taken by many makers, users, owners, collectors, intermediaries, audiences and museum workers. These assemblages generally consist of multiple kinds of object, and only rarely consist of a single 'type' such as points or stone tools.⁷⁰ They also diverge in other ways. Whilst Emile Clement transacted hundreds of Western Australian objects, many of the collections now in British and Irish museums are much smaller. Of 90 identified individuals and institutions who gave, sold or exchanged objects with the British Museum (Figure 5), 53 (58%) transacted three or fewer objects.

⁶⁸ Carol Cooper, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections in Overseas Museums* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1989); Philip Jones, *Report to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of South Australia: 'To Study Aboriginal Collections in European Museums'*, 2001
<https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/media/fellows/Jones_Philip_2001.pdf> [accessed 23 June 2020].

⁶⁹ See, for example, Martin Poor, 'Country and Relational Ontology in the Kimberley, Northwest Australia: Implications for Understanding and Representing Archaeological Evidence', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 28:3 (August 2018), 395–409.

⁷⁰ Robert Newall's donation of 81 stone tools to the British Museum in 1912 is an exception, however Newall also collected an Aboriginal shield, spear-thrower and spear-head that went to Reading Museum.

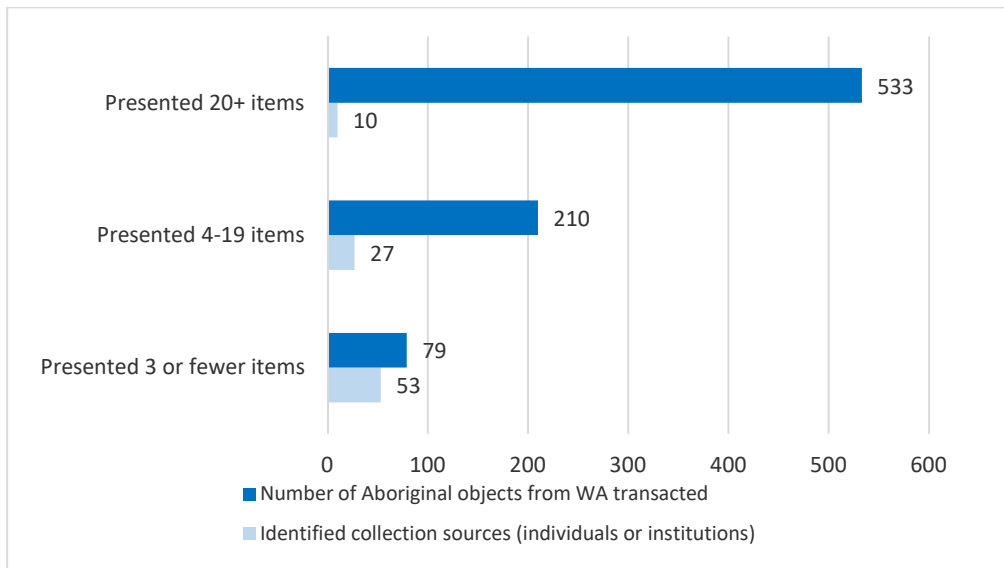


Figure 5: Number of items from Western Australia transacted in known donations, sales and exchanges with the British Museum

The British Museum's collection (see Appendix Three) contains large numbers of stone tools and implements (124, 14% of the collection), 'ornaments' (96, 11%), points and spear-points (90, 10%), spears (85, 9%), spear-throwers (67, 7%), ceremonial boards, bullroarers or other ritual objects (51, 6%), boomerangs (46, 5%) and shields (44, 5%). It also contains single examples of objects like a cradle, a didgeridoo, a honey-gathering hook and a spoon. The objects come from across Western Australia (see Appendix Three), with large numbers linked to the Kimberley (at least 242 items, 27%), Pilbara (at least 163 items, 18%), and the south-west (at least 121 items, 13%). Despite this diversity, it is possible to trace some patterns in what entered the British Museum and other British and Irish institutions throughout this period.

Many of the objects now in British and Irish museums were collected in the south-west and north-west: both areas witnessing high levels of British immigration during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to expanding pastoral empires and later mining ventures. Short-term visitors also had opportunities to acquire material. Albany became an important stopover point for international shipping routes from Europe to Australia from the 1840s onwards, and passengers whilst in port or breaking their voyage

could buy Aboriginal items from local curio shops.⁷¹ By comparison, very few objects come from the inland deserts that were unsuitable for cattle and other livestock. One exception is a collection made by explorer David Carnegie in 1896 whilst he was prospecting and looking for a new stock route between Coolgardie and Halls Creek (see Chapter Four). Colonial expansion across Western Australia gave collectors opportunities to acquire material in ‘new’ places, but it also stifled other opportunities, as a principal aim of Australian child removal policies from 1905 onwards was to eliminate Indigenous cultures as distinct entities.⁷²

The prevalence of certain items in collections often does not reflect their prevalence or cultural importance in their originating community. Some objects continue to hold far more significance than their surviving numbers imply. No skin cloaks have survived in British or Irish museums, but they possess enduring cultural significance to communities who used and use them in the south-west.⁷³ Noongar politician Ken Wyatt wore one for his first speech to the Australian Parliament in 2010; and each painting in Noongar artist Sandra Hill’s *Home-maker* series depicts an Aboriginal woman wearing a traditional *booka* (kangaroo skin cloak).⁷⁴ Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi scholar Lynette Riley has discussed the creation of kangaroo skin cloaks as a means of cultural affirmation and revitalisation.⁷⁵

Practical considerations must have affected many choices made by makers and collectors. Small, light and sturdy items like spear points are

⁷¹ Annie Brassey, *The Last Voyage: To India and Australia, in the ‘Sunbeam’* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887), 252–56.

⁷² National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), 237.

⁷³ Samuel Talbot (Chapter Three) donated one to the British Museum in 1839, but it no longer survives, presumably due to pest damage.

⁷⁴ Hannah Reich, ‘Stolen Generations Survivor Sandra Hill Turned to Art to Tell Her Story, Process Grief and Heal’, *ABC Arts*, 2 June 2020, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-03/stolen-generations-aboriginal-artist-sandra-hill/12311624>> [accessed 18 March 2021].

⁷⁵ Gary Munn and Frances Mao, ‘Ken Wyatt: Australia’s First Indigenous Cabinet Minister’, *BBC News*, 28 May 2019, <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-48418359>> [accessed 25 June 2020]; Lynette Riley, ‘Reclaiming Tradition and Re-Affirming Cultural Identity through Creating Kangaroo Skin Cloaks and Possum Skin Cloaks’, *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing*, 1:1, Article 2 (2016), 5–22.

generally easier to transport than large items like rafts!⁷⁶ However, other concerns also influenced collecting decisions. Objects traditionally used only or primarily by Aboriginal women are under-represented in collections. Bags and some other objects traditionally associated with women were often made of fibres or other materials that degraded faster than woods, stone and other materials commonly used in men's weapons. Most collectors also demonstrated limited interest in women's material culture and knowledge. Samuel Talbot and Edward Hardman (see Chapter Three) are amongst the few collectors who acquired 'everyday' women's objects like digging sticks. Perhaps digging sticks' physical hardness, similarity to clubs and potential use as women's weapons helped to make them attractive to some collectors. Colonists across the British empire were often fascinated by the weapons of indigenous peoples, and 436 (48%) of the known Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in the British Museum (see Appendix Three) are weapons or tools that could have been construed as weapons.⁷⁷ Stone tools also became a particular attraction. Many larger collections from Western Australia include stone tools, which attracted widespread archaeological interest as supposed evidence of prehistoric technologies, an interest tied up with hierarchies of value coalescing around the notion of an Aboriginal 'Stone Age' due to be superseded by more technologically advanced cultures.⁷⁸

The prevalence of certain items in collections is linked to the choices of Aboriginal people as well as to European collectors and commentators. During early colonial settlement in the south-west during the 1820s, European newcomers as well as Minang people would improvise materials for trade.⁷⁹ The British Museum alone holds 89 Kimberley points: delicately serrated points made of glass, quartz or stone often used as spearheads or knives. Their production apparently increased during the late nineteenth century, with some made as trade goods targeted at European buyers.⁸⁰ Yet the increased

⁷⁶ Daniel Simpson notes, for example, that 'the size and weight of canoes, in conjunction with the importance they possessed to their makers, militated against all but the most determined efforts to study them and to bring them to Britain' Simpson, 'Agency, Encounter and Ethnographic Collecting', 321.

⁷⁷ Many items were multipurpose instruments designed for use in more than one task, such as hunting, fishing, food preparation, ceremony and warfare. These uses were not apparent to every collector.

⁷⁸ Griffiths, 55–85.

⁷⁹ Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe*, 186.

⁸⁰ For further discussion, see Kim Akerman, Richard Fullagar, and Annelou van Gijn, 'Weapons and Wunan: Production, Function and Exchange of Kimberley Points',

production of Kimberley points was not only a response to European trade, as many seem to have been made without this intention. For example, Alistair Paterson and Peter Veth studied the production of these points by Aboriginal people who had been deliberately marooned on Barrow Island (off north-west Australia) to serve as unfree labour for the pearling industry.⁸¹ They suggest that the labourers may have produced the points in order to maintain group identity and Kimberley-specific Dreamings whilst trapped far away from their own Country.⁸²

Another trend emerged in the late nineteenth century: museums' acquisition of men's restricted material, particularly ceremonial boards of wood or stone. Their entry speaks to the strain that colonial exploitation was placing upon Aboriginal people, social structures and cultural traditions. Sometimes collectors personally found and stole items; in other instances, Aboriginal people 'gave' or 'traded' them to missionaries and other collectors. In an illustrated 1921 article on 'secret' 'phallic articles', William Dugald Campbell (see Chapter Five) noted that around 1899 an Aboriginal man in the Kimberley made and gave one object, via the owner of Liveringa Pastoral Station, to J.T. Tunney of the Western Australian Museum.⁸³ Daisy Bates (see Chapter Seven) was passed ceremonial objects in southern Australia between the 1910s and 1930s, alongside the responsibility 'to grease and freshen these boards occasionally, and to hide the place of their storage from white men'.⁸⁴ Some collectors acquired restricted material as the result of longstanding relationships. Jason Gibson proposes that anthropologist T.G.H. Strehlow's collection of artefacts, photographs and recordings from Aboriginal peoples of central Australia between 1932 and 1971 'could most fruitfully be understood as a co-production, originally emergent from dialogical encounter and best interpreted in relational terms'.⁸⁵ By the late 1920s the Lutheran

Australian Aboriginal Studies, 1 (2002), 13–42; Rodney Harrison, 'An Artefact of Colonial Desire? Kimberley Points and the Technologies of Enchantment', *Current Anthropology*, 47:1 (2006), 63–88; Kim Akerman, 'Discussion: On Kimberley Points and the Politics of Enchantment', *Current Anthropology*, 48:1 (2007), 133–34.

⁸¹ Alistair Paterson and Peter Veth, 'The Point of Pearling: Colonial Pearl Fisheries and the Historical Translocation of Aboriginal and Asian Workers in Australia's Northwest', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 57 (2020), 1–13.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸³ William Dugald Campbell, 'A Description of Certain Phallic Articles of the Australian Aborigines', *Man*, 21 (1921), 145–46 (p. 145).

⁸⁴ Cited in Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 296.

⁸⁵ Jason M. Gibson, *Ceremony Men: Making Ethnography and the Return of the Strehlow Collection* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), 239.

mission at Hermannsburg in central Australia was a major centre for the production and sale of restricted objects; this trade worked to alter the cultural meanings of these objects to Arrernte people.⁸⁶ In contrast, no women's restricted objects are documented in the general literature or, as far as is known, in the collections.

Many collectors active in Western Australia acquired a wide range of material, including Aboriginal objects, Ancestral Remains, and botanical, geological and zoological specimens. For example, George Webb, a commissariat official working in Perth between 1839 and 1848, sent Aboriginal objects and seed specimens collected in the south-west to his parents in Dublin.⁸⁷ After moving from private hands into the realm of museums, such wide-ranging collections were frequently dispersed as institutions and their collecting policies changed. Today, separate institutions specialising in medicine, natural history or 'world cultures' often hold dispersed elements of what was once a single collection. Some Aboriginal cultural material entered non-ethnographic museums, as with stone tools acquired by Phillip Parker King that are now in the Natural History Museum; and wooden ornaments, fire sticks and other objects acquired by Emile Clement now in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.⁸⁸ Throughout this thesis I will consider how this dispersed material helps to illuminate the circumstances in which Aboriginal objects were acquired.

Changes in the museum sector

Tracing the journeys of Aboriginal objects reveals that many continued moving across different institutions, regions and nations *after* they were acquired by British and Irish museums. Museum authorities have over time embraced different theories about their institutional remits and capabilities, and moved 'ethnographic' material in and out of collections accordingly. Such

⁸⁶ Philip Batty, 'The *Tywerrenge* as an Artefact of Rule: The (Post) Colonial Life of a Secret/Sacred Aboriginal Object', *History and Anthropology*, 25:2 (2014), 296–311 (p. 305).

⁸⁷ NMI, AE:1880.1792–1805. For the botanical specimens see E. Charles Nelson, 'Sources of Plants for, and Distribution of Plants from, the Royal Dublin Society's Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, 1795–1879: An Annotated Checklist', *Northern Ireland Heritage Gardens Trust Occasional Paper*, 7 (2016), 85.

⁸⁸ Shellam and Paterson, 'A Historical Stratum of Geological Collections ...', 44. Also see Appendix Four.

transfers do not imply that Aboriginal material was seen as holding no value. In 1956 Norwich Castle Museum sold points and other objects from Western Australia in its collection to the World Museum in Liverpool, which was actively rebuilding its ethnographic collection after suffering wartime damage.⁸⁹ And in 1960 the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew transferred nine tools and spinifex resin samples purchased from Clement to the British Museum.⁹⁰ At Kew these had been categorised as examples of economic botany, but they now went to the British Museum to join its 'ethnographic' material. Such movements have led to some striking absences. For example, no Aboriginal objects from Western Australia have been conclusively identified in Welsh museums today, despite significant Welsh emigration there.⁹¹ This absence is presumably linked to past decisions over the remit of Welsh cultural institutions, and what cultural heritage they prioritised and preserved; it means a significant aspect of Wales' colonial past is not physically represented in its national collections.

Some museums exchanged objects from their collection. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, institutions including the British Museum, the Natural History Museum and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, acquired large numbers of 'duplicate' ethnographic, zoological or other objects.⁹² Their curators considered these to be, for all meaningful purposes, identical to existing material in their permanent collections.⁹³ They selectively exchanged 'duplicates' with other institutions in return for material that would plug perceived gaps in their own collections. In 1947, for example, five Ngarinyin objects (two paintings, two ceremonial boards and a girdle) from the Kimberley came to the British Museum through an exchange with the Institut für Kultur-Morphologie in Frankfurt.⁹⁴ Such exchanges required museums to

⁸⁹ World Museum, 56.24.234–310, 56.25.549–933, 56.26.710, 56.28.21–937.

⁹⁰ See Appendix Four.

⁹¹ 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, Tuesday 16 July 1901, 4. No material has been traced in Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum of Wales (founded in 1907). A glass Kimberley point labelled as coming from 'Northern Australia' is now in Flint (many thanks to Len Pole for bringing this to my attention), and it is possible that further items may be identified in some other Welsh museums.

⁹² Caroline Cornish and Beth Wilkey, "'Specimens Distributed': The Circulation of Objects from Kew's Economic Botany Collection", *Mobile Museum Working Paper 2* (January 2018), <<https://www.rhul.ac.uk/mobile-museum>> [accessed 18 March 2021].

⁹³ Sometimes, as with Craven Henry Ord's donation to the British Museum, an institution split a collection into items that were accessioned, and items that were treated as 'duplicates'.

⁹⁴ BM, Oc1947, 14.1–5.

mutually agree upon the value of what was being transacted: 'the unwritten rules of equivalency and reciprocity'.⁹⁵

British and Irish collections have also been affected by changes playing out within Australia's collecting institutions. Perth's first museum, the Swan River Mechanics' Institute museum, was established in 1857.⁹⁶ Before then, anyone wanting to offer their collection to a public museum had to consider institutions in other colonies or nations. Yet even after the museum opened in Perth, it was far from the only potential destination for material. For many first-generation settlers or British and Irish residents who were only temporarily staying in the colony, places where they had lived or studied in the British Isles likely felt an obvious destination for their collections.

A key recent development has been the repatriation of Ancestral Remains and occasionally other material from UK collections. Since the late twentieth century some Ancestral Remains from Western Australia have been repatriated, most notably the head of Wajuk Noongar warrior Yagan from Liverpool in 1997.⁹⁷ A very small amount of material discussed in this thesis has been repatriated to Australia.⁹⁸ In 2019 Manchester Museum repatriated six men's ceremonial items back to the Nyamal people of the Pilbara.⁹⁹ In the coming years, some other material in British and Irish museums will likely return home, through the efforts of communities and the support of the Australian government.

⁹⁵ Catherine A. Nichols and Nancy J. Parezo, 'Social and Material Connections: Otis T. Mason's European Grand Tour and Collections Exchanges', *History and Anthropology*, 28:1 (2017), 58–83 (p. 77).

⁹⁶ Denise Cook and Andrea Witcomb, 'The Natural History Collections of the Perth Museum at the Swan River Mechanics' Institute: Origins, Role and Legacies', *Studies in Western Australian History*, 35 (2020), 89–109.

⁹⁷ Cressida Fforde, 'Yagan', in *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice*, by Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert and Paul Turnbull (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 229–41.

⁹⁸ Four of the key collectors discussed in this study acquired Ancestral Remains in Western Australia and took them to Britain or Ireland: Edward Hardman (Chapter Three) Emile Clement (Chapter Five), Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson (Chapter Seven). Several Ancestral Remains taken by Clement have since been repatriated to Australia.

⁹⁹ These items were likely associated with Emile Clement and his son Adolphe Emile. Iain G Johnston, Christopher Simpson, Tamarind Meara and Tony Taylor, *Return of Nyamal Artefacts to Country: Return of Cultural Heritage Project: Repatriation of Nyamal Cultural Heritage Material from the Manchester Museum* (Canberra: AIATSIS, 2020), 12.

Conclusions

Aboriginal objects from Western Australia are widely distributed across the British Isles (see Appendix Two). Most date from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period when many white people in Britain and Australia shared strong political and personal links; and when Aboriginal people from Western Australia were a topic of extensive scholarly and humanitarian interest. The movement of these objects into British and Irish museums was closely connected to political, social and cultural changes in all these places.

The chronology I have outlined complicates Peterson, Allen and Hamby's suggested model for chronological phases of collecting in Australia.¹⁰⁰ Their model indicates that collections made in Australia before 1880 were predominantly 'unsystematic'. This appears to be true of many collections originating from Western Australia, although material absences must be read with caution as they often reflect not only ideological motives but issues such as portability and degradability. However, as the next chapter discusses, some collections dating well before the 1880s were clearly formed with a systematic intent. Notions of 'collecting before it is too late' were also firmly in play in Western Australia well before the approximate date of 1920 suggested by Peterson, Allen and Hamby. We find traces of this thinking in Ord's 1899 decision to give objects taken from people in the Kimberley to the British Museum:

I have an idea that some of the weapons may be found interesting because it is only within the last few years that iron has been introduced to the country out back of the Robinson Ranges and the Leopold Ranges. The natives are still in the stone age and you may find that some of the weapons have been cut & fashioned by stone implements. ... Nowadays the natives make their spear heads from glass worked with iron, usually a bit of wire. But as I said there may be some from ... out back where there is still no iron.¹⁰¹

Ord's words implied that certain items of interest to collectors would not long survive colonial contact.

¹⁰⁰ Peterson, Allen, and Hamby, 8.

¹⁰¹ Ord to Read.

The number and nature of objects arriving in Britain and Ireland connect to broader patterns of colonial migration, changing colonial identities, and to developments in anthropology and museums. Interestingly, the federation of Australian colonies in 1901 does not seem to have immediately impacted British and Irish museums' desire or ability to acquire Western Australian material. Items continued arriving through individual and institutional donations, bequests, sales and exchanges. These transactions show that some settlers in and visitors to Western Australia continued sending Aboriginal material to British and Irish people and institutions well into the twentieth century. Their motivations were complex. Some clearly felt an emotional connection to the British Isles, whereas others probably targeted museums there because they could pay higher prices than their Australian counterparts. Aboriginal objects had commercial value on British art and 'curios' markets, staying present in many dealers' catalogues over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some donors and sellers approached national institutions like the British Museum, or museums located in metropolitan locations that held personal meaning to them. Other collectors had little input into where their collections went, with decisions taken by their descendants.

The movement of Aboriginal material between the British Isles and Australia has again become a matter of widespread interest. Public debate is largely focused on the ethics of holding material acquired in the colonial-era, and particularly decisions over the repatriation of Ancestral Remains and objects to Traditional Custodians. When we trace museums' holdings of Aboriginal objects from Western Australia, we find that they often changed hands even after being acquired by a museum. Like the collectors discussed in this thesis, museum managers' and trustees' choices over whether and how to keep material has been shaped by contemporary social attitudes around issues of nationality, religion, gender, race and class. In 2020 UK Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden threatened to review funding arrangements for publicly-funded museums that remove 'contested heritage' or engage in actions motivated by 'activism or politics'.¹⁰² His letter was criticised for

¹⁰² Oliver Dowden, 'Letter from Culture Secretary to DCMS Arm's Length Bodies on Contested Heritage', 28 September 2020,

promoting an 'impossible logic', that once material enters a museum it must not permanently leave.¹⁰³ Felix Driver, Mark Nesbitt and Caroline Cornish pose an important question: 'what might it mean to think of the history of museums and collections in terms of dispersion rather than accumulation, mobility rather than fixity, mutation rather than inertia?'.¹⁰⁴ Far from embodying a singular moment in time, we indeed find that over the last two centuries Aboriginal material has continually been moving into, within and out of collecting institutions.

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-culture-secretary-on-hm-government-position-on-contested-heritage>> [accessed 1 March 2021].

¹⁰³ Dan Hicks, 'The UK Government is Trying to Draw Museums Into a Fake Culture War', *The Guardian*, 15 October 2020,

<<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/15/the-uk-government-is-trying-to-draw-museums-into-a-fake-culture-war>> [accessed 1 March 2021].

¹⁰⁴ Driver, Nesbitt and Cornish, 5–6.

Chapter Three: Collecting on colonial frontiers

As Chapter Two outlined, over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Aboriginal objects entered British and Irish museums via many channels. In 1994 Yawuru barrister, scholar and activist Michael Dodson reflected on colonisers' long fascination with studying and defining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: 'since their first intrusive gaze, colonising cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling Aborigines and Aboriginality'.¹ These practices started before Britain's first formal acts of colonial possession in Western Australia in 1829, and they continued long after Western Australia joined the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901.² As settlers gained greater political autonomy from Britain, Aboriginal peoples faced a succession of policies restricting their freedoms, a development that I explore in subsequent chapters.³ This chapter, however, focuses on three collections formed in places when permanent colonial settlements had only just begun to be built: the south-west in the late 1820s and 1830s, and the north-west in the 1880s. These new settlements marked an important stage of the colonisation process and the later framing of Aboriginal dispossession. I discuss three men who travelled to and collected in these places, their desire to seize the financial and reputational riches promised by the land and a 'frontier consciousness' that informed how and why they collected. Their activities, I argue, demonstrate how 'frontiers' can be understood as culturally determined as well as chronologically and geographically framed.

This chapter considers collections made in the south-west during the 1820s and 1830s by surgeon and colonial official Alexander Collie and private settler Samuel Talbot; and in the Kimberley during the 1880s by geologist

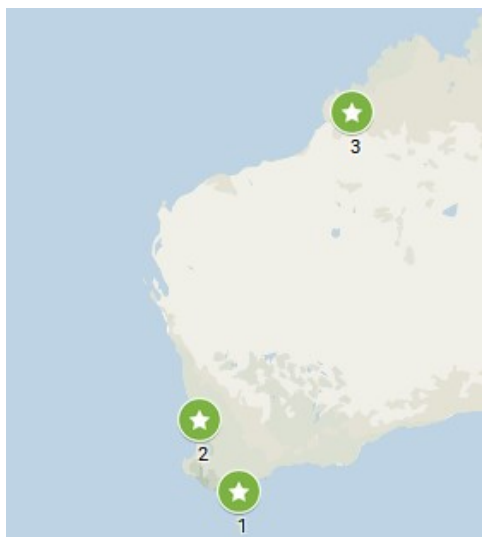
¹ Michael Dodson, 'The Wentworth Lecture: The End in the Beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1 (1994), 2–13 (p. 2).

² Two years later its government proclaimed the new colony's precise territorial limits by officially claiming the entirety of 'New Holland'. Gerard Carney, 'Public Lecture Series, High Court of Australia', *The Story Behind the Land Borders of the Australian States: A Legal and Historical Overview*, 2013

<http://www.hcourt.gov.au/assets/publications/speeches/lecture-series/Carney_lecture.pdf> [accessed 23 December 2018].

³ Key legislation included the *Aborigines Protection Act* 1886 (WA), *Aborigines Act* 1889 (WA), *Aborigines Act* 1897 (WA) and *Aborigines Act* 1905 (WA).

Edward Hardman (see Map 1). Each man acquired and used Aboriginal material in diverse ways: for themselves, their families, friends, patrons, employers, and scientific or cultural bodies. Both regions were, when Collie, Talbot and Hardman lived in them, undergoing an early phase of permanent colonial settlement. I argue that each man's collecting is underlined by a common perception of their surroundings as 'frontier' space.



Key:

- 1: King George Sound (*Minang Noongar*)
- 2: Perth (*Wajuk Noongar*)
- 3: Yeeda Station / Fitzroy River (*Nyikina*)

Map 1: Key locations discussed in Chapter Three

Map data © 2021 Google

People living in different parts of Western Australia experienced colonisation at different times and in different ways. This chapter focuses on interactions during the early years of permanent colonial settlements, when local Aboriginal people were still able to maintain lifestyles that were largely independent of colonists. In recent years, explorations of early colonial contacts in Western Australia have moved 'from narratives emphasising one-sided European domination, conflict and conquest to ones that reveal more nuance and detail while emphasising accommodation and exchange'.⁴ Localised studies shed light on diverse attitudes within settler and Aboriginal groups. Particular attention has focused on the Albany region, especially during the 1820s; while Chris Owen has shown how the interests of police, pastoralists and government officials in the Kimberley during the 1880s

⁴ Chris Owen, 'A Journey Travelled: Aboriginal-European Relations at Albany and the Surrounding Region from First Contact to 1926 (Review)', *Aboriginal History*, 40 (2016), 301–3 (p. 301).

sometimes diverged.⁵ Studies of colonial interactions in the Kimberley often focus on the mid-1880s onwards, when some Aboriginal people began living somewhat more sedentary lives connected to particular pastoral stations, so there is much scope for further work on these issues.⁶ Scholars have also increasingly recognised the important role of Aboriginal participants in colonial exploration.⁷ The role that gender played in 'frontier' spaces is likewise receiving more attention, and this chapter will consider how ideas about masculinity manifest in Collie, Talbot and Hardman's self-image and motives for collecting.⁸ These developments echo scholarship on other Australian colonies, which offer opportunities for comparison with Western Australian experiences.

During the nineteenth century the term 'frontier' increasingly fed a moral ideology of British settler colonialism as a march of progress turning

⁵ Murray Arnold, *A Journey Travelled: Aboriginal-European Relations at Albany & the Surrounding Regions from First Contact to 1926* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2015); Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe*; Sculthorpe and Nugent, *Yurlmun*; Neville Green, 'King George Sound: The Friendly Frontier', in *Archaeology in ANZAAS*, ed. Moya Smith (Perth: Western Australian Museum, 1983), 68–74; Chris Owen, *Every Mother's Son Is Guilty: Policing the Kimberley Frontier of Western Australia 1882–1905* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2016).

⁶ Key works include Anthony Redmond and Fiona Skyring, 'Exchange and Appropriation: the Wurnan Economy and Aboriginal Land and Labour at Karunje Station, North-western Australia', in *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Ian Keen (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 73–90; Stephen Muecke, 'Boxer Deconstructionist' in *Dislocating the Frontier: Essaying the Mystique of the Outback*, ed. Deborah Bird Rose and Richard Davis (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005), 165–176; Tim Rowse, "'Were You Ever Savages?' Aboriginal Insiders and Pastoralists' Patronage,' *Oceania*, 58:2 (1987), 81–99; Pamela Smith, 'Station Camps: Legislation, Labour Relations and Rations on Pastoral Leases in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia', *Aboriginal History*, 24 (2000), 75–97. The northern Kimberley underwent pastoral settlement from 1903 onwards, a comparatively late date that has encouraged historians to make greater use of oral accounts in their research. See Mary Ann Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare: A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 2002).

⁷ *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archive*, ed. Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent and Tiffany Shellam (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2015); Clint Bracknell, 'Bobby Roberts: Intermediary and Outlaw of Western Australia's South Coast', in *Brokers and Boundaries: Colonial Exploration in Indigenous Territory*, ed. Tiffany Shellam, Maria Nugent, Shino Konishi and Allison Cadzow (Acton: ANU Press and Aboriginal History Inc., 2016), 119–39; Tiffany Shellam, 'Miago and the "Great Northern Men": Indigenous Histories from In-Between', in *Indigenous Mobilities: Across and Beyond the Antipodes*, ed. Rachel Standfield (Canberra: ANU Press, 2018), 185–207.

⁸ Susan Hunt, *Spinifex and Hessian: Women's Lives in North-West Australia, 1860–1900* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1986); Marilyn Lake, 'Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 20:49 (1996), 12–20; Christine Choo, *Mission Girls: Aboriginal Women on Catholic Missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1900–1950* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2001).

‘unsettled’ wilderness to ‘settled’ societies.⁹ Historic depictions of colonisation, particularly in Australia and North America, tended to focus on the ‘wilderness’ itself as settlers’ principal opponent: in Klein’s words, ‘effectively eliminating society beyond the frontier’.¹⁰ Amanda Nettelbeck and Russell Smandych reflect how:

In so far as Indigenous peoples have figured in this [Australian] national story, they have done so as one of a number of natural adversaries faced by pioneers thrown up by a harsh and unyielding landscape, more akin to bushfire or drought than to political opponents over land.¹¹

The alignment of indigenous peoples with nature was a common trope used by settler-colonists across the British empire to claim rights to where they invaded.¹² Marginalising and disavowing indigenous presences remains key to attempts to rationalise colonial incursions and to downplay or justify anti-indigenous settler violence.¹³

Early British newcomers to Western Australia could hardly deny the existence of a significant and largely autonomous Aboriginal presence, even if some saw this as something soon to be controlled or eliminated. The region’s colonisation required the subordination of Aboriginal authority and land to British control, and the visible and ongoing Aboriginal presence led some early colonists to explicitly consider their own legitimacy. Through disavowing indigenous presences, settlers could position themselves as a land’s first ‘real’ inhabitants.¹⁴ Yet colonists on the ground debated the nature and scope

⁹ Klein, 183.

¹⁰ Ibid, 187. Also see A.A. den Otter, *Civilising the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert’s Land* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012).

¹¹ Nettelbeck and Smandych, 369.

¹² For the American ‘Myth of the Frontier’, which shared some affinities with the popular Australian foundational narrative, see Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800–1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1994).

¹³ Veracini, 75–81. Within Australian society, the existence and extent of this disavowal remains a highly politicised topic. See Tracey Banivanua Mar, ‘Settler-colonial Landscapes and Narratives of Possession’, *Arena Journal*, 37/38 (2012), 176–98; Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, ‘Introduction: Making Space in Settler Colonies’, in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, ed. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1–24.

¹⁴ Veracini, 93. The history of Aboriginal land rights and native title has been extensively discussed by scholars. See, for example: Bain Atwood, ‘The Law of the

of British authority over Aboriginal people well into the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Lauren Benton suggests that many early colonial spaces operated without the assumption of full British legal sovereignty over indigenous and non-indigenous peoples; and in her study of colonial Georgia and New South Wales in the early nineteenth century, Lisa Ford argues that settler sovereignty was 'a fluid and contested notion'.¹⁶ I will consider how this tension played out amongst three colonial actors, by exploring the collecting and writings of Collie, Talbot and Hardman.

Early colonial spaces often encompassed heterogeneous populations, including Aboriginal people originating from several regions. Colonial incursions happened across pre-existing Aboriginal realms, which Philip Jones notes 'have always been liminal zones, interpenetrated by dispersed and fluid populations with flexible allegiances'.¹⁷ Well before British settlement started, Macassan fishermen seasonally visited northern coasts to gather trepang (sea cucumber); and a small number of 'Afghan' camel-drivers arrived from the 1860s onwards.¹⁸ Even in towns where settler authority supposedly ruled, 'mutual, albeit uneven, interactions of colonization and Indigenization, were, for a short time part of the tenor of the early settler-colonial landscape'.¹⁹ Most colonists came from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, elsewhere in Europe, and other Australian colonies. Their economic and social capital varied: early immigrants included colonial officials, private settlers, skilled tradespeople, indentured servants and some much poorer members of society. In the early 1830s Samuel Talbot said that

Land or the Law of the Land?: History, Law and Narrative in a Settler Society', *History Compass*, 2 (2004), 1–30. Maureen Tehan, 'A Hope Disillusioned, An Opportunity Lost? Reflections on Common Law Native Title and Ten Years of the Native Title Act', *Melbourne University Law Review*, 27 (2003), 523–71.

¹⁵ Damen Ward, 'Constructing British Authority in Australasia: Charles Cooper and the Legal Status of Aborigines in the South Australian Supreme Court, c.1840–60', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 34:4 (December 2006), 483–504 (p. 483).

¹⁶ Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33. Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788–1836* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 30, 205.

¹⁷ Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 1.

¹⁸ Nahid Afrose Kabir, 'The Culture of Mobile Lifestyle: Reflection on the Past: The Afghan Camel Drivers, 1860–1930', *Continuum*, 23:6 (2009), 791–802 (p. 791); Regina Ganter, 'Muslim Australians: The Deep Histories of Contact', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 32:4 (2008), 481–92 (p. 482).

¹⁹ Edmonds, 69.

it was hard to get good servants locally as 'nothing else could be expected, than that [workhouse] overseers [in Britain] should endeavour to get their parishes cleared from such trash and scum'.²⁰ Racial difference closely informed colonists' experiences of Western Australia, but was not the only factor driving individual allegiances.

In 1826 Britain established a military garrison and penal settlement at King George Sound (which at this time they called King George's Sound) on the south-west coast. The settlement, at what is now the city of Albany, is in Minang Noongar Country. Local Minang people, like many who lived near the coast, had already experienced decades of intermittent temporary contact and trade with passing ships.²¹ The new garrison's presence was not, Tiffany Shellam argues, 'a destructive force initially, but a subtly transforming one with advantages in exchange and political gain' on both sides.²² Influential British and Noongar individuals established connections involving elements of political advantage, curiosity, and apparent personal friendship.²³ This pattern of relationships between colonists and locals was unusual and partly connected to limited competition for local resources. Later colonial settlements involved larger numbers of migrants and greater exploitation of land for settler farming or other industries, frequently leading to violent conflict with local Aboriginal people.²⁴

In 1827 James Stirling persuaded the British government to establish a settlement by the Swan River, on the south-west coast. In 1829 Britain formally declared sovereignty over the Swan River Colony (a term also used synonymously for Western Australia), as the first civilian officials and settlers arrived. The Swan River settlement comprised Perth and the port settlement of Fremantle. Further townships in the south-west soon followed, and excitement in Britain caused a brief rush of emigrants in 1829 and 1830,

²⁰ Quoted in T.B. Wilson, *Narrative of a Voyage Around the World* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, & Piper; 1835), 224.

²¹ Shellam, "'Thro' the Medium of Biscuits'", 10–17.

²² Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe*, 215.

²³ These included Mokare (c.1800–1831) and his older brother Nakinah (active 1830s), Alexander Collie (1793–1835), Isaac Scott Nind (1797–1868) and Collet Barker (1784–1831).

²⁴ Murray Arnold, 'Menang and European Relations at Nineteenth-century Albany', in *Yurlmun: Mokare Mia Boodja 'Returning to Mokare's Home Country': Encounters and Collections in Menang Country*, ed. Gaye Sculthorpe and Maria Nugent (Welshpool: Western Australian Museum, 2016), 43–45.

including colonists Alexander Collie and Samuel Talbot. Like South Australia and Port Phillip in the same era, Swan River was designed as a free settlement rather than a penal colony. In 1831 the King George Sound settlement, now renamed Albany, officially joined the Swan River Colony. Its former garrison presence was replaced by a civilian administration, which included Alexander Collie as the township's first government resident.

For a short time, relations between British and Noongar people around the Swan River were generally peaceful, as they had been at King George Sound. However, tensions soon developed, particularly over settler encroachments onto traditional hunting grounds and subsequent violent conflicts over cattle and other food resources.²⁵ During the early 1830s, settler anxieties were 'rife' due to a common perception of being under constant threat of Aboriginal attack, regardless of the reality.²⁶ In 1833 colonists shot and killed Yagan, a Wajuk Noongar man and key figure of the early Noongar resistance, near the Swan River. Shortly afterwards Alexander Collie, now living in Perth, told his brother George that Yagan's death had 'apparently cowed' local Noongar peoples.²⁷ Only a year later Governor Stirling led a government-sanctioned extrajudicial killing when he and a party killed up to thirty or more Pinjarup Noongar men, women and children at Pinjarra.²⁸ Collie, Talbot and Hardman were all aware of colonial violence, although they downplayed it in their writings.²⁹

Factors that slowed colonial expansion in Western Australia included the colony's size, arid areas inland that were unattractive to pastoralists, Aboriginal resistance and intermittent problems in attracting new emigrants.

²⁵ Between 1829 and 1850 the entire settler population reached an estimated 2,000 at most, mostly concentrated around the coastal plain from Fremantle to Guildford. South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, John Host, and Chris Owen, *It's Still in My Heart, This Is My Country: The Single Noongar Claim History* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2009), 90.

²⁶ Tiffany Shellam, 'Our "Natives" and "Wild Blacks": Enumeration as a Statistical Dimension of Sovereignty in Colonial Western Australia', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 13:3 (2012), n.p.

²⁷ Alexander Collie to George Collie, 6 August 1833, 'Letters 1828–35', NLA MS 109, 59.

²⁸ 'Encounter with the Natives in the Pinjarra District', *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, Saturday 1 November 1834, 382–83.

²⁹ For example, an 1834 letter from Alexander Collie to his brother made no mention of escalating violence between settlers and Noongar people: a 'marked omission' given that he must have known about these incidents and their seriousness. Gwen Chessell, *Alexander Collie: Surgeon, Naturalist and Explorer* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2008), 174.

Before the 1880s, British incursions into the northern region now called the Kimberley were limited and transient. In 1864 a disastrous attempt at permanent settlement (involving settlers from Victoria) in the West Kimberley was abandoned within a year. In the early and mid-1880s, however, the pace of colonisation intensified and expanded into the interior. This activity was partly influenced by an 1879 expedition led by Alexander Forrest that proclaimed the Kimberley's great pastoral potential, and geologist Edward Hardman's report on the likelihood of extracting profitable minerals there. Gold discoveries and the growth of pastoral and pearling industries led to an influx of new settlers and livestock over the next decade. New settlements included pearling operations, pastoral stations and the coastal townships of Broome, Derby (both 'founded' in 1883) and Wyndham ('founded' in 1886). As in the south-west, white violence against Aboriginal people in the Kimberley seemed largely 'the exception rather than the norm' during the very earliest years of colonisation.³⁰ This changed in the 1890s, when colonial incursions, shifts in government policy and police actions led to levels of ongoing violence that 'can reasonably be called a war' between Aboriginal people and colonists.³¹ Despite local variations, therefore, both the south-west and north-west soon saw clashes emerge between the new settlers and Aboriginal groups.

Collections, like maps, reflect individuals' attempts to make sense of this dual presence on the landscape. Mapping, itself a cultural act, marked what governments saw as the borders of their territory.³² Colonists' maps were thus supposedly objective representations of the process of creating, stabilising and transforming the 'frontier', although Aboriginal mapping demonstrates the existence of alternative ways of seeing.³³ Aboriginal, botanical, zoological and geological objects were also acquired in an attempt to 'represent' Western Australia, creating assemblages that were themselves products of colonial ideology. Both mapmaking and collecting (activities that were sometimes conducted in tandem) can be considered strategies,

³⁰ Chris Owen, *Every Mother's Son Is Guilty*, 9.

³¹ *Ibid*, 12.

³² See *Mapping Colonial Conquest: Australia and Southern Africa*, ed. Norman Etherington (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2007).

³³ See Tiffany Shellam, 'Nyungar Domains: Reading Gyalliput's Geography and Mobility in the Colonial Archive', in *Conflict, Adaptation, Transformation: Richard Broome and the Practice of Aboriginal History*, ed. Ben Silverstein (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2018), 80–95.

informed by the mapmaker or collector's cultural expectations, to make unfamiliar peoples and landscapes knowable and ultimately controllable. Of course, those on the ground moved across and complicated these theoretical limits of control. Whilst colonial maps and collections purported to represent Aboriginal societies, they thus point to their creators' and collectors' own anxieties.

A government official in Noongar Country: Alexander Collie



Figure 6: *Kodj* (axe) acquired by Alexander Collie in the south-west

Kodj are a unique form of axe made by Noongar peoples of south-west Australia. They were made by heating a fine powder of substances including ground resin from the balga plant. The hot and malleable resin was used to secure stone axe-heads to a slender wooden handle, and when cooled it formed a glue strong enough to create a tool suitable for cutting hand and footholds into tree trunks.

Stone, resin, wood. Unidentified Noongar maker; collected by Alexander Collie in the south-west between 1829 and 1835; acquired by the British Museum in 1855.

BM, Oc.4768. © The Trustees of the British Museum

As previously indicated, the colonisers of Western Australia did not share a unified national identity. Alexander Collie (1793–1835) was amongst the first civilian settlers to arrive in Western Australia in 1829. A keen naturalist and former naval surgeon, Collie came from a Scottish farming family and had an influential patron in the person of William Burnett, the Physician-General of the Royal Navy. With Burnett's help he was appointed medical officer on HMS *Blossom* during its 1825–1828 voyage to the Pacific Northwest. Burnett wished Collie 'to collect specimens of Natural History for the Naval hospitals of Haslar and Plymouth', and the younger man had done so assiduously (see Appendix Four).³⁴ According to Daniel Simpson, Collie so diligently collected

³⁴ Cited in Chessell, 101.

flora, fauna and indigenous material culture that 'it threatened to cause considerable embarrassment to the expedition's official naturalist'.³⁵

Once the *Blossom* returned to Britain in 1828, Collie told his brother George that he had been appointed surgeon to the Swan River settlement, adding: 'I am to be collector of all objects of natural history and be provided by government with the requisite articles for collecting'.³⁶ Collie was disappointed when it emerged that another man had in fact obtained the post, but decided to go to the colony nonetheless, telling George 'I shall have a better opportunity perhaps for collecting in Natural History, and the Dr. [Burnett] is to get me things for this purpose'.³⁷ Collie spent the next six years in south-west Western Australia. Shortly after his arrival, he joined an expedition inland that saw the river now bearing his name, and in 1831 he became the first government resident at Albany. Collie's collecting activities had come to a standstill, and he hoped that this new post would foster greater opportunities.³⁸ In 1832 he was finally appointed colonial surgeon, and returned to live in Perth. For years, however, he had suffered intermittently from what was probably pulmonary tuberculosis, and became gravely ill in 1835.³⁹ Attempting to return home to Britain, he was taken off the ship at Albany, where he died. Collie's will instructed that he be buried there by the grave of Mokare, a Minang man with whom he had lived and worked several years previously.

Collie was well-versed in deploying botanical, animal and Aboriginal material for professional advancement, although some of what he collected for Burnett was likely lost when the Haslar Hospital Museum collections were dispersed in 1855.⁴⁰ Collie also collected for his family, and when working in Perth he hoped to collect 'shells or other pretty things' to send his sister-in-law.⁴¹ His surviving letters and reports, however, only briefly refer to material culture, and are more concerned with describing his interactions with

³⁵ Simpson, 'Agency, Encounter and Ethnographic Collecting', 204.

³⁶ See also Collie to George Collie, 22 November 1828, 'Letters 1828–35', 1.

³⁷ Ibid, 26 December 1828, 3.

³⁸ Ibid, 12 March 1831, 32.

³⁹ Chessell, 180.

⁴⁰ For example, Collie to George Collie, 22 November 1828, 'Letters 1828–35', 2. For the history of the Haslar Hospital Museum see Simpson, 'Medical Collecting on the Frontiers of Natural History'.

⁴¹ Collie to George Collie, 6 August 1833, 'Letters 1828–35', 59.

Aboriginal people and other aspects of their culture. These relationships appear to have been generally friendly. Mokare acted as an interpreter and guide, and sometimes lived with Collie at King George Sound until his illness and death there in 1831. Mokare and Collie's relationship has been interpreted as one of genuinely close friendship.⁴² Another Noongar man, Manyat, guided and accompanied Collie on an inland expedition in 1832. Collie recognised Manyat's enthusiasm for travelling to unfamiliar regions and collecting new plants.⁴³ The Scotsman benefited from Mokare and Manyat's skills and knowledge, which they had their own reasons for sharing with him.

A small group of Aboriginal weapons and tools collected by Collie survive, and are amongst the earliest Western Australian objects identified in Britain today. Three *taap* (knives), a *kodj* (axe), a spear and spear-thrower are preserved as functional. The seventh item, a spearhead, appears to have been cut down, possibly after Collie acquired it. None of Collie's own notes about them survive, and whilst the British Museum's registration slips state that some objects came from King George Sound, this is by no means certain. Collie had presumably sent them to his patron Burnett, as the British Museum acquired them from Haslar Hospital Museum in 1855.

This small and likely incomplete collection nonetheless speaks to Collie's particular motives for collecting. In December 1821 the crew of HMS *Bathurst* had acquired 150 knives, 100 spears, 40 hammers, 30 throwing sticks and 'a few' hand-clubs during ten busy days of trade with Minang people at King George Sound.⁴⁴ Minang traders wanted ship's biscuit and the crew wanted their weapons, partly to ensure that they could not 'do any mischief' during the ship's visit.⁴⁵ Philip Parker King believed that many Minang items thus obtained were poor-quality specimens produced purely for

⁴² Catherine Bishop and Richard White, 'Explorer Memory and Aboriginal Celebrity', in *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archive*, ed. Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent and Tiffany Shellam (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2015), 31–66 (pp. 48–49).

⁴³ Alexander Collie, 'Anecdotes and Remarks Relative to the Aborigines of King George's Sound (From an Original Manuscript by a Resident at King George's Sound)', *Perth Gazette*, Saturday 16 August 1834, 339–40 (p. 340). Also see Tiffany Shellam, 'Manyat's 'Sole Delight': Travelling Knowledge in Western Australia's Southwest, 1830s', in *Transnational Lives*, ed. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 121–32 (particularly pp. 122–26).

⁴⁴ King, *Narrative of a Survey*, II, 137.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

sale to his crew, and never intended to be used functionally.⁴⁶ He noted that 'Jack', an intermediary who some scholars suggest was Mokare, 'laughed heartily whenever a bad and carelessly-made spear was offered to us for sale'.⁴⁷ Collie operated in different contexts to King's crew, but acquired very similar kinds of objects. His own particular motives, therefore, require further scrutiny.

Collie's collecting opportunities likely benefited from the longer-term relationships that he and his immediate predecessors had developed with Noongar people. Simpson supports this interpretation, noting that 'as a collector, Collie was unusual for his considerable ability and interest in negotiating intercultural encounters'.⁴⁸ He argues that Collie secured better quality objects in Western Australia than did many others, and that this:

was surely a product of the ambiguous boundaries between science, religion and the colonial project prevailing at that time. It is not known when precisely or how the Minang objects were first acquired, but accounts of Collie's collecting by others suggest strongly that such things nearly always originated as products of friendship and mutual understanding.⁴⁹

Collie's negotiations of intercultural relationships in the south-west were informed by a concept of middle-class manliness that gained ground in British metropolitan circles during the early nineteenth century.⁵⁰ The discourse of domestic masculinity emphasised men's connection with the home and their responsibility to lead and support their domestic dependents:

⁴⁶ Ibid, 137. King speculated that the Noongar people deliberately showed the crew object types that were relatively easy for them to manufacture.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 134. Neville Green, 'Mokare (1800–1831)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, 2005), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mokare-13106/text23711>> [accessed 19 November 2018].

⁴⁸ Simpson, 'Agency, Encounter and Ethnographic Collecting', 203.

⁴⁹ Daniel Simpson, 'For Science, Friendship or Personal Gain? Alexander Collie and the Origins of Naval Ethnography at Haslar Hospital Museum', in *Yurlmun: Mokare Mia Boodja 'Returning to Mokare's Home Country': Encounters and Collections in Menang Country*, ed. Gaye Sculthorpe and Maria Nugent (Welshpool: Western Australian Museum, 2016), 26–33 (p. 32).

⁵⁰ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987, reprinted 2002).

the man's role as provider for, protector and representative of, and, importantly, leader and owner of his home and family was constitutive of his manliness, underpinning and re-working the traditional association of masculinity with authority, self-reliance, bravery, chivalry and Christian reason.⁵¹

Collie clearly yearned for such domesticity and claimed to be unwillingly single, blaming this on his poor health and a lack of eligible settler women.⁵² Perhaps as a way of compensating, he built 'the best house in Perth' in 1834, and actively maintained links with his family in Scotland.⁵³ The discourse of domestic masculinity also offers potential insights into Collie's interactions with Aboriginal people. As Lester and Dussart argued, the realm of domestic masculinity, influenced by contemporary humanitarian and evangelical Christian ideals, expanded in the 1820s and 1830s to include groups like the 'deserving poor', enslaved and indigenous peoples.⁵⁴ In 1832 Collie argued that each settler:

must dissipate the idea that it is perfectly just and right in him to neglect every conciliatory measure, every beneficent thought for the native, who has a strong claim on our pity and compassion for the lowness of the scale in human nature in which he is unfortunately placed. Generous and exalted man delights in ennobling human nature, in raising the inferior grades to an equality with himself.⁵⁵

Although Collie acknowledged the practical benefits of establishing friendly intercultural relations, he also framed this as a humanitarian obligation, and one that reinforced one's masculine role. By encouraging Aboriginal people to

⁵¹ Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, 'Masculinity, 'Race', and Family in the Colonies: Protecting Aborigines in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 16:1 (2009), 63–75 (p. 64).

⁵² Collie to George Collie, 31 May and 18 December 1833, 'Letters 1828–35', 55–56, 65.

⁵³ Collie to George Collie, 4 August 1831, 31 May 1833 and 7 April 1834, 'Letters 1828–35', 36–37, 60, 68; B.C. Cohen, 'Collie, Alexander (1793–1835)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, 1966), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/collie-alexander-1911/text2267>> [accessed 28 October 2018].

⁵⁴ Lester and Dussart, 'Masculinity, "Race", and Family ...', 64.

⁵⁵ Alexander Collie, 'Copy of a Report from Dr. Collie, His Majesty's Resident at King George's Sound, to Governor Sir James Stirling (24 January 1832)', in *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)* (London: House of Commons, 1837), 129–32 (p. 130).

embrace the civilising mission, he argued, settlers would meet their responsibilities towards their indigenous dependents.

While Collie described his interactions with local Noongar people as generally positive, and attributed desirable qualities to some individuals, he also ascribed inherent moral failings to them and to Aboriginal people in general: 'cunning, revenge, caution, acquisitiveness, love of ease, superstition and vanity'.⁵⁶ He held that wise colonial management could respond to and even capitalise upon these, transforming some failings into the very qualities that would lead their owners to Christianity and 'civilization'.⁵⁷ Collie did not extensively ponder why Noongar people might strategically wish to secure some colonists' objects, perhaps with a view to strengthening political allegiances. Instead, he claimed in 1832 that a rather simple vanity 'prompts them to procure those things which distinguish the learned, admired and envied foreigner from the ignorant and despised savage, and this may be advantageously cultivated until the capricious hunter grows into the steady labourer'.⁵⁸ Again, Collie portrayed the colonial intrusion as a force for good if colonists worked to 'enoble' those whom they displaced. This may have influenced him to collect a *taap* (knife) whose cutting edge was made from newly introduced bottle glass, rather than quartz (Figure 7). Isaac Nind, a surgeon who lived at King George Sound from 1827 until late 1829, had been clear that *taap* incorporated stones.⁵⁹ By October 1831 Collie's colleague Collet Barker, who commanded the King George Sound penal settlement from 1829 to 1831, noted in his diary that bottle-glass was now replacing stone in the making of *taap*.⁶⁰ Some *taap* with stone edges were likely still available to Collie, but glass was becoming a preferred medium amongst Noongar makers.

Collie's surviving collection can thus be interpreted in several ways. The objects are all small and robust, and would have been relatively easy to

⁵⁶ Ibid, 129.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 129; see also Collie to George Collie, 4 August 1831, 'Letters 1828–35', 35–36.

⁵⁸ Collie, 'Copy of a Report ...', 129.

⁵⁹ Isaac Scott Nind, 'Description of the Natives of King George's Sound (Swan River Colony) and Adjoining Country', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 1 (1831), 21–51 (p. 27).

⁶⁰ *Commandant of Solitude: The Journals of Captain Collet Barker, 1828–1831*, ed. John Mulvaney and Neville Green (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1992), 337.

transport back to England; full-length spears or objects made with feathers or skin are absent. Does this reflect later losses of other objects from the Haslar collection, or simply a lack of interest on Collie's part in collecting more bulky, fragile or unusual objects? Of the seven surviving objects, Simpson suggests that Collie may have 'sought to demonstrate the complexity and dynamism of Menang culture as well as their appreciation of the economic potential of local resources', and Collie's evident interest in Minang culture lends credence to this view.⁶¹ Yet the inclusion of bottle-glass raises another possibility, that he saw the use of European-made materials as demonstrating European technological superiority, and the benefits of colonisation for indigenous peoples.



Figure 7: Taap (knife) acquired by Alexander Collie in the south-west

Wood, bottle-glass, resin. Unidentified Noongar maker; collected by Alexander Collie between 1829 and 1835; acquired by the British Museum in 1855.

BM, Oc.4771. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Collie's surviving writings never portrayed Aboriginal people as an existential threat to the colonial order. Indeed, he showed more anxiety about a potential moral contamination from Australia's convict population.⁶² Scholars have argued that historical assessments must do more to recognise the diverse actors and relationships at play in colonial spaces.⁶³ Tim Rowse showed how later pastoral stations in the Kimberley came to include Aboriginal and white 'insiders' who shared 'an accord that neither the [urban] critics with pens nor those with spears could'.⁶⁴ Some colonists in New South Wales aligned Aboriginal people with convicts, another undesirable social element, as 'the prehistory history had to fight', whereas Collie saw Noongar

⁶¹ Simpson, 'For Science ...', 31–32.

⁶² Collie to George Collie, 5 May 1832 and 7 April 1834, 'Letters 1828–35', 43, 66. During the 1830s and 1840s, anxieties over convict labour in the Australian colonies were common. Curthoys and Mitchell, 104–105, 162–64.

⁶³ Bill Thorpe and Raymond Evans, 'Frontier Transgressions: Writing a History of Race, Identity and Convictism in Early Colonial Queensland', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 13:3 (1999), 325–32.

⁶⁴ Rowse, 81–82.

peoples as less damaging.⁶⁵ He believed that they could be controlled and morally ennobled so long as colonists exuded a beneficent authority, treating them with judicious patience and discipline.⁶⁶ Collie also positioned the colony itself as a child of Britain, which accordingly bore parental obligations:

The Colony I see is not destined to make any rapid progress but I doubt not it will advance steadily and surely unless the Mother country commits the crime of infanticide downright. What child can gain its own subsistence before 5 or 10 years?⁶⁷

Cautiously optimistic about the colony's prospects, Collie identified British immigration and investment as vital for its future success.⁶⁸ In several letters he developed the analogy with childhood: the young colony boded well, but needed Britain's protection and nourishment to reach maturity. He portrayed Aboriginal people as dependents rather differently, stressing the need for vigilance to prevent their becoming a threat.⁶⁹ Given that Collie saw many other elements of Noongar material culture, it is striking that all his surviving Aboriginal collection could be construed as weapons.⁷⁰ His surviving collection from HMS *Blossom*'s voyage also included a large proportion of weapons, which suggests a particular interest in them. This focus, read alongside his preoccupation with family and domesticity in his letters to George, might suggest a lingering unease about the colony's future health.

Many of the specifics of Collie's collecting and relationships in Western Australia remain unknown. We cannot, for example, fully understand the nature of his and Mokare's relationship because he framed it to his European peers in ways that upheld Victorian ideals about white middle-class masculinity. For a time Mokare lived, and then died, in Collie's house. As Collie and the other colonists were living on Mokare's family's land, however,

⁶⁵ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), 321.

⁶⁶ Collie, 'Copy of a Report ...'; Collie to George Collie, 29 September 1833, 'Letters 1828–35', 63.

⁶⁷ Collie to George Collie, 25 September 1834, 'Letters 1828–35', 73; also see letter of 5 May 1832, 43.

⁶⁸ Collie to George Collie, 28 July 1832, 'Letters 1828–35', 46–47.

⁶⁹ Collie, 'Copy of a Report ...', 129.

⁷⁰ Noongar men, women and children visited the colonial settlement at King George Sound. Alexander Collie, 'Anecdotes and Remarks Relative to the Aborigines of King George's Sound (From an Original Manuscript by a Resident at King George's Sound)', *Perth Gazette*, Saturday 5 July 1834, 315.

suggest Ian Coates and Alison Wishart, 'rather than Mokare residing with the settlers, the truth of the situation was that the settlers were residing with Mokare'.⁷¹ Collie's writings are marked by silences over how this 'domestic frontier' was experienced, and the same is true of his collection. Nevertheless, these reveal insights into early colonial experiences in King George Sound. Compared with King's activities a decade earlier, Collie's interactions with Aboriginal people enabled him to connect with British middle-class humanitarian and masculine discourse. Collie also saw object transactions, like the 'gifting' of European foods to allies, as part of the broader civilising mission and a practical way to safeguard colonial settlements.⁷² Sales and exchanges between Aboriginal people and settlers also occurred in other parts of Australia. In the Port Phillip District during the 1830s, documented ones included transfers of blankets, scissors, metal axes, tea, sugar and flour by settlers; and cloaks, stone axes, baskets, *woomeras* (spear-throwers), boomerangs, crayfish and quail by Aboriginal people.⁷³ After Mokare's death his mourning brother Nakinah prepared to leave the settlement to carry out a revenge spearing, in accordance with Noongar custom. Collie reported that Nakinah:

walked out in a few minutes, saying he was going to the kitchen, and would return very soon; he, instead, however, immediately went to the different houses in quest of spears. He procured only one, which was taken back as soon as the person from whom he had got it knew the horrible purpose for which it was intended.⁷⁴

These words indicate that the spear's owner was a colonist, and, moreover, that Aboriginal objects were present in many settler households at King

⁷¹ Ian Coates and Alison Wishart, "'Usurping the Ancient Lands ...': Mokare, Alexander Collie, and Botanical Collecting on Menang Country", in *Yurlmun: Mokare Mia Boodjar (Returning to Mokare's Home Country): Encounters and Collections in Menang Country*, ed. Gaye Sculthorpe and Maria Nugent (Welshpool: Western Australian Museum, 2017) 18–25 (p. 21).

⁷² Collie, 'Copy of a Report ...'; Collie to George Collie, 18 December 1833, 'Letters 1828–35', 64.

⁷³ Elizabeth Willis, 'Gentlemen Collectors: The Port Phillip District, 1835–1855', in *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, ed. Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen, and Louise Hamby (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 114–40 (p. 116).

⁷⁴ Alexander Collie, 'Anecdotes and Remarks Relative to the Aborigines of King George's Sound (From an Original Manuscript by a Resident at King George's Sound)', *Perth Gazette*, Saturday 26 June 1834, 327.

George Sound. Movements of objects between Aboriginal people and early colonists were thus clearly more frequent than the small number of survivals might suggest.

A private settler in the Swan River ‘neighbourhood’: Samuel Talbot



Figure 8: Dance ornament acquired by Samuel Talbot in the south-west

This *ngal-bo* (emu feather dance ornament) was likely made by a Noongar person near the Swan River, who tied brown emu feathers measuring about three palm-widths long with a band. Emu plumes were widely used across Australia, and often worn by dancers at ceremonies. This ornament's feathers are stained with red pigment, and have become fragile and brittle over time.

Emu feather, sinew (?), ochre (?). Unidentified maker; collected by Samuel Talbot from 'the neighbourhood of the Swan River' in 1838.

BM, Oc1839,0620.20. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Collie's collecting was motivated, at least in part, by a need to please his patron. Yet as Nakinah's search for a spear shows, other early colonists also collected Aboriginal objects. They included Collie's contemporary, Samuel Rodbard John Neil Talbot (1808–1863). Unlike Collie, Talbot was a private settler with no professional obligation to collect. His choice to do so (see Appendix Four) supports Philip Jones's argument that Aboriginal people and objects held significant curiosity value for 'interested citizens' during the early years of European settlement, before this interest 'steadily diminished' from the 1850s onward as ethnography became a 'specialised interest or hobby' of those working 'at the margins of colonial life'.⁷⁵

From an old Anglo-Irish family, Talbot had spent most of his youth living with his parents and siblings in France, Italy, and England. He arrived in the

⁷⁵ Jones, "A Box of Native Things", 75.

Swan River Colony in October 1829 with two servants and his cousin, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Like many, Talbot was too late to submit a claim for the most promising farming land. However, he had both the resources and the will to wait, and in 1830 secured a land grant in the south-west around the new township of Guildford (along the Swan River). He joined two exploration parties, the first in 1829 up the Canning River, and the second in 1830 with Collie.

Later in 1830, finding the Swan River Colony ‘unpromising’, Talbot emigrated to Van Diemen’s Land where his uncle William lived and farmed.⁷⁶ That venture flourished, and in 1840 he sent the Royal Agricultural Society of England grass seeds for cultivation trials.⁷⁷ In the letter accompanying his 1839 donation to the British Museum, Talbot also reported recently seeing Western Australia ‘in a very flourishing condition, and likely in very few years to be a valuable appendage to the Mother Country’.⁷⁸ He travelled to Europe several times in the 1830s and 1840s, including an unsuccessful visit to identify a suitable wife.⁷⁹ His brother Richard indicated that marriage was a major source of anxiety:

It is sad to think that with his prospects and income that he could not have managed better [in finding a suitable wife]. I hope however he will recover his health and get a wife since that seems uppermost in his mind and will tend so much to his happiness.⁸⁰

It was not to be. Whilst in England in the mid-1840s, Talbot suffered a mental breakdown and was declared of ‘unsound mind’.⁸¹ The nature of his condition is no longer known, but it seems that from 1846 until his death in 1863 he could no longer live independently.⁸²

⁷⁶ Stephen E. Talbot, *Into the Lion’s Den: A Biographical History of the Talbots of Malahide* (Stephen E. Talbot, 2012), 443.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 443; *The Gardeners Chronicle: A Stamped Newspaper of Rural Economy and General News*, I, Saturday 2 January 1841, 582.

⁷⁸ Samuel Neil Talbot to the Secretary of the British Museum, 7 January 1839. *Original Letters and Papers*, 20 (January to June 1839), BM Central Archives.

⁷⁹ Stephen E. Talbot, 444, 447.

⁸⁰ Richard Gilbert Talbot to Eliza Talbot, cited in Stephen E. Talbot, 447–48.

⁸¹ Stephen E. Talbot, 447–50.

⁸² In 1846 until his death, Talbot lived at 42 Alpha Road in St John’s Wood, a neighbourhood where many private patients with mental health problems lived with assistance.

Talbot assembled at least three collections of Aboriginal material during the 1830s. One, a case of 'curiosities', was put onto a ship departing Van Diemen's Land for London on 12 June 1839, although its ultimate destination is unclear.⁸³ Talbot also presented two collections to the British Museum. An 1832 donation consisting of eight spears, five 'paddles' (probably spear-throwers) and a stone axe, 'brought from the Settlement at Swan River and its neighbourhood', do not seem to have survived.⁸⁴ However, most of his third known collection (hereafter referred to as the 1839 donation) does, along with Talbot's original descriptions of items. Talbot acquired them during a visit to Western Australia between June and November 1838, and they arrived at the British Museum by 22 June 1839.⁸⁵ The 1839 donation is notable for its size (82 objects) and inclusion of items not usually found in collections from this period. It therefore provides a unique opportunity to study collectors' engagement with Aboriginal culture at Swan River during the colony's early years.

It is not clear how Talbot assembled his 1839 donation, but he was primarily based in Van Diemen's Land during the 1830s. As he is not known to have had extensive contact with Aboriginal informants in Western Australia, he probably received significant help from an intermediary. During his 1838 visit, he stayed with George Fletcher Moore, a likely candidate for this role.⁸⁶ Moore, an influential Irish settler living in what is now Perth, was very interested in the language and customs of local Noongar people.⁸⁷ Moore expressed a limited sympathy towards them and in 1833, under the pseudonym 'Philaeth' in the *Perth Gazette*, lamented:

⁸³ 'Launceston Shipping List', *The Colonial Record*, Monday 17 June 1839, 3.

⁸⁴ P110, *British Museum Book of Presents*, 1832, BM Central Archives.

⁸⁵ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, Saturday 30 June 1838, 102; 'Shipping Intelligence', *Colonial Times* Tuesday 13 November 1838, 4; Talbot to the Secretary of the British Museum, 7 January 1839.

⁸⁶ George Fletcher Moore, *Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia and also a Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language of the Aborigines* (London: M. Walbrook, 1884), 354, 358.

⁸⁷ Moore had a deep interest in Aboriginal culture and languages, publishing a descriptive vocabulary in 1842. George Fletcher Moore, *A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language in Common Use Amongst the Aborigines of Western Australia, with Copious Meanings, Embodying Much Interesting Information Regarding the Habits, Manners and Customs of the Natives and the Natural History of the Country* (London: W. S. Orr & co., 1842).

How few of us deigned to bestow even a thought upon the existence of a people whom we were about to dispossess of their country. Which of us can say that he made a rational calculation of the rights of the owners of the soil, of the contemplated violation of those rights, of the probable consequences of that violation, or of our justification of such an act?⁸⁸

Only a month beforehand, however, Moore had suggested it would be 'prudent to poison them' if the taking of livestock continued.⁸⁹ And whilst he had regular and friendly contact with some, he also called them 'troublesome friends and dangerous enemies ... a thorn in our sides which we can not get rid of'.⁹⁰ Moore was deeply implicated in colonial violence.⁹¹ Like Collie, he might admit to some qualms about how the colony had been (and was being) established, but remained determined to safeguard his own investment.

Like other early collections from Western Australia, Talbot's 1839 donation includes many objects that were or could be construed as hunting, fishing and fighting weapons.⁹² Some were hard to acquire, including a shield that Talbot said was 'scarce and can seldom be got, they are brought from the neighbouring tribes' (Figure 9).⁹³ The collection also covers an unusually wide range of other items. Philip Jones argues that before the mid-nineteenth century most collectors seeking to represent Aboriginal peoples were not collecting systematically and judged 'a relatively tiny selection of objects ... sufficient' for their purposes.⁹⁴ Talbot's 1839 donation is thus an unusual early precursor to the larger and more overtly systematic 'ethnographic' collections of the later nineteenth century. It includes items generally coded as women's objects: digging-sticks, a spindle, a *kalga* (hook used to gather Banksia-flower

⁸⁸ 'To the Editor of the Perth Gazette', *Perth Gazette*, Saturday 27 July 1833, 119; Penny Edmonds and Zoë Laidlaw, "'The British Government is Now Awakening": How Humanitarian Quakers Repackaged and Circulated the 1837 Select Committee Report on Aborigines', in *Aboriginal Protection and Its Intermediaries in Britain's Antipodean Colonies*, ed. Samuel Furphy and Amanda Nettelbeck (New York: Routledge, 2020), 38–57 (pp. 49–50).

⁸⁹ J.M.R. Cameron, ed., *The Millendon Memoirs: George Fletcher Moore's Western Australian Diaries and Letters, 1830–1841* (Victoria Park: Hesperian Press, 2006), 243.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁹¹ Edmonds and Laidlaw, 49–50.

⁹² In Talbot's collection, spears alone comprise 45 of the 82 known objects.

⁹³ Talbot, descriptive notes accompanying donation, 20 June 1839, P62–67, *Acquisitions Ethnographical 1835–1839*, Franks papers, BM AOA Archives.

⁹⁴ Jones, "'A Box of Native Things'", 25.

'honey') and an 'old woman's bag'.⁹⁵ These rarely appear in other British and Irish collections from Western Australia, presumably due in some cases to collectors' limited knowledge or interest, or to Aboriginal women's unwillingness to relinquish them. Such factors often converged, as they did when missionary James Love visited Killalpaninna Mission in South Australia in 1914. Love 'was surprised to find that the men and women would part freely with the old carved boomerangs and spears, but were unwilling to part with the everyday rough wona [digging stick] as it was of more practical use'.⁹⁶ Love, more interested in the boomerangs anyway, did not press matters.⁹⁷



Figure 9: Shield acquired by Samuel Talbot in the south-west

Wood. Unidentified maker; collected by Samuel Talbot from 'the neighbourhood of the Swan River' in 1838.

BM, Oc1839,0620.15. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Some of Talbot's notes about his 1839 donation survive, including a detailed descriptive list of objects. They indicate that he or an intermediary had close contact with some Aboriginal people, and a clear interest in understanding how items were made and used:

[The digging stick] Is a piece of stick about three feet long and is used for all the purposes of a spade, it is with these they dig the native potato[,] ground nuts etc, dig their wells, strip the trees of long pieces of bark for making their huts, cooking etc, the women also use it as a weapon when they fall out with each other.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ BM, Oc1839,0620.33-35, Oc1839,0620.11, Oc1839,0620.65. The 'old woman's bag' has not survived. Talbot, descriptive notes.

⁹⁶ Cited in Jones, "A Box of Native Things", 241.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Talbot, descriptive notes.

The notes accompanying Talbot's collection do not name or describe individual Aboriginal people. They still hint at individual agency: describing the shield as 'scarce and can seldom be got', for example, suggests that the collector struggled to acquire it, perhaps because it had been traded from far away.⁹⁹ The 'old woman's bag', since lost, is an unusual inclusion. It probably refers to the person who previously owned the bag, rather than a specific type of bag used only by senior women.¹⁰⁰ George Fletcher Moore described women using bags in the south-west during the 1830s, to carry children or edible roots.¹⁰¹ How Talbot's bag was obtained remains unclear. In 1832 Moore recorded that when his fellow-settlers raided an Aboriginal camp supposedly to punish cattle-theft, they took not just weapons, but bags and cloaks as 'legitimate booty'.¹⁰²

Nugent notes that Talbot's descriptions of objects expressed admiration for Aboriginal ingenuity, 'in ways that contrast with later nineteenth century descriptions more influenced by and freighted with scientific theories of race'.¹⁰³ In his descriptions, Talbot also distinguished between spears used for fishing, hunting, and warfare, implying that they were not acquired purely for their aesthetic qualities. The collection's variety suggest that Talbot intended to represent a wide range of the material culture used by Aboriginal people in the Swan River neighbourhood. Yet it remained a view of Noongar society constructed by and for European eyes. For example, Collie remarked in 1831 that some Minang people at King George Sound wore European clothing instead of the *booka* (kangaroo skin cloak).¹⁰⁴ Some combined garments: when Yagan was killed in 1833 he wore 'a soldier's old coat' underneath his *booka*.¹⁰⁵ Talbot collected some objects that overtly indicated syncretic interactions with colonisers, such as spears incorporating European glass. Yet in terms of clothing, he restricted himself to collecting the *booka*, which did not hold such associations. As such, even an early and wide-ranging collection like Talbot's already reveals tensions in terms of what manifestations of Aboriginal culture collectors sought to represent.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Undated note in Talbot's hand. Franks Papers, BM AOA Archives.

¹⁰¹ Moore, *Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life ...*, 23, 32.

¹⁰² Ibid, 119.

¹⁰³ Nugent, 'Encounters in Country', 134.

¹⁰⁴ Collie to George Collie, 4 August 1831, 'Letters 1828–35', 36.

¹⁰⁵ Moore, *Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life ...*, 206.

Talbot viewed the 1839 donation as a coherent body of material which could illustrate Aboriginal material culture to British audiences. His motives for forming and donating the collection were also influenced by expectations about what constituted colonial 'success'. Even before arriving in Western Australia, Talbot saw the colonies as a testing ground for manliness. His family had long expected Talbot to emigrate to Canada, where his uncle Thomas had settled in 1803.¹⁰⁶ This plan disintegrated once uncle and nephew met in 1828, with Talbot later telling Thomas that 'I declined accompanying you to America, from an Idea that I was not agreeable to you'.¹⁰⁷ Talbot and his immediate family were clearly disappointed at the collapse of a plan that had reportedly been discussed by the family since he was two years old. Perhaps in response to his uncle's implicit rebuke, Talbot announced that he would travel to Western Australia, framing it as a means of proving his physical and mental vigour:

... From this you will perceive that I am not prevented from want of energy and resolution, nor from any affection for the gaities and comforts of the civilized world from venturing to a part of the Globe where they are not to be expected by me for many years to come.¹⁰⁸

These remarks reveal the psychological demands of emigration: male settlers staked their masculine reputations and livelihoods on succeeding in this testing new environment. Almost a century later, similar ideas were held by male British emigrants who joined the unsuccessful Northcliffe land clearance scheme in the south-west. These men 'were confronted not just with economic ruin but also with a sense of their masculine failure'.¹⁰⁹

Talbot retained his lands in Western Australia despite moving to Van Diemen's Land in 1830, and he returned to visit the Swan River region in 1838. In April 1838 the *Hobart Town Courier* had carried a special request from the trustees of the British Museum, asking those in British colonies to

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Talbot to Thomas Talbot, December 1828, cited in Stephen E. Talbot, 304.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen E. Talbot, 304.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 304.

¹⁰⁹ Patricia Crawford, 'Group Settlers and Land in the Northcliffe Region, South-West Western Australia 1924–1939', in *Country: Visions of Land and People in Western Australia*, ed. Anna Gaynor, Mathew Trinca and Andrea Haebich (Perth: Western Australian Museum, 2002), 125–45 (p. 138).

help secure 'such rare and curious objects as shall appear to be of sufficient importance to deserve a place in the National Museum'.¹¹⁰ In the letter accompanying his 1839 donation, Talbot wrote:

Having lately visited the Swan River, I was enabled to make a very good collection of Native spears &c. I have therefore taken the liberty of forwarding them to the British Museum, trusting that it will not be considered intrusive on my part, and that even such a trifle may not be considered unworthy of being placed in that valuable establishment.¹¹¹

Talbot's letter was dated 7 January 1839, making it likely that he had assembled the collection with the specific aim of donating it to the British Museum. This would also help to explain the evident care that was taken to collect and document its diverse contents. The British Museum's subsequent acceptance meant that Talbot's Australian venture had now achieved not only economic but cultural recognition.

Talbot's ability to acquire a rich range of material in a short time suggests that he received substantial help from intermediaries, and indicates how highly networked early colonial Western Australia was. Talbot showed little interest in using his collection for professional advantage, and as a private settler, had little need to do so. Yet his collection represents a concerted attempt to 'know' and represent Aboriginal culture in a way that would benefit British interests, through donating objects to the British Museum, a prestigious national institution at the heart of Britain's empire. This suggests that, like Collie, Talbot was influenced by specific cultural expectations about what constituted a successful settler. Elucidating these expectations therefore provides insights into his motives for collecting Aboriginal material.

¹¹⁰ 'British Museum, October 2, 1837', *The Hobart Town Courier*, Friday 6 April 1837, 4.

¹¹¹ Samuel Neil Talbot to the Secretary of the British Museum, 7 January 1839. *Original Letters and Papers*, XX (January to June 1839), BM Central Archives.

A geologist in the Kimberley: Edward Hardman

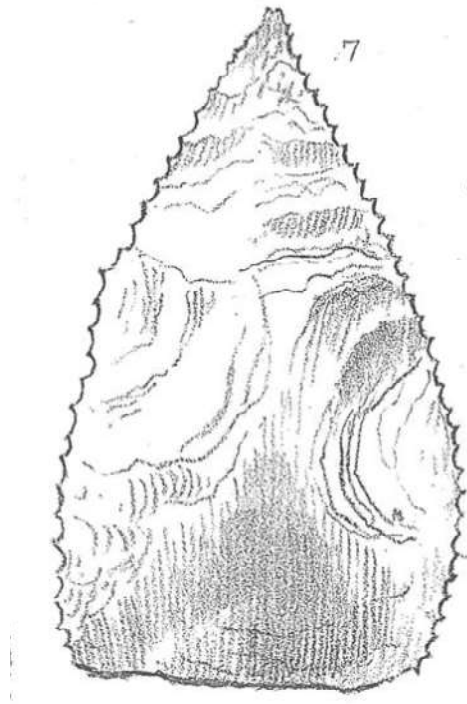


Figure 10: Historic illustration of bottle-glass point acquired by Edward Hardman in the Kimberley

This point was likely created by someone living near the Fitzroy River in the West Kimberley. They would have used a stone tool to roughly work a piece of clear bottle-glass and then used a pressure-flaking tool, perhaps a pointed stick or sharpened bone, to 'dress' it. Carefully striking the glass at a slight angle created its delicate facets and serrated edges.

Point made by an unknown person; collected by Edward Hardman near the Fitzroy River between 1883 and 1885; and now at the National Museum of Ireland, 1887.99.

Illustration by W.F. Wakeman c. 1886, published in Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', Plate 1.

Separated by fifty years and over two thousand kilometres, Collie and Talbot's experiences nonetheless have parallels with those of Irish geologist Edward Townley Hardman (1845–1887), who visited the Kimberley region as permanent colonial settlement there began (see Appendix Four). Like them, Hardman was well-connected. He was part of an 'old and respected Drogheda family', a freemason, and a geologist with a good professional reputation.¹¹² Before arriving in Western Australia in 1883, Hardman had

¹¹² A.B.W., 'Edward Townley Hardman, F.C.S., F.R.G.S.I., etc.', *Geological Magazine*, 4:7 (July 1887), 334; Gordon L. Herries Davies, *North From the Hook: 150 Years of the Geological Survey of Ireland* (Dublin: Geological Survey of Ireland, 1995), 183. Hardman's strong professional network is evident in the list of scientific and cultural figures who undertook to receive remittances for his memorial fund.

spent thirteen years working for the Geological Survey of Ireland. He was seconded to Western Australia after some small gold finds in the Kimberley prompted the colonial government to assess the region's mineralogical prospects. Hardman's desire to take the appointment probably stemmed in part from a desire to provide his family with financial security. Opportunities for internal promotion at the Irish Survey were poor, and Hardman's post there (both before and after his Western Australian secondment) was not tenured, well paid or pensionable.¹¹³

Once in post as a temporary government geologist, Hardman joined survey expeditions to the Kimberley in 1883 and 1884.¹¹⁴ When his secondment ended in 1885, he was told that it could not be renewed due to limited funds. A disappointed Hardman returned to work at the Irish Survey, but was assured that he would be re-hired in Western Australia should a permanent post be approved. He maintained his connections from Ireland, assisting in the colony's preparations for its display at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London. He also began publishing on Aboriginal cultures, but contracted typhus and died soon after in 1887. Ironically, that year the Western Australian government finally approved the permanent post that he had sought. Hardman's death left his wife Louisa and their two young children in considerable financial difficulty, which probably obliged her to sell over one hundred of his Aboriginal objects to the Dublin Museum of Science and Art later that year.

Like Collie, Hardman had professional and personal motives for collecting. He obtained many geological specimens, including a large collection presented to the newly established Geological Museum in Perth, although he clashed with the museum's founder over their labelling.¹¹⁵ Hardman also acquired four Ancestral Remains presumably of Aboriginal

'Fund for the Widow and Children of Mr. Hardman', *The West Australian*, Wednesday 14 September 1887, 3.

¹¹³ Herries Davies, 296.

¹¹⁴ The 1883 expedition was led by John Forrest in the West Kimberley; the 1884 expedition was led by H.F. Johnston. P.E. Playford, 'The Kimberley gold rush of 1885–86', *2004–2005 Annual Review* (Perth: Geological Survey of Western Australia, 33–37 (p. 34).

¹¹⁵ Kenneth J. McNamara and Frances S. Dodds, 'The Early History of Palaeontology in Western Australia, 1791–1899', *Earth Sciences History*, 5:1 (1986), 24–38 (p. 33); Phillip E. Playford and Isobel Pridmore, 'The Reverend Charles Grenfell Nicolay: Western Australia's First Museum Curator', *Record of the Western Australian Museum*, 3:1 (1974), 78–81 (p. 80).

people, but about which we know little. The objects sold by his widow represent the largest known ethnographic collection from Western Australia now in an Irish museum, and most of them (64 known items, 60% of the collection) come from the Kimberley. This section will focus on Hardman's attitude towards objects of the Kimberley, the place that was also the focus of his scholarly papers. He would have had contact both with Aboriginal people attached to the survey parties as well as those living at and beyond the new pastoral stations.¹¹⁶ He had little control over where and for how long the survey party stopped, but found time to obtain some contextual information and to watch some objects being made and used.¹¹⁷

Hardman was tasked with assessing the Kimberley's geological resources and their commercial potential. Some Western Australian politicians, and much of its popular press, were hostile towards professional geologists.¹¹⁸ By the 1880s, settlers were also demanding responsible government: the delegation of most local affairs to the local ministry and legislature. Hardman's geological assessments during this turbulent time were positive yet cautious, with an enthusiasm for the land's scientific and aesthetic qualities occasionally shining through his formal reports.¹¹⁹ He collected diverse objects made from crystal, quartz, pearl shell, kangaroo and lizard bones and cat-fish spines, suggesting an interest in raw materials and Aboriginal manufacturing techniques.

Like many Irish Geological Survey workers during the nineteenth-century Celtic Revival, Hardman was keenly interested in his own homeland's past.¹²⁰ He wrote several papers on anthropological and archaeological issues, and his collecting was motivated at least partly by a belief that some

¹¹⁶ 'The Survey Party at the Kimberley', *The Herald*, Saturday 28 April 1883, 3.

¹¹⁷ 'The Kimberley Survey', *The Argus*, Tuesday 10 February 1885, 9. Edward T. Hardman, 'Notes on Some Habits and Customs of the Natives of the Kimberley District, Western Australia', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 1 (1889–1891), 70–75 (p. 73).

¹¹⁸ Hardman's demonstrably successful work in Western Australia probably helped to change how the colony's public and press viewed geologists. John Glover and Jenny Bevan, *The Forgotten Explorers: Pioneer Geologists of Western Australia, 1826–1926* (Carlisle: Hesperian Press, 2010), 174.

¹¹⁹ For example, Edward T. Hardman, *Report on the Geology of the Kimberley District, Western Australia (1884)* (Perth: Richard Pether, Government Printer, 1884), 17.

¹²⁰ Herries Davies, 91; Edward T. Hardman, 'On Two New Deposits of Human and other Bones discovered in the Cave of Dunmore, Co. Kilkenny', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Science*, 2 (1875–1877), 168–176.

Aboriginal objects in the Kimberley shared similarities with ancient Irish material culture. He explored this theme in an 1886 paper for the Royal Irish Academy:

I have been able to secure some specimens which bear such a remarkable resemblance to ancient Irish weapons, that they may possibly be of some value as throwing a little light on the manner of, and the mode of, using the stone and other implements of pre-historic times.¹²¹

Hardman tried to align what he saw in Western Australia with his own cultural reference points, and repeatedly highlighted apparent similarities between Aboriginal objects and the ancient objects and monuments 'at home'.¹²² The remainder of this section will therefore consider Hardman's attitudes in light of wider cultural interest about Europe's past and the extent to which all humanity shared a common prehistoric ancestor.

Over the nineteenth century, scholars and collectors searched for apparent similarities between Aboriginal societies and prehistoric European cultures. Australia's original inhabitants were thus subsumed within Eurocentric frameworks that portrayed them as examples of less evolved humanity. The theory of monogenism impacted white intellectual discourse for much of the nineteenth century. Influenced by earlier European Christian and Enlightenment beliefs, monogenists held that all humanity had a single point of origin.¹²³ As the white race had developed from primitivism, this thinking went, 'less evolved' races were also capable of progress, especially if given white guidance and leadership. Monogenetic explanations of human origins sought to explain apparent cultural and physical differences between human populations via stadial progress from 'barbarism' to (European-like)

¹²¹ Edward T. Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection of Native Weapons and Implements from Tropical Western Australia (Kimberley District)', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1889–1901), I (1889–1891), 57–69 (p. 57).

¹²² See, for example, Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', 56, 68; W.G. Wood-Martin, 'The Rude Stone Monuments of Ireland (Continued)', *The Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland*, 8:70 (1887), 50–94 (90–94). Hardman also compared some Aboriginal customs with those described in the Book of Leviticus. 'Habits and Customs', 72–73.

¹²³ Kay Anderson and Colin Perrin, 'The Miserablest People in the World': Race, Humanism and the Australian Aborigine', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 18.1 (2007), 18–39.

'civilisation'. Property and sustenance were assumed to be the primary markers of human progress according to stadial theory. Within this influential paradigm, societies followed a natural development sequence from 'savagery' (characterised by hunting as the mode of subsistence) to 'barbarism' (by nomadic pastoralism) to civilisation (by agriculture and commerce).¹²⁴ Aboriginal peoples were depicted as nomadic hunters, and evidence of complex industries and land management practices widely downplayed. Thus, Penny Edmonds writes, 'British subjects of the commercial stage saw in their classicized Aboriginal subjects both the ancient and pastoral states that they had once embodied'.¹²⁵ Monogenism and stadial theories could thus support measures to integrate (with varying degrees of violence) some Aboriginal people into colonial society.

By the mid-nineteenth century, perceived connections between Aboriginal and prehistoric cultures were also being used to challenge monogenism. Polygenetic explanations for human origins assigned different races to distinct 'types' or species possessing innate capacities, with some races inherently incapable of further 'improvement'. Such schemas typically presented Aboriginal people as the lowest in this racial hierarchy, making them embody 'the most devastating conclusion of evolutionary thought: that in the human struggle for existence certain races were destined not even to survive'.¹²⁶ These 'extinction narratives', also informed by stadial theory, offered colonists 'a culturally and conveniently naturalized explanation for the demise of Aboriginal peoples'.¹²⁷ Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) also influenced a 'new monogenism' that challenged both polygenism and orthodox monogenism because although it maintained that all humans were of one species, it proposed 'an explanation for the irreversible inequality of races'.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 2.

¹²⁵ Edmonds, 58.

¹²⁶ Anderson and Perrin, 18.

¹²⁷ Edmonds, 156.

¹²⁸ Robert Kenny, 'From the Curse of Ham to the Curse of Nature: The Influence of Natural Selection on the Debate on Human Unity before the Publication of "The Descent of Man"', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 40:3 (2007), 367–88 (p. 367).

Hardman's expressions of admiration for some Aboriginal objects implied that their makers might indeed be able to survive colonisation. He highly praised Kimberley points, a type of point that was often attached to the head of a spear, or made into a knife. Hardman called them 'spearheads' and acquired both unfinished and finished examples, some of which he saw being made (see Figure 11).¹²⁹ His description of their manufacture demonstrated a desire (not altogether successfully realised) to understand their makers' techniques.¹³⁰ Hardman compared them favourably with a flint-knapping method then used in England:

If we compare the extreme simplicity of this method, and the beautiful results produced, with the process of the "flint-knappers" of Brandon, as described by Dr. John Evans ... for the manufacture of "strike-a-light" flints, in which manufacture four steel hammers and one steel chisel are required, I think we must come to the conclusion that the Australian savage is a somewhat unappreciated man.¹³¹

This remark bears similarities with others made a decade earlier. In 1872 Hardman criticised inefficient practices in the coal-mining pits of County Tyrone, including the use of a lining 'neither so ingenious nor so effective as the wicker work or wattle tubbing of the ancient Belgians'.¹³² He also saw many pits as dangerously lacking in effective dewatering machinery:

this is a state of things that cannot be avoided when, as often happens, the workings are undertaken by a few poor men who club together to share the labour and expense: but *the same thing is being done every day by people who should know better*, and should see that it is their own interest to have their apparatus on a proper footing.¹³³

¹²⁹ Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', 58.

¹³⁰ Harrison, 'An Artefact of Colonial Desire?', 70.

¹³¹ Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', 59. Evans had seen 'strike-a-light' flints made at Brandon (in Suffolk) in the 1870s. John Evans, *Ancient Stone Implements, Weapons and Ornaments, of Great Britain* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1872; republished Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 16–17.

¹³² Edward T. Hardman, 'On the Present State of Coal Mining in the County of Tyrone', *Journal of the Royal Dublin Society*, 6 (1875), 366–82 (p. 378).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 379 [my emphasis].

When Hardman favourably compared Aboriginal or prehistoric European manufacturing techniques with practices used in Victorian Britain, he was not simply praising the former. The County Tyrone miners, in his view, should 'know better' than to use inferior practices. In a similar way, he used the skilful manufacture of Kimberley points to critique inefficiencies in the British strike-a-light industry. In praising aspects of Aboriginal material culture, he was also criticising European industry.

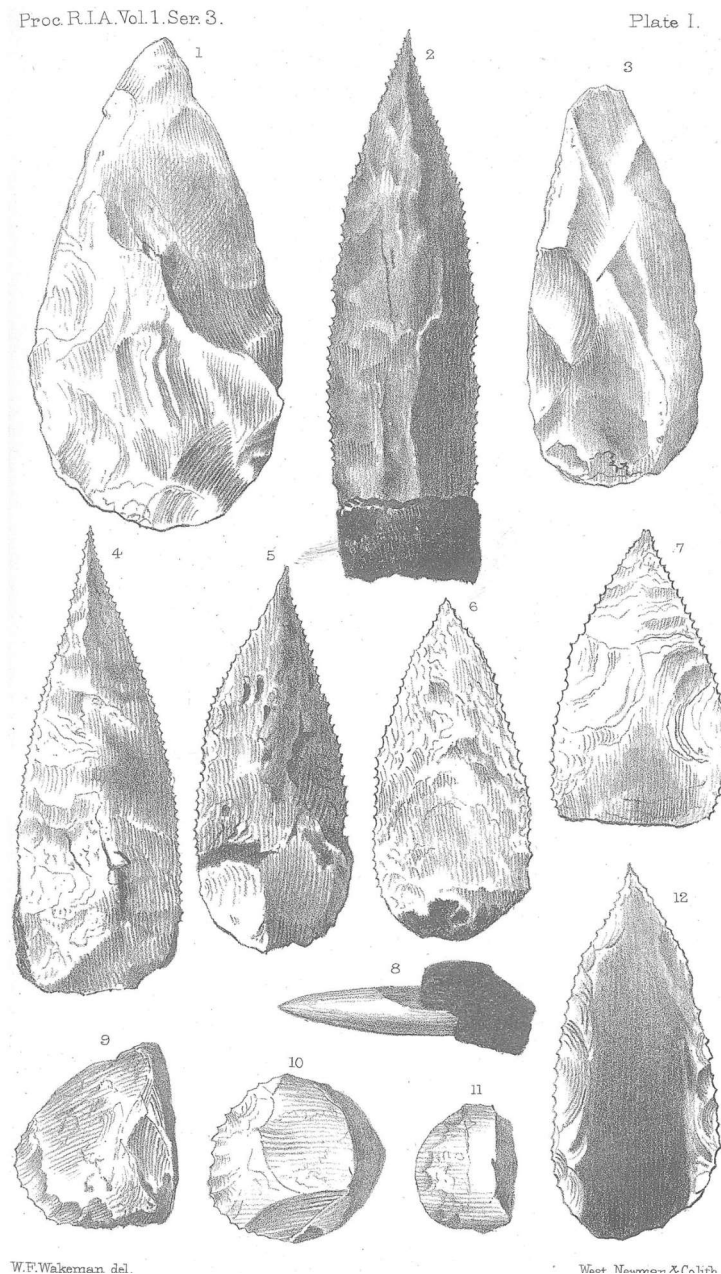


Figure 11: Historical illustration of points from the Kimberley acquired by Edward Hardman

Illustrated by W. F. Wakeman c. 1886, published in Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', Plate 1.

Hardman attributed a significant dynamic component to Aboriginal material culture: it had adapted to external factors, and was continuing to do so. He argued that the spear points he collected showed 'a curious admixture, illustrating the adaptability of the modern savage to circumstance. Separately they would seem to be representatives of the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, bone and iron ages'.¹³⁴ Hardman portrayed Aboriginal material culture as neither inherently static nor inevitably doomed. This helps to explain his interest in objects that overtly incorporated European materials. Some glass and metal had reached the Kimberley interior well before the 1880s, but people living near the new pastoral stations now had far greater opportunities to obtain them. Hardman acquired three glass points from Yeeda Station near Derby in the West Kimberley, an area that had seen the introduction of sheep in 1880 and cattle in 1882, and was reportedly the site of the first European 'house' built in the Kimberley in 1881.¹³⁵ Hardman's collection and papers bear out this interest in how Aboriginal culture engaged with change. One of his drawings does too: an 1883 sketch depicts two Aboriginal men (presumably pastoral workers or survey party members) wearing European clothing, one of whom is smoking a pipe.¹³⁶

Hardman's attitude towards Aboriginal material culture contrasts with that of Joseph Beete Jukes, who was Professor of Geology at the Royal College of Science when Hardman studied there. Jukes visited Australia in the 1840s as naturalist on the HMS *Fly*, assembling a collection that he deployed in order to reconcile polygenist theory with the biblical creation narrative, and to frame Aboriginal people as racially inferior to Torres Strait Islanders.¹³⁷ Jukes wrote that Aboriginal people 'are wholly destitute of agriculture and of all manner of manufacture of any kind of material, or tool, or implement, beyond their few weapons, and a rude stone hammer, and some simple nets and baskets'.¹³⁸ Polygenism had become less influential by the time that Hardman was collecting in the 1880s, and his wide-ranging

¹³⁴ Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', 61.

¹³⁵ NMI, 1887.3–5; 'The First House Built in the Kimberleys', *Western Mail*, Thursday 8 June 1922, 7.

¹³⁶ Sketchbook by E.T. Hardman (1883), 71. Battye Library, MN 1213, Papers of Edward Townley Hardman, ACC 9888AD.

¹³⁷ Simpson, 'Agency, Encounter and Ethnographic Collecting', 317–18.

¹³⁸ Joseph Beete Jukes, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyage of H.M.S. Fly*, 2 vols. (London: T. & W. Boone, 1847), II, 243.

collection implicitly challenges Jukes' portrayal. Hardman also explicitly commented on the wider debate, reflecting that: 'on the whole, these natives are by no means of such a low type of humanity as has been supposed'.¹³⁹ Instead, he stated, Aboriginal people in the colony 'are quick and intelligent, easily taught, and become tractable and willing servants'.¹⁴⁰ Hardman's aesthetic appreciation for Kimberley points and some other aspects of Aboriginal material culture thus had practical and political implications. He noted that, 'as is exemplified in the carving of their weapons and implements, and in the drawings which may be often seen in cairns and on rocks, [the inhabitants of the Kimberley] have some notions of art'.¹⁴¹ In showing Aboriginal people as capable of an aesthetic sensibility, Hardman engaged with wider discourse over their makers' supposed capacity to 'progress'.¹⁴² For him, they were adaptable, potentially controllable by colonists and capable of surviving under the new colonial order.

Hardman saw the fulfilment of Western Australia's colonial potential as contingent upon settlers' actions, arguing that the Kimberley was not like other Australian 'frontiers' and:

is not country that can be 'rushed,' as in the old days of Victoria. The natives are numerous, and have on many occasions shown themselves hostile. A strong party, well equipped [and well armed], is absolutely necessary to do anything in those districts.¹⁴³

Collie had likewise stressed the need for settlers to militarily dominate Aboriginal people, but also recommended some other strategies for fostering peaceful relations. Hardman did not explicitly discuss other strategies, perhaps because they did not interest him or because he thought that programmes operating in other districts could not be easily replicated in the Kimberley.¹⁴⁴ Yet Hardman also demonstrated ambivalence about whether

¹³⁹ Hardman, 'Habits and Customs', 75.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 75.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 75; also Hardman, *Report on the Geology ...*, 9.

¹⁴² Wilfried van Damme 'Not What You Expect: The Nineteenth-Century European Reception of Australian Aboriginal Art', *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 81:3 (2012), 133–49.

¹⁴³ Hardman, quoted in *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, Saturday 16 October 1886, 244.

¹⁴⁴ Hardman apparently visited New Norcia Mission in the south-west. Hardman, 'Habits and Customs', 75.

colonial incursions truly benefited indigenous people. Many of his contemporaries saw colonists' introduction of alcohol as an existential threat to Aboriginal communities, and Hardman described glass points as exhibiting 'the progress of civilization, and the deadly presence of the brandy-bottle'.¹⁴⁵ Despite this, he did not suggest that Aboriginal culture was inevitably doomed, but that one (Figure 10) 'attests the wonderful delicacy of touch and sense of symmetry which the so-called degraded Australian savage possesses'.¹⁴⁶ Such praise implicitly contrasted its unnamed maker's skill and adaptability with the colonists' 'inevitable brandy-bottle'.¹⁴⁷ Hardman's collection therefore shows how 'frontier' spaces and the objects used there could be used to support but also to complicate scholarly discourse about the value and likely future of Aboriginal peoples of Western Australia.

Collecting and colonial anxieties

Early colonial spaces were based upon an inherently unequal power dynamic that their inhabitants upheld, negotiated, subverted or challenged in different ways. Many historians have moved away from the frontier-resistance paradigm to explore acts of co-operation and collaboration.¹⁴⁸ Increasingly, scholars have also argued that many accounts of Aboriginal responses to British colonialism are structured around an overly simplistic binary of either (physical) resistance or accommodation. Wolski suggests that this is linked to a misinterpretation of Henry Reynolds' work, which challenged stereotypical notions of Aboriginal passivity by highlighting acts of resistance downplayed or ignored in colonial accounts.¹⁴⁹ Wolski argues that practices like the deliberate continuation of pre-colonial value-systems, lifestyles and material culture; or the melding of different cultural forms like spear points made from bottle-glass, also constituted resistance.¹⁵⁰ The various circumstances in which the collectors discussed here collected Aboriginal objects thus speak to varying degrees of exchange, resistance, accommodation and adaptation.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 58.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 61.

¹⁴⁸ Russell, 'Introduction', 5.

¹⁴⁹ Wolski, 218.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 218, 223.

Collie, Talbot and Hardman were occasionally conscious of failing to 'know' Aboriginal cultures. Collie implied that Aboriginal people had their own logical motives for behaviour that to him looked unpredictable, writing that 'their out-goings and in-comings *seem to us* exceedingly capricious [my emphasis]'.¹⁵¹ Hardman was disappointed when people in the Kimberley would not give him their ceremonial boards (whose existence Europeans had only recently become aware of) or reveal details about male initiation ceremonies.¹⁵² Despite obtaining some potentially sensitive information and objects, like bullroarers and a knife purportedly used in initiation rites, he grasped that much was being withheld. Collectors might be unaware of other forms of resistance, in the objects that they never got to hear about, let alone see or acquire. Hardman tried to watch and question those making and using objects, but he recorded little about specific individuals. This possibly reflects limited in-depth communication with the Aboriginal communities he met in the Kimberley, but also the Aboriginal members of his Survey party who likely acted as cultural intermediaries.

Each collector entered 'frontier' spaces occupied not only by Europeans (or, later, white Australians) but by Aboriginal populations still largely and visibly free from colonial control. Through their collections and writings, each sought to render Aboriginal societies more understandable to European and settler friends, family, colleagues, officials and scholars. Colonists' attempts to understand aspects of Aboriginal culture could involve major misconceptions. For example, Edmund Lockyer interpreted the 1826 spearing of a British prisoner at King George Sound as a random act, whereas Shellam argues that he probably misread a well-considered action taken in accordance with local (if not British) law.¹⁵³ The collectors and those whose objects were acquired doubtless faced challenges when trying to interpret intercultural interactions in line with their own cultural expectations. Collectors' surviving writings tried to convey Aboriginal knowledge in European terms, but such translations were not straightforward. Talbot's notes state that a digging stick in his collection was used 'like a spade', and Hardman's 'convoluted' account

¹⁵¹ Collie to George Collie, 4 August 1831, 'Letters 1828–35', 36.

¹⁵² Hardman, 'Habits and Customs', 73.

¹⁵³ Tiffany Shellam, 'Making Sense of Law and Disorder', *History and Anthropology*, 18:1 (2007), 75–88.

of how Kimberley points were manufactured demonstrates the challenges of documenting unfamiliar processes.¹⁵⁴

Lorenzo Veracini argues that the common settler colonial portrayal of indigenous peoples as highly mobile and nomadic ‘allows a typically settler colonial inversion’, with settlers’ supposedly more permanent presence in the same spaces enabling them to ‘perform their indigenisation and express their nativism’.¹⁵⁵ I suggest that for colonists like Collie, Talbot and Hardman, collecting Aboriginal objects became an important way of conveying a successful Western Australian career. Each wrote about Australia and its original inhabitants in authoritative tones, yet their own personal ambitions and positions were fragile. The colony held out the hope of professional success, for Collie and Hardman to establish secure and prestigious medical and geological careers and for Talbot to prove his ability to run a successful estate. They generally portrayed the colony as full of nascent resources suitable for exploitation. Yet each man’s experience of Western Australia was transient. Hardman was on a temporary secondment, Talbot relocated to Van Diemen’s Land after a year, and Collie had to wait several years before obtaining his long-desired appointment as the colonial surgeon in Perth. Many early collections now in the UK and Ireland were likewise formed by people who were not born in Western Australia and did not expect to live there permanently. Their bright colonial future, therefore, felt by no means secure.

I argue that the ‘frontier’ trope becomes particularly useful when looking at Collie, Talbot and Hardman. Each man was taking advantage of enhanced collecting opportunities but also having to intellectually reconcile the imposition of new colonial power structures with an ongoing Aboriginal presence on and claim to land. Later chapters explore how the concept of a ‘doomed race’ gained momentum in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, after the colonial presence was more established and Aboriginal peoples increasingly a minority in their own lands. Perhaps this is how the ‘imagined frontier’ helps us to understand the three collectors’ perceptions of Aboriginal material culture: as the creations of people who were active, independent and visible players in colonial spaces. Yet their apparent

¹⁵⁴ Talbot, descriptive notes accompanying donation, 20 June 1839; Harrison, ‘An Artefact of Colonial Desire?’, 70.

¹⁵⁵ Veracini, 79.

certainty in the eventual colonial dominance of Aboriginal people does not imply indifference towards the future prospects of Aboriginal people. Collie and Hardman explicitly portrayed them as potentially useful colonial subjects, and whilst Talbot does not seem to have written explicitly on this topic, his correspondence with the British Museum gave no sense of Aboriginal peoples as under threat.

It is important to understand how Collie, Talbot and Hardman's backgrounds, ideals and anxieties influenced their assumptions about Aboriginal peoples' capacities. Each had taken familial, professional or financial risks in going to Western Australia. The identification of domesticity and humanitarianism as core aspects of 'civilised' manliness gained a significant following in British middle-class circles in the 1830s, and Collie and Talbot's lives demonstrate the cultural strength of these ideals. During the 1830s, marriage and the establishment of a household was commonly seen as an important rite of middle-class adulthood and a marker of masculine success.¹⁵⁶ Collie and Talbot were unmarried and (as far as we know) childless, and to their families they lamented their exclusion from the domestic ideal. During the late nineteenth century this association between masculinity and domesticity was challenged as increasing numbers of men actively chose to remain single.¹⁵⁷ Lester and Dussart argue that early nineteenth-century colonial 'frontiers' thus became battlegrounds for different notions of masculinity.¹⁵⁸ Early colonists' experiences informed the development of an anti-domestic model that stressed 'toughness, self-reliance, independence, and the resistance to, and selective deployment of violence'.¹⁵⁹ Western Australia offered an outlet for these ideals, particularly as many Britons now perceived Britain's colonies as 'quintessentially a masculine arena'.¹⁶⁰ Yet men living in 'frontier' spaces did not universally reject the discourse of domesticity, and interpreted and pursued masculine ideals in different ways. Hardman was less overtly concerned with domestic ideals. Whilst the 1830s and 1880s saw shifts in how masculinity was pursued in Western Australia, his personal circumstances were very different

¹⁵⁶ See John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Bath: Bath Press, 1999).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, especially 143–94.

¹⁵⁸ Lester and Dussart, 65.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 68.

¹⁶⁰ Tosh, 174–75.

to Collie and Talbot. Migration to Western Australia enabled him to safeguard the bonds of domesticity and held out the hope of obtaining financial security for his family dependents. All three men's experiences, like those of Georgiana Molloy (1805–1843), a botanist and early settler in the south-west, suggest that collecting sprang from a wide range of impulses often linked to a desire to maintain and cement social status and ties.¹⁶¹ There was significant interplay between ideas of masculinity, domesticity and the act of collecting in the nineteenth century, as Tom Griffiths notes: 'men dominated the public conversations about collection and forged an understanding of it as a sort of muscular interior decoration, a manly domesticity'.¹⁶²

Collectors' beliefs about what success looked like, informed by ideas about Britishness and manliness, also affected their attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Collie, for example, portrayed Aboriginal people as the dependents of colonists who bore a duty to 'discipline' and 'ennoble' them. Such actions were often used to justify the British usurpation of Aboriginal lands. Talbot constructed a large collection to be presented to the British Museum, an institution at the symbolic 'heart' of the British empire. He construed his collection as providing valuable colonial knowledge. Later, Hardman drew connections between Aboriginal and European societies, testifying to Aboriginal peoples' ability to become productive colonial subjects as well as critiquing failures in British industry. Other cultural expectations informed their collecting decisions. Hardman tried to record detailed information about objects, although his need to move with the Survey party impeded his ability to communicate with Aboriginal makers, users and owners. Despite longer-lasting contacts with people like Mokare, Collie showed far less overt interest in Aboriginal material culture than did Talbot and Hardman. This probably does not stem simply from personal enthusiasm, but from the different professional circumstances the collectors found themselves in. Hardman's decision to form such a large private collection and later publish on it when back in Dublin presumably stemmed in part from a wish to maintain the interest of the Western Australian government, who had the power to employ him.

¹⁶¹ Susan K. Martin, 'Apples for Apples: Garden Gifts, Plant Acquisition and Exchange in Nineteenth-century Australia', *Garden History*, 39:1 (2011), 109–23 (pp. 112–13).

¹⁶² Griffiths, 20.

The attitude of early colonists towards Aboriginal people has sometimes been portrayed as quickly hardening into the view that their culture would inevitably disintegrate in the face of European 'civilisation'. Nineteenth-century academic and popular discourse closely aligned Aboriginal culture with the 'stone age'.¹⁶³ Griffiths suggested that this offered antiquarian collectors in Victoria 'a powerful metaphor of primitiveness. It conveyed the image of a static culture, one that was unmalleable, set, impermeable, discrete, inorganic'.¹⁶⁴ Most of Griffiths' collectors had little personal contact with Aboriginal Victorians who had been and were being removed from their lands to government reserves and mission stations. In contrast, Talbot and Hardman had contact with Aboriginal people living largely autonomous lives. More work needs to be done comparing collecting across Western Australia and Victoria, both of which in 1886 passed acts of parliament to forcibly take Aboriginal children with European ancestry from their families.¹⁶⁵ Yet Collie, Talbot and Hardman's collections all show little evidence of the fetishization of 'traditional' Aboriginal culture as the relics of disappearing societies. They also complicated the 'stone age' metaphor by engaging with items overtly blending 'European' materials or techniques. Each man worked in areas where sustained contact with Europeans was relatively new: Hardman focused on the Kimberley, and Collie and Talbot joined expeditions into areas then largely unknown to Europeans. Importantly, however, they did not ignore items from Aboriginal people closer to the new colonial settlements. Hardman also collected material from the south-west, and nowhere suggested that people living there had grown 'degraded' through colonial contact.

Western Australia's 'imagined frontier' held out the prospect of personal and professional success for enterprising white men. However, this was frequently accompanied by a lingering unease over land rights. In 1832, Collie advised settlers to:

¹⁶³ The term 'stone age' was coined in an influential 1837 essay by Christian Jürgensen Thomsen's (translated into English in 1848). Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, 'The Language of Objects: Christian Jürgensen Thomsen's Science of the Past', *Isis*, 103:1 (2012), 24–53.

¹⁶⁴ Griffiths, 55.

¹⁶⁵ The Aborigines Protection Act 1886 (Victoria) and the Aborigines Protection Act 1886 (WA).

constantly bear in mind the facts that it is he [the settler] who is the primary intruder, that it is he who is usurping the ancient grounds, the undoubted property of the aborigines, who are entitled to every international law, to a full compensation, to entire satisfaction, for what they are so insidiously deprived of.¹⁶⁶

Collie and several of his contemporaries therefore acknowledged Aboriginal property in relation to land, showing some uneasiness about colonial land usage.¹⁶⁷ As early as 1839, Governor Hutt said of Aboriginal people that ‘the only substantial property they ever did possess is the soil, over each separate portion of which some individual claims an inherited right, and of this we have long ago divested them, not being aware of such claims ...’.¹⁶⁸ His words portrayed colonial dispossession as potentially regrettable, but now irreversible. Collie and Hardman also depicted Aboriginal people as capable of being incorporated into the colonial system through contact with settlers and thus ‘civilised’, ‘uplifted’ and ‘elevated’. Their statements still ultimately disavow Aboriginal sovereignty, portraying the supposed benefits arising from colonial influence as compensating or at least significantly mitigating the effects of the British invasion. We can read the presence in so many collections of weapons, as well as ‘settler’ glass and metal, in many ways: as the result of Aboriginal makers’ and owners’ agency, collectors’ interest in showcasing cultural dynamism and range, or, potentially, as collectors’ attempts to justify colonial invasion. We do not know precisely what inferences Collie, Talbot and Hardman wished people to draw from their collections, but must reflect on how their personal complicity in usurping Aboriginal sovereignty sits alongside their collecting choices.

¹⁶⁶ Collie, ‘Copy of a Report ...’, 130.

¹⁶⁷ Ian Keen argues that most commentators during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thought that Aboriginal people had at least some concept of property. Ian Keen, ‘The Interpretation of Aboriginal “Property” on the Australian Colonial Frontier’, in *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Ian Keen (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 41–61 (p. 45).

¹⁶⁸ Governor Hutt to Lord Glenelg, 3 May 1839, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 34 (1844), 363–66 (p. 364).

Conclusions

British visitors to Western Australia had collected Aboriginal objects prior to 1829, however these interactions were usually brief. With the transition to permanent colonial settlements, some colonists and Aboriginal people came into more sustained contact. Collie, Talbot and Hardman had opportunities to acquire a wider range of items than the crew on earlier passing ships could access, and to spend more time with Aboriginal makers, users and owners. Their collections stemmed from intercultural transactions that were not on the face of it physically violent, although settlers like George Fletcher Moore were quite capable of coercing objects from some people whilst maintaining more positive interactions with others. Issues of consent are also complicated by Hardman's claim to have 'found' some of his acquisitions 'at a native camp' (a theme that Chapter Four returns to).¹⁶⁹

Collie, Talbot and Hardman seized opportunities to acquire material and information from populations largely unknown to Europeans, and to engage with debate about Aboriginal peoples' colonial potential. Their responses were informed by different individuals and local contexts (which affected, for example, their opportunities to develop personal relationships) as well as broader cultural changes. Hardman's more overt interest in ethnology, for example, is likely linked not only to personal inclination but from developments in scholarly disciplines over the later nineteenth century. In a similar way, each man's conclusions about Aboriginal culture were entwined not only with their own hopes for their new neighbourhood's colonial future, but their specific cultural expectations and personal stake in this enterprise. The concept of 'frontier' thus offers a potentially useful lens through which to study collecting during the early years of permanent colonial settlements. We must be flexible when defining these areas. Pamela Smith found that many pastoralists colonising the south-east Kimberley between the mid-1880s and early 1920s saw themselves as invaders: perceptions bearing similarities with statements made half a century earlier in the south-west.¹⁷⁰ Rather than applying to narrowly defined times and places, I suggest that the 'frontier' trope is best seen as a set of affinities between how some individuals

¹⁶⁹ Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', 58.

¹⁷⁰ Pamela A. Smith, 'Into the Kimberley: The Invasion of the Sturt Creek Basin (Kimberley Region, Western Australia) and Evidence of Aboriginal Resistance', *Aboriginal History*, 24 (2000), 62–74.

perceived Western Australia. 'Frontier' collecting therefore involves acknowledging the longstanding and current reality of Aboriginal presences, even if one might seek to usurp it. For the collectors discussed, frontiers operated as spaces that framed interactions between populations assumed to be at different stages of development. I have argued that looking at how they engaged with Aboriginal material culture enriches our understanding of the problematic concept of the frontier, revealing the mutual interplay between different ideas about human difference, race and sovereignty; and about 'manliness', who a man's dependents were and what duties he owed them.

Although early British settlements in Western Australia were geographically remote from other colonial settlements, their residents were parts of networks that criss-crossed other Australian colonies and the wider British empire. Circulating ideas about indigenous people across these networks means that some scholars have fruitfully compared colonial experiences in Australia, North America and Africa.¹⁷¹ Nettelbeck and Smandych showed, for example, how during the later nineteenth century colonial expansion in parts of Australia and Canada was influenced by the British government's theoretical recognition of indigenous peoples as British subjects entitled to humanitarian protection.¹⁷² Ann Curthoys and Jeremy Martens highlighted connections between Western Australia and Natal in terms of the mutual influences and tensions between the imperial metropole and local settler-colonial interests over Indigenous policy; and Rebecca Schwartz has explored how individuals in Western Australia and Natal engaged with and contributed to debates over the civilisation and education of indigenous peoples.¹⁷³ Whilst this chapter has explored the personal experiences of colonists in Western Australia, the next one therefore explores the movement of people and objects across these wider colonial networks.

¹⁷¹ Important studies include Furniss, 'Imagining the Frontier'; Amanda Nettelbeck, Russell Smandych, Louis A. Knafla and Robert Foster, *Fragile Settlements: Aboriginal Peoples, Law, and Resistance in South-West Australia and Prairie Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016).

¹⁷² Nettelbeck and Smandych, 356–57.

¹⁷³ Ann Curthoys and Jeremy Martens, 'Serious Collisions: Settlers, Indigenous People, and Imperial Policy in Western Australia and Natal', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, 15 (2013), 121–44; Rebecca Swartz, 'Civilisation and Colonial Education: Natal and Western Australia in the 1860s in Comparative Perspective', *History of Education*, 47:3 (2018), 368–83.

Chapter Four: Colonial ‘careerists’

Chapter Three explored how ideas about boundaries have influenced collecting within Western Australia, and I now build on this to consider connections between individuals, ideas and objects across geographically distant spaces. Specifically, this chapter asks how peoples’ experiences in other colonial spaces influenced how they collected Aboriginal objects in Western Australia. The Western Australian legislature only acquired responsibility for ‘Aboriginal affairs’ in 1897, far later than the eastern Australian colonies. This delay was linked to British officials’ concerns over its ability to protect Aboriginal people from settler violence and exploitation.¹ Humanitarian concerns about the situation in Western Australia continued well into the twentieth century. I will consider how five individuals living and working across the British empire over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engaged with these concerns: a governor and former farmer; a writer and governor’s wife; a cleric; a prospector, explorer and government official; and a servant and explorer. Three have been recorded as the collectors of Aboriginal objects now in English museums. The remaining two did not receive this recognition, but they too were associated with the collecting of material. How did material culture and its associated knowledge support or disrupt each traveller’s personal and professional ambitions? I argue that important insights into collecting choices are revealed by tracking these wider geographical trajectories and engagements.

Historians have devoted increasing attention to the complex relationships between and within colonies and the imperial metropole (or

¹ When the British government granted self-government to Western Australia in 1890 it had insisted upon maintaining control over Aboriginal affairs, something that had not been insisted upon for any of the other Australian colonies, which had obtained self-government in the 1850s. Ann Curthoys, ‘Settler Self-Government versus Aboriginal Rights, 1883–2001: The Shocking History of Section 70 of the Western Australian Constitution’, in *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* <<http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps=articles>> [accessed 10 March 2021]; Curthoys and Mitchell; Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw, David Philips and Shurlee Swain, *Equal Subjects, Unequal Rights: Indigenous People in British Settler Colonies, 1830–1910* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003) particularly 134–56.

'homeland').² Focusing exclusively upon any one place gives an incomplete picture about collectors' motivations and the mobile realities of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century life. Western Australia often represented just one sphere of a collector's activity. My approach is therefore informed by concepts developed in transnational history. Broadly conceived, transnational history challenges the assumption that the nation 'is the basic unit of historical analysis', displacing conventional hierarchies about colonial societies.³ Whilst recognising the significance of nations and other discrete political entities (such as 'Western Australia'), this approach focuses on the 'networks, processes, beliefs, and institutions that transcend these politically defined spaces'.⁴ Movements across political borders involved far more than a simple two-way communication between colony and 'metropole'. For example, Alan Lester argues that settlers in southern Africa, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand collectively forged a distinctive settler discourse aiming to influence those in Britain as well as those in its overseas empire.⁵ The big settler-organised exhibits at international exhibitions (see Chapter Six) and the smaller collections discussed in this chapter can also be seen in this light. Collectively, they form parts of a wider global movement that sought to embed particular ways of seeing Aboriginal people.

² Important works covering relevant themes include Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*; David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds), *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careerism in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott (eds), *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008); Marilyn Lake and Ann Curthoys (eds), *Connected Worlds: History in Trans-National Perspective* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006); Kathleen Wilson (ed), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005).

³ Mae Ngai, 'Promises and Perils of Transnational History', *Perspectives on History*, American Historical Association (December 2012), <<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/december-2012/promises-and-perils-of-transnational-history>> [accessed 8 March 2019]; Ann Curthoys, 'Cultural History and the Nation', in *Cultural History in Australia*, ed. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003), 22–37.

⁴ Sven Beckert, in C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History'. *The American Historical Review*, 111:5 (December 2006), 1441–64 (p. 1459).

⁵ Alan Lester, 'British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire', *History Workshop Journal*, 54:1 (1 October 2002), 24–48.

The global interconnections between people, ideas and objects extended beyond the confines of the political entity known as the British empire. The travellers considered in this chapter lived and worked almost entirely within this empire. They rarely ventured physically beyond its imperial territories, but were also part of a web of wider global interconnections. Some had direct personal contact with people linked to other European empires, such as the Spanish Benedictine monks who established the monastic town of New Norcia (132 km north of Perth).⁶ Mary Barker claimed that ‘in all the principal towns of Australia, the “foreigner” thrives and flourishes’.⁷ They were conscious of physically crossing political borders constructed by settlers and indigenous peoples, although their understandings of the latter borders varied. Travellers might find their journeys through these territories and politics personally and professionally rewarding, but also troubling.

Tracing life histories can help to illuminate the complexities of colonial societies. Malcolm Allbrook argued that in order to understand Henry Prinsep’s actions as Western Australia’s first Chief Protector of Aborigines, we must understand his earlier experiences of family and empire.⁸ The edited collection *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* used individual life histories to explore the globally connected world of the British empire.⁹ Its editors, David Lambert and Alan Lester, argued that subjects with widely different political and cultural impacts were worth studying collectively because ‘their life histories – indeed, their life geographies – constituted meaningful connections across the empire in their own right. Such connections facilitated the continual reformulation of imperial discourses, practices and culture’.¹⁰ Developing this point, Zoë Laidlaw discussed how personal networks were ‘the mainstay of day-to-day colonial

⁶ Judith Woodward, ‘Deconstructing and Reconstructing Australia’s Spanish Heritage: Research Projects of the Benedictine Monastic Community of New Norcia, Western Australia’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 1:1–2 (December 1995), 141–53 (p. 141).

⁷ Lady Broome, *Colonial Memories* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1904), 2. Here, Barker contrasted Australia to New Zealand, which she called ‘beautifully and distinctively English’.

⁸ Malcolm Allbrook, *Henry Prinsep’s Empire: Framing a Distant Colony* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 16.

⁹ David Lambert and Alan Lester, ‘Introduction’, in *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Lambert and Lester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–31.

¹⁰ Lambert and Lester, ‘Introduction’, 2.

governance, transmitting influence, patronage, and information'.¹¹ These networks were vitally important: they 'sustained the empire'.¹² This chapter explores how some individuals engaged with indigenous objects when travelling across the British empire, and ask what this reveals about personal, professional, domestic and global intersections taking place in individual lives.

Travellers' ideas about and interest in indigenous peoples changed across time and space. This is true of individuals like Alexander Collie, Samuel Talbot and Edward Hardman, who consciously engaged with ethnographic interests. However, it is important to recognise that many collections were *not* formed with deliberate ethnographic intentions. For the collectors considered in this chapter, collecting was a more incidental activity over the course of their colonial careers. Scholarly knowledge was rarely the main driver for this collecting, which was more consciously driven by motives related to personal prestige, social status and professional advancement. These motives were often obscured once the objects entered British and Irish museums. Tracing the journeys of these collectors and what they collected therefore helps to reveal how scholarly and popular ideas about non-British lands and peoples merged and diverged.

Here, I consider five travellers who journeyed through Western Australia and other British colonies. I begin with Frederick Broome and his wife Mary Barker, who lived in Western Australia when he was governor there between 1883 and 1889. Broome donated Aboriginal objects to the British Museum in 1885; and Barker wrote extensively about their colonial postings and dealings with indigenous peoples. In 1896 and 1897 David Carnegie led an expedition into the Western Australian interior, and collected objects from people living there. Finally, Gerard Trower acquired Aboriginal items from the Kimberley region when he was the Anglican Bishop of North West Australia between 1910 and 1927. Broome, Barker, Carnegie and Trower had peripatetic colonial careers, which significantly affected their collecting choices. They were all part of a social elite who identified as British and were, in different ways, invested in upholding its empire. However, in this chapter they are joined by Warri, an Aboriginal traveller whose experiences differed in important ways.

¹¹ Laidlaw, 14.

¹² Ibid, 94.

White collectors in Western Australia often operated alongside a range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal companions and intermediaries. Broome was accompanied by other settlers when travelling in the Kimberley; and Trower's visits to the Forrest River Mission in the Kimberley were mediated through mission workers and their families, baptised and unbaptised Aboriginal people, and visitors such as police constables. Their involvement has often been downplayed or overlooked, but it is still possible to trace something of their impact. Warri, a young Aboriginal man from central Australia, travelled through the Western Australian desert as a member of Carnegie's expedition party. Like Barker, he is not named as a source of objects in British or Irish collections, but tracing his actions deepens our understanding of how objects sustained and disrupted colonial networks.

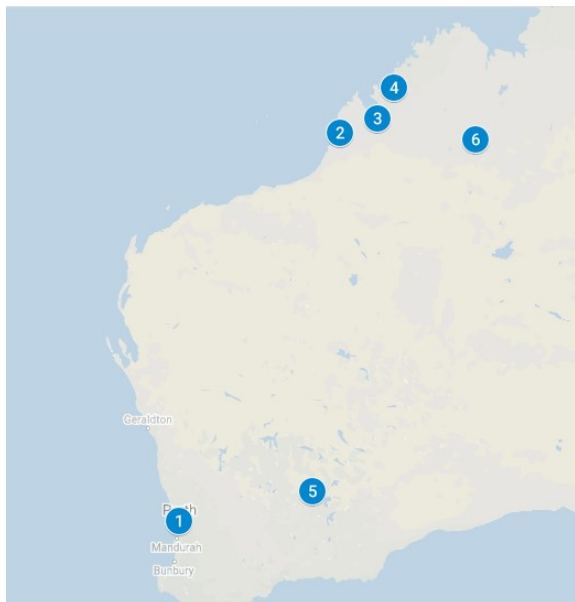
All the Aboriginal objects discussed in this chapter were acquired by collectors between the 1880s and 1920s, a period encompassing major change in Britain's imperial outlook and Western Australia's political ambitions. British interest in Australia was sustained by continued migration, British financial investments in Australian mining and other enterprises, and vehicles of colonial ideology like imperial adventure stories, an increasingly popular genre from the 1880s onwards.¹³ However, Jane Lydon notes that historians 'often overlook the distinctive history of Western Australian colonization, and the way that its northern frontier invaded indigenous country much later than in other colonies'.¹⁴ Into the first decades of the twentieth century, she argues, 'the wild north-west provided a focus of concern and difference for humanitarian observers based in the cities of south-eastern Australia, whose own histories of violent invasion were by now safely in the past'.¹⁵ Through the 1880s and well into the 1900s, Western Australia's government had to do significant reputation management. The British Colonial Office was concerned by reports of abuses against Aboriginal people, particularly of violence and enslaved labour in the north-west, which

¹³ Luke Trainor, *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism: Manipulation, Conflict and Compromise in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 65.

¹⁴ Jane Lydon, *Imperial Emotions: The Politics of Empathy Across the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 140.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

were seen as an ‘imperial embarrassment’.¹⁶ When Western Australia was finally granted responsible government in 1890 the Colonial Office insisted on retaining control of matters relating to Aboriginal affairs. This, alongside requirements that Western Australia’s government reserve up to one per cent of the colony’s gross revenue to spend on ‘the preservation and well-being of the Aborigines’ caused settler resentment, and in 1897 both provisions were repealed.¹⁷ This did not stop humanitarian criticism. While writers of the imperial adventure stories made ‘little-traversed’ colonial landscapes the backdrops for their stirring tales, other commentators portrayed ‘the wild north-west’ as a site of white depravity. As this chapter shows, these places also caught the eye of collectors who grappled with these tensions in their own ways.



Key:

- 1: Perth (*Wajuk Noongar*)
- 2: Broome (*Yawuru and Jukun*)
- 3: Derby (*Nyikina*)
- 4: Forrest River Mission (now Oombulgurri) (*Yijji*)
- 5: Coolgardie (*Wangkathaa*)
- 6: Halls Creek (*Jaru and Kija*)

Map 2: Key locations discussed in Chapter Four

Map data © 2021 Google

¹⁶ Ibid, 142; also see Curthoys and Mitchell, 385–404.

¹⁷ The Western Australian Constitution Act 1889 (52 Vict. No. 23), 19; *Aborigines Act* 1897 (WA).

A colonial couple: Frederick Broome and Mary Barker



Figure 12: Message stick, 'extreme N.W.', acquired by Frederick Broome (detail)

This wooden message stick measures about three hand-widths in length, and is incised with darkened designs. How its maker intended it to be used is not clear. Markings show geometric designs as well as a three-masted ship and a building of European-style construction. This suggests that its maker lived near the coast and spent time in or near to one of the pastoral and pearling settlements established during the 1880s.

Wood. Unidentified maker; collected by Frederick Broome in the 1880s.

BM, Oc,.2424. © Trustees of the British Museum.

In 1883 settlers in Western Australia turned out to greet their new governor Frederick Napier Broome (1842–1896), and his wife Mary Anne Barker née Stewart (1831–1911). The couple were seasoned travellers within Britain's empire.¹⁸ Both were born in British colonies (Broome in Canada, Barker in Jamaica) but educated in England. In 1860 Barker moved to India to join her first husband, an army captain. Widowed within a year, she returned to England with her sons John (b. 1853) and Walter (b. 1857). Having worked as a sheep farmer in New Zealand, Broome met and married Barker during an 1864 visit to England. Leaving John and Walter to be educated in England, they returned to farming life in New Zealand until a disastrous 1868 season forced their return to England. There, their sons Guy (b. 1870) and Louis (b. 1874) were born, and the couple turned to writing to provide an income. Broome published poetry, Barker edited travel books, and both wrote for newspapers and other publications. Barker also authored books (as Lady

¹⁸ I refer throughout to Mary by the surname (Barker) under which she published most of her books.

Barker, a title deriving from her first marriage) ranging from children's stories to interior design and cookery guides. Some of her most successful works described her experiences of colonial life.

Broome's career as a colonial administrator took off in 1875, when he was made colonial secretary in Natal, an appointment that came as a surprise to the couple's friends.¹⁹ Barker accompanied him to all his postings, and both Guy and Louis went with them to Natal. In 1878 Broome became colonial secretary (and in 1880, lieutenant-governor) of Mauritius; and in 1882 he was appointed governor of Western Australia. He, Barker and Louis arrived in the colony in May 1883 (Guy was now being educated in England). Broome showed early interest in matters of Aboriginal policy, reducing magistrates' opportunities to send Aboriginal convicts to the prison on Rottnest Island (known to Wajuk Noongar people as Wadjemup), and establishing an 1883 commission to investigate reports of poor conditions there.²⁰ In 1884 he also put pressure on the generally pro-pastoralist Legislative Committee by ensuring that it received important documents relating to Aboriginal matters like illegal labour agreements in the pearling industry.²¹ In pronouncements that I will discuss, however, Broome portrayed Aboriginal people as mainly well-treated, and reports of their mistreatment as unfounded, exaggerated, or exceptional.

From 1886 onwards, Broome had to deal with a high-profile set of allegations about widespread settler violations against Aboriginal people. In 1885 John Brown Gribble, a missionary in the north-west, complained that settlers were exploiting Aboriginal people there with impunity. A year later he published *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land*, an exposé condemning settlers for enslaving, physically and sexually abusing, and murdering Aboriginal people.²² Furious settlers responded by attacking Gribble's reputation, and the missionary was 'outmanoeuvred and ultimately defeated by a

¹⁹ F.K. Crowley, 'Broome, Sir Frederick Napier (1842–1896)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, 1969), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/broome-sir-frederick-napier-3068/text4527>> [accessed 9 March 2019].

²⁰ Curthoys and Mitchell, 377.

²¹ Ibid, 382.

²² J.B. Gribble, *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land, or, Blacks and Whites in North-West Australia* (Perth: Stirling Bros., 1886).

conservative elite'.²³ In keeping with his previous public statements, Broome acknowledged that some isolated cases of 'rough' treatment might exist, but denied Gribble's allegations of serious and widespread oppression.²⁴

During the 1880s colonists grew increasingly confident about Western Australia's economic prospects, ability to attract new settlers, and claims to self-government. Broome had arrived with instructions to discourage demands for responsible government, but in 1884 he began to support them. Yet the 1883 commission into the treatment of prisoners on Rottnest Island had, Katherine Roscoe argues, 'demonstrated to Broome and the [British] colonial office that supervision over the colonial government was necessary when it came to Aboriginal policy'.²⁵ He recognised that the Colonial Office's disapproval of Western Australia's record on Aboriginal affairs, particularly labour practices in the north, threatened its political transition.²⁶ In 1887 Broome formally agreed to seek the introduction of responsible government, 'provided that suitable protection was given to the Aboriginals and that the British government might at any time create a separate colony in the north'.²⁷ These requirements were incorporated into the *Western Australian Constitution Act* 1889, although the colony was ultimately not divided.²⁸ The idea of a fundamental disjuncture between Western Australia's north and south would also, as I will discuss, affect settlers' perceptions about Aboriginal peoples living in these areas.

Broome and Barker were actively involved in Western Australian settler society, and Barker was 'credited with ... beguiling by her undoubted charm

²³ J.B. Gribble, *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land, or, Blacks and Whites in North-West Australia*, with introduction by Bob Tonkinson (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1987), xii.

²⁴ Governor Sir F.N. Broome, K.C.M.G., to the Right Hon. The Earl of Derby, K.G., 25 October 1884, in *Correspondence Respecting the Aborigines of Western Australia* (Colonial Office, 1887), 8–9 (p. 8). TNA, CO 881/8/3; Governor F.N. Broome, K.C.M.G., to the Right Hon. The Earl of Granville, K.G., 9 June 1886, in *Correspondence Respecting the Aborigines of Western Australia* (Colonial Office, 1887), 47–81 (p. 48).

²⁵ Katherine Roscoe, "'Too Many Kill 'em. Too Many Make 'em Ill': The Commission into Rottnest Prison as the Context for Section 70", *Studies in Western Australian History*, 30 (2016). 43–57 (p. 57).

²⁶ Curthoys and Mitchell, 395.

²⁷ Ibid, 381; Crowley.

²⁸ *Constitution Act* 1889 (Western Australia) (52 Vict. No. 23).

those who differed from the governor'.²⁹ If so then she was kept busy, for Broome clashed with many colleagues.³⁰ His term in Western Australia was not extended, and the couple left the colony in late 1889. In 1890 Broome was appointed acting-governor of Barbados then, in 1891, governor of Trinidad. Yet in 1896 he died aged 54, leaving Barker, like Louisa Hardman, financially insecure. Barker managed to secure a modest pension from the Western Australian government and resumed work as an author, publishing her final memoir, *Colonial Memories*, in 1904.

Many scholars have explored Barker's prodigious literary output, including her adoption of colonial ideology and attitudes towards indigenous peoples.³¹ Whilst political developments during Broome's governorship of Western Australia attract extensive scholarly attention, the same cannot be said of his interior life there or elsewhere.³² The couple's engagement with indigenous material culture (see Appendix Four) has also received little attention. However, in April 1885 Broome presented fifteen Aboriginal objects to the British Museum: six spears, three shields, two spear-throwers, two message sticks, a bowl and a boomerang. British Museum curator Augustus Wollaston Franks recorded that that they were 'all from extreme N. west of Western Australia'.³³ Broome would have acquired them between May 1883 and November 1884, perhaps during his tour of the north-west coast in September and October 1884. The family also acquired other Aboriginal items, and soon after arriving in Australia Barker called Louis 'already the

²⁹ Alexandra Hasluck, 'Broome, Lady Mary Anne (1831–1911)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, 1969), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/broome-lady-mary-anne-3069/text4529>> [accessed 3 March 2019].

³⁰ Crowley.

³¹ Works include Gillian Whitlock, 'A "White-Souled State" Across the "South" with Lady Barker', in *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall (London: Routledge, 1996), 65–79; Emma Ferry, 'Home and Away: Domesticity and Empire in the Work of Lady Barker', *Women's History Magazine*, 54 (2006), 4–12; Emma Ferry, 'Writing Home: The Colonial Memories of Lady Barker, 1870–1904', in *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior*, ed. Anne Massey and Penny Sparke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 53–68; Harriette Richards, 'Reading Lady Barker: Fashioning Femininity in Colonial New Zealand', *Antipodes*, 31:2 (December 2017), 291–304.

³² Relevant works include Curthoys and Martens; Roscoe; Chris Owen, "An Excess of Humanity?" The Kimberley District and Section 70 of the Western Australian Constitution', *Studies in Western Australian History*, 30 (2016), 73–89; Jane Lydon, 'Christian Heroes? John Gribble, Exeter Hall and Antislavery on Western Australia's Frontier', *Studies in Western Australian History*, 30 (2016), 59–72; Curthoys and Mitchell, 361–84.

³³ 'Sketches of items acquired from Sir F Napier Broome 27 April 1885'. Christy correspondence, BM AOA Archives.

proud possessor of a native spear'.³⁴ Barker's early letters to Guy back in England, which she published in 1885 as *Letters to Guy*, repeatedly mention Aboriginal people, practices and objects. Other records about these incidents are limited, and Barker's original letters do not survive. It is therefore unclear if she embellished some accounts to entertain Guy (or, when preparing her book for publication, to appeal to a wider audience). Interestingly, books stemming from her other postings generally show less interest in indigenous material culture.³⁵ Broome's collecting mirrors this trend: apart from his 1885 donation to the British Museum he is not known to have made other collections of indigenous objects.

Broome donated objects to the British Museum only a few weeks before the end of a five-month visit to England in 1884 and 1885.³⁶ The Western Australian press hailed his visit as a resounding success and marker of the colony's economic progress.³⁷ During his visit Broome was knighted, and successfully lobbied the British government to invest heavily in public works in Western Australia. In other circumstances, however, the visit might have proved disastrous. In February 1885 Broome met Lord Derby, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, who noted that the new governor 'rather disappointed me, for I had heard well of him: he seemed awkward and embarrassed (I believe he was very shy)'.³⁸ Broome's nervousness was understandable, as he had been summoned to London to answer accusations of financial impropriety.³⁹ Despite this inauspicious start, Broome impressed Derby on 16 March when he read a paper at the Royal Colonial Institute before the Prince of Wales and other social elites.⁴⁰ The paper showcased Broome's newly acquired knowledge about Western Australia's people,

³⁴ Mary Anne Barker (Lady Broome), *Letters to Guy* (London: Macmillan, 1885), 23, 207.

³⁵ Most of Barker's personal correspondence was destroyed in World War II, and scholars have generally looked to her books for insights about her colonial experiences.

³⁶ 'Special Telegrams', *The Argus*, Monday 5 January 1885, 5; 'Our Anglo-Australian Letter', *The Express and Telegraph*, Saturday 23 May 1885, 2.

³⁷ 'Public Reception of Governor Broome', *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, Wednesday 24 June 1885, 3.

³⁸ Cited in Graeme Powell, 'A Diarist in the Cabinet: Lord Derby and the Australian Colonies 1882–1885', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 51:4 (2005), 481–95.

³⁹ Broome had apparently been summoned to London to discuss a controversial payment made to him during his time in Mauritius. Lord Derby ultimately ordered the Mauritanian Legislative Council to approve the transactions. 'Mauritius', *South Australian Register*, Monday 18 May 1885, 6.

⁴⁰ Powell, 487.

settlements, resources and industries.⁴¹ He referred to Aboriginal people at several points, emphasising those deemed to be living in a 'savage state' or those interacting with, or living in, institutions like Rottnest Prison and New Norcia Mission.

At the Royal Colonial Institute, Broome only briefly mentioned Aboriginal people working in settler industries. Despite this being a subject of international humanitarian concern, he framed the industries as offering economic profits for colonists and 'civilising' benefits for Aboriginal workers. He mentioned Aboriginal shepherds in the north, noting that 'natives ... take a larger share in civilised life and labour in Western Australia than in any other part of the continent'.⁴² When describing the pearling industry, now notorious for its exploitation of Aboriginal workers, Broome stressed that his government closely supervised the hiring and treatment of Aboriginal divers.⁴³ He admitted that: 'It is a rough calling, this pearl fishing, and there are rough men in it. But the divers are, as a rule, treated very kindly, and much improve their savage condition by engaging in the fishery'.⁴⁴ Writing to Derby, Broome called it 'good ... for them to be employed whether at shepherding or diving, and that they are nearly always treated in a kind, liberal, and friendly way by their masters I have not the slightest doubt'.⁴⁵ He admitted that they were not always treated well, partly blaming this on their own minds being difficult to read, and their natures changeable.⁴⁶ He also admitted that a few settlers behaved poorly, telling Derby that 'the rough dispositions' of some men in the pearling industry required the government to closely monitor the treatment of Aboriginal workers.⁴⁷ Yet although Broome attempted to portray pastoral and pearling enterprises positively when speaking at the Royal Colonial Institute, he seems to have felt more comfortable describing Aboriginal people beyond the reach of these industries. Seen in this light, the absence of objects made with pearl shell or 'European' products in Broome's donation to the British

⁴¹ Reproduced in 'Governor Broome's Lecture', *The Albany Mail and King George's Sound Advertiser*, Tuesday 5, 12, 19 and 26 May 1885, 3.

⁴² 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 5 May 1885, 3.

⁴³ On the mistreatment of workers in Western Australia's pearling industry, see Paterson and Veth.

⁴⁴ 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 26 May 1885, 3.

⁴⁵ Broome to the Earl of Derby, 25 October 1884, 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

Museum may not be coincidence, but a wish to avoid highlighting controversial industries.

Broome proclaimed in his paper that 'in the Kimberley district you may see, without journeying to the back country, the life of aboriginal Australian natives in all its simplicity and savagery'.⁴⁸ The farthest point of his recent tour of the north-west was Derby (in the Kimberley), which he visited in early October 1884. During this tour, the new governor was greeted with deputations, receptions and dinners in towns along the coast. He joined a kangaroo hunt and saw displays of weapon-throwing, later praising boomerang throwing in the Kimberley as 'the best ... I ever saw'.⁴⁹ Broome also had opportunities to acquire objects in more remote settings. In October he visited Yeeda and Liveringa pastoral stations, and along the banks of the Fitzroy River met people apparently living a 'traditional' lifestyle.⁵⁰ He tried communicating with one man who walked off into the river, despite the risk of crocodile attack and the presence of a nearby land crossing.⁵¹ Broome assumed that this action was 'native fearlessness and laziness', but was told that it may have been to ward off 'the unlucky influence' of meeting a white man.⁵² It might equally have been a pragmatic decision, born of experience, to cut short an interaction that had the potential to turn coercive.

During the mid-1880s, many Aboriginal weapons in the north-west were made without glass or metal. However, larger ethnographic collections from the period often include glass spear points or other items made with 'European' materials. Broome's collection contains none, although (like Edward Hardman) he travelled through areas where some makers had access to glass and metal. The collection includes no individual points, but three painted *wunda* (shields), a shield-form decorated with a distinctive grooved zigzag design.⁵³ These grooves, which deflect missiles and also possess cultural significance (zigzags are often linked to water), help to make

⁴⁸ Cited in 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 26 May 1885, 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁰ Cited in 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 26 May 1885, 3; 'Country News', *The West Australian*, Thursday 23 October 1884, 3.

⁵¹ 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 26 May 1885, 3.

⁵² Ibid, 3.

⁵³ Kim Akerman, 'The Wunda Shield of Western Australia', *Art Tribal. Annual Bulletin of the Barbier-Mueller Museum*, 2 (1992), 15–22.

the shield a time-consuming product to manufacture.⁵⁴ *Wunda* shields are rarely acquired by collectors in multiples.⁵⁵ They seem an odd inclusion, especially as points, none of which are in Broome's collection, were far more widely available. The presence of glass and metal potentially disrupted Broome's desire to portray Aboriginal people either as undergoing 'civilisation' at settler institutions or as 'uncivilised' and largely separate from settlers. It likely also reflects opportunist collecting, with Broome perhaps donating objects presented to him by Aboriginal people or settlers during his north-west tour.

Whilst the lack of metal or glass in Broome's donation suggests an interest in Aboriginal culture 'uncontaminated' by colonial contact, he did include a message stick (Figure 12) that depicted a European-style building and a ship.⁵⁶ In a letter written in March 1884, Barker described similar designs on message sticks, which she called 'the newspaper of the district'.⁵⁷ Both Barker and Broome demonstrated an interest in certain kinds of intercultural interactions. For example, Barker described Broome and other white men throwing *kylies* (boomerangs) at a 'kylie-tea' near Perth in 1884.⁵⁸ A native policeman also threw the *kylie* there, although not as well, according to Barker, as prisoners on Rottnest. She concluded that 'he was out of practice and too civilised, for he had been "tame" for many years'.⁵⁹ She also told Guy that many European objects were superseding Aboriginal ones:

The natives are now giving up making weapons or household utensils, for there are few places where they cannot procure English equivalents, which are of course ever so much more convenient⁶⁰

The couple were also interested in New Norcia's Aboriginal residents. Broome praised missionaries for moulding them into economically useful subjects who adopted forms of work and recreation associated with settlers:

⁵⁴ Ibid, 16–17.

⁵⁵ Broome was one of only three collectors to give multiple *wunda* shields to the British Museum. The others were Henry Christy (four, before 1865) and William Ingram (two, in 1903).

⁵⁶ BM, Oc,+2424.

⁵⁷ Barker, *Letters to Guy*, 181.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 215–17.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 216.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 182.

Australian natives not only sing in church or study in school, but are engaged, side by side with the monks, in agriculture and various industries, besides playing the violin and other instruments in the Mission band, and cricket in the mission eleven⁶¹

Broome stated that 'with infinite pains, labours, and expense, it [New Norcia] turns a number of the natives into Christian and civilised beings'.⁶² He singled out one individual who had become 'not only a good Christian but an expert telegraphist', probably referring to Mary (Maria) Ellen Cuper (1847–1877).⁶³ Despite this praise, Broome donated nothing linked to the mission to the British Museum. Perhaps he found objects connected to mission residents, now supposedly well on the way to becoming good colonial subjects, less culturally distinctive or interesting than those linked to the north-west's 'wild' Aboriginal peoples.

Barker and Broome's relative enthusiasm for describing or collecting Aboriginal products partly reflected their confidence in their position in Western Australia. Indigenous people, let alone objects, are markedly absent within Barker's two previous books on life in New Zealand, and Emma Ferry suggests that this was because she was writing during the country's Land Wars (1845–1872).⁶⁴ The prevalence of weapons in Broome's donation from Western Australia (twelve of fifteen items) seems to frame their makers as inherently antagonistic. Speaking at the Royal Colonial Institute, Broome echoed Alexander Collie in depicting Aboriginal people as prone to violence when not controlled by sensible colonists.⁶⁵ Yet he also drew sympathetic comparisons between Aboriginal spearings and the old European custom of duelling, calling most 'very different from a murder of the European type' and thus deserving of judicial leniency.⁶⁶

⁶¹ 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 26 May 1885, 3.

⁶² Ibid, 3.

⁶³ Ibid, 3. Tiffany Shellam, "'On My Ground': Indigenous Farmers at New Norcia 1860s–1900s', in *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism*, ed. Zoë Laidlaw and Alan Lester (London: Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015), 62–85 (p. 70).

⁶⁴ Ferry, 'Home and Away', 9.

⁶⁵ 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 26 May 1885, 3.

⁶⁶ 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 19 May 1885, 3.

Broome seems to have been more motivated to collect indigenous objects in northern Western Australia, than from elsewhere in the colony or the wider British empire. At the Royal Colonial Institute he emphasised settler institutions' ability to control and 'educate' Aboriginal people, but as far as we can tell he did not collect mission artefacts or items from Rottnest Prison. If he did acquire material from these places, he did not donate it to the British Museum; or at least he did not specify their origins. Instead, he gave objects from the 'extreme' north-west that, apart from the message stick, showed little obvious signs of intercultural contact. These choices reflect common ideas about 'authentic' Aboriginal material culture; they are also in keeping with Broome's general tendency to publicly downplay concerns about the negative impact of settler expansion into the north.

Travellers in the Western Desert: David Carnegie and Warri



Figure 13: Bark container taken by David Carnegie in the Western Desert

This long and lightweight container, made from sheets of paperbark, was owned by someone living in the Western Desert. Similar examples sometimes held restricted items, but this carried more 'everyday' contents when it was stolen in 1896: fourteen flint flakes, a bone nose-pin, four wooden pins, and three girdles. These small but valuable possessions were probably cushioned with soft material like bird down but, like the string that fastened the container, this is now lost.

Unidentified maker; stolen by David Carnegie in the Western Desert in September 1896.

BM, Oc1898,-.56 © Trustees of the British Museum

Governor Broome expressed some unease about the treatment of Aboriginal people in the north, but David Wynford Carnegie (1871–1900) had fewer qualms. Three years after Broome and Barker's departure from Western Australia, Carnegie arrived in the colony to join the 1892 Coolgardie goldrush. A younger son of the Earl of Southesk in Scotland, Carnegie's education in England was cut short when he clashed with school authorities. In 1892 he

went to work on a tea plantation in Ceylon, but disliked the lifestyle and soon left for the prospects of Western Australia.⁶⁷ Carnegie spent some years working as a miner, engine-driver and prospector around Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie and the wider Goldfields-Esperance region. After briefly visiting England in 1896, he returned to lead his ambitious self-funded expedition into Western Australia's inland deserts.⁶⁸ Carnegie hoped that this would find gold and a viable stock route between Coolgardie, in south-central Western Australia, and the Kimberley. His party included two white prospectors, Charles Stansmore and Godfrey Massey; a white pastoralist, Joseph Breaden; and Breaden's servant Warri, a young Aboriginal man (Figure 14).

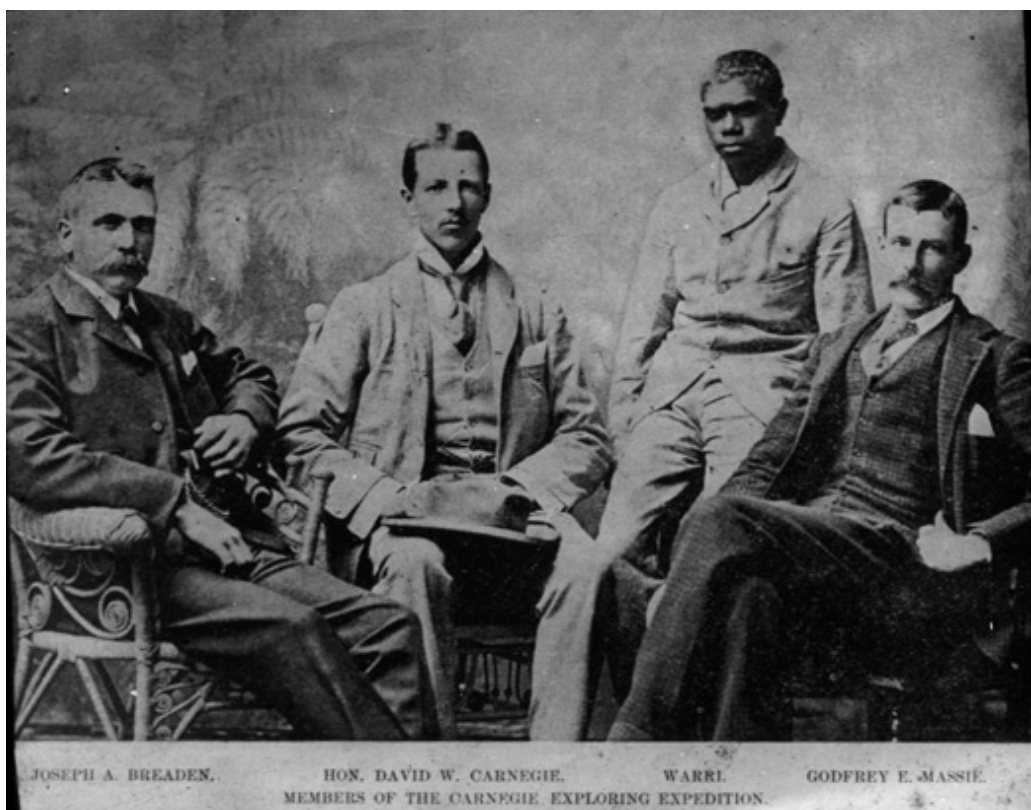


Figure 14: 'Members of the Carnegie Expedition'

Historical lantern slide showing Joseph Breaden, David Carnegie, Warri and Godfrey Massey. Unidentified photographer, image taken 1896 (presumably after Charles Stansmore's death in November 1896).

State Library of Western Australia, 003469D.

⁶⁷ David Wynford Carnegie, *Letters from Nigeria, 1899–1900*, with an introduction by Lady Helena M. Carnegie (Brechtin: Black & Johnston, 1902), viii.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv.

Warri was originally from the MacDonnell Ranges in the southern Northern Territory, and like Beaden was a recent newcomer to Western Australia.⁶⁹ From the age of six he was ‘trained’ as Breaden’s servant, ‘to ride and track and do the usual odd jobs required of black-boys on cattle stations’.⁷⁰ His name may be connected to the Luritja word for ‘cold’, although it is not clear who his family were or if he had much contact with them after Breaden became interested in him.⁷¹ Many colonial explorers in Australia and Africa took indigenous youths with them, ‘valuing them for their apparent tractability, which was a consequence of their vulnerability as “deracinated” individuals’.⁷² These young people, separated from their families, were at high risk of exploitation and abuse. Angelina Noble, a Queensland-born missionary who later worked at Forrest River Mission, was as a child kidnapped and enslaved by an itinerant horse dealer and forced to travel with him disguised as his ‘boy’.⁷³ We do not know what choices Warri had over joining or continuing with Carnegie’s expedition, but it is hard to envisage a scenario where he could have defied the other men without serious repercussions.

Leaving Coolgardie in July 1896, the party made an arduous journey through the Gibson Desert (in the central-eastern part of the colony) and Great Sandy Desert (which straddles the Pilbara and Kimberley). These places fall within the Western Desert cultural bloc, made up of Aboriginal peoples living across central Australia. After struggling to find water, Carnegie developed a strategy of kidnapping Aboriginal people and forcing them to reveal hidden wells and soaks. He was not publicly censured for this, although when the Canning Stock Route Expedition used similar methods a

⁶⁹ In early 1896 Breaden, then running a pastoral station in South Australia, accompanied an expedition party led by William Carr-Boyd to Western Australia. Warri probably worked on the station with Breaden and accompanied him. ‘Warrina Races’, *Evening Journal*, Friday 3 January 1896, 4.

⁷⁰ David Wynford Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand: A Narrative of Five Year’s Pioneering and Exploration in Western Australia* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1898), 149.

⁷¹ My thanks to Jason Gibson for suggesting this possibility.

⁷² Shino Konishi, ‘Intermediaries, Servants and Captives: Disentangling Indigenous Labour in D.W. Carnegie’s Exploration of the Western Australian Desert’, in *Labour Lines and Colonial Power: Indigenous and Pacific Islander Labour Mobility in Australia*, ed. Victoria Stead and Jon Altman (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), 27–56 (p. 38); Dane Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 164–92.

⁷³ Philip L. Freier, ‘Living with the *Munpitch*: The History of Mitchell River Mission, 1905–1967’ (PhD thesis, James Cook University, 1999), 131.

decade later it sparked a government inquiry.⁷⁴ Stansmore died in a shooting accident shortly before the team's arrival at Halls Creek (in the east Kimberley) in December. In March 1897 the four survivors headed back for Coolgardie, arriving there in August. Having travelled 3,000 miles together in thirteen months, they parted ways.

Carnegie's expedition found neither an exploitable stock route nor gold, but contemporaries were impressed by his skills as an explorer and he was awarded the Royal Geographical Society's Gill medal in 1897. Carnegie lectured in Britain on his expedition; wrote several articles and a book, *Spinifex and Sand* (1898); and tried, unsuccessfully, to get the British Foreign Office's sanction to lead an expedition in East Africa.⁷⁵ Although tempted to become a special war correspondent in South Africa for *The Times*, he ultimately accepted a commission to the Colonial Service in November 1899.⁷⁶ Posted to the newly established British protectorate of Northern Nigeria as an assistant resident, he struggled to adjust to life as a government official. His sister Helena wrote that 'impatience of control, an almost exaggerated dislike of conventionalism in any form, and, above all, of unnecessary detail, were the defects of his strongly marked qualities of self-reliance and independence'.⁷⁷ He died a year later, pierced by a poisoned arrow during an attempt to capture a local chief. Colleagues told his bereaved family that Carnegie had been popular with colonists and local Nigerians, but some implied that he had recklessly pursued the fatal confrontation.⁷⁸

Carnegie collected a range of Aboriginal material during his 1896–1897 expedition (see Appendix Four). He sometimes exchanged, 'found' or stole items, and once received some that he interpreted as gifts given in gratitude for having provided medical treatment to a child.⁷⁹ Later anthropologists saw peoples of the Western Desert as offering 'a privileged window into the pre-

⁷⁴ The Royal Commission to Enquire into the Treatment of Aboriginal Natives by the Canning Exploration Party (1908) investigated the expedition party's treatment of Aboriginal people, including allegations of chaining Aboriginal people, feeding them salt, taking belongings and spoiling wells. 'The Canning Enquiry: Royal Commission's Report', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, Saturday 22 February 1908, 8.

⁷⁵ William J. Peasley, *In the Hands of Providence: The Desert Journeys of David Carnegie* (Perth: St George Books, 1995), 191–93.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 193–94.

⁷⁷ Carnegie, *Letters from Nigeria*, vi.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 197, 200–204.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 227, 243, 373, 421.

contact Aboriginal world' due to their relatively limited direct contact with settlers, and Carnegie also saw their belongings as of scholarly interest.⁸⁰ In 1898 he told Charles Hercules Read of the British Museum that:

I shall be very glad indeed to have a talk with you over the strange implements & curiosities of the W.A. natives ... I will bring with me one or two articles which I shall be proud to give to your Museum.⁸¹

After they met, Carnegie told Read that he would send him a 'native "portmanteau" ... from the centre of the W.A. desert' (Figure 13) and other items from desert camps.⁸² Carnegie ultimately donated twenty-nine objects to the museum. The 'portmanteau' and its contents are lightweight and easily portable, reflecting the practical restrictions on Carnegie's collecting. He had to leave some bulky and heavy objects in the desert, but still managed to bring a range of items to Britain.⁸³ In 1898 he exhibited a large collection 'of ethnological interest' from Australia at the Anthropological Institute in London; and he also gave a carved ceremonial board from the Western Desert to Australian politician John Forrest.⁸⁴ Carnegie also acquired several Polynesian clubs, although it is not clear if he visited Polynesia himself, and he continued collecting in Nigeria.⁸⁵ The only extant Nigerian object linked to him, however, is the arrow that killed him, which was passed to his family.⁸⁶ As I will discuss, such material reflects the ways in which Carnegie took advantage of, and sometimes struggled with, colonial power dynamics.

In his 1898 book *Spinifex and Sand*, Carnegie tried to frame his contact with Aboriginal people in ways that eased readers' potential concerns about the morality of his actions. The published work significantly revised some entries in his earlier diaries. In October 1896 his diary recorded a captive's escape from the party's campsite at Helena Spring in the Gibson Desert. The

⁸⁰ Paul Burke, *Law's Anthropology: From Ethnography to Expert Testimony in Native Title* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2011), 176.

⁸¹ David Wynford Carnegie to Charles Hercules Read, 10 March 1898. Correspondence file, BM AOA.

⁸² David Wynford Carnegie to Charles Hercules Read, 13 May 1898, Correspondence file, BM AOA.

⁸³ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 349.

⁸⁴ *The Athenaeum*, Saturday 26 March 1898, 410. The whereabouts of this material is not known. Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 349.

⁸⁵ Office of the Duke of Fife (personal communication, 9 August 2018).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

man, who he nicknamed 'Sir John' (a comic reference to politician John Forrest), was shackled with a metal leg-chain but escaped with it still attached. Carnegie confided:

how he will remove it from his ankle I have no idea – he tried to burn tho' the chain one night but found it rather painful – Poor old buck! it will be a most uncomfortable anklet but he should have waited.⁸⁷

In the published book, however, he significantly downplayed the chain's impact:

doubtless that chain, which he could easily break on a stone with an iron tomahawk, will be treasured for many years to come. Had he not been in such a hurry he would have returned to his family laden with presents, for we had set aside several articles designed for him.⁸⁸

This revision was presumably intended to allay uneasiness that the man had been left materially worse-off by his capture. Carnegie doubtless thought readers would not dwell too much on an earlier revelation that Massie had 'taken' the man's metal 'tomahawk' when the party first attacked him.⁸⁹ 'Sir John' made a daring daytime escape, creeping away when the party's attention was focused elsewhere, so would not have had time to search for his weapons. After being held captive for over a week he must have been desperate to get away, and Carnegie noted how the man had cried after an unsuccessful escape attempt some days previously.⁹⁰ Due to the escape, Carnegie could not bestow gifts upon 'Sir John', a performance through which he could retrospectively reframe their relationship as one of leader-informant rather than captor-captive. Carnegie often suggested that it was in Aboriginal peoples' own interests to submit to his demands: 'Sir John' had provided valuable information, albeit unwillingly, and was thus entitled to recompense. In depicting the chain as an exchanged treasure, Carnegie suggested that the man had, despite himself, benefited. On another occasion Carnegie used a

⁸⁷ David Wynford Carnegie, *Diaries, 1894–1897* [manuscript], 4 vols., State Library of Western Australia (ACC 2693A), III, 53. Carnegie often applied the pejorative term 'buck' to Aboriginal men.

⁸⁸ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 273.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁹⁰ Carnegie, *Diaries*, III, 52.

light chain as a trade good, attaching it to part of an old meat-tin (which he stamped with his initial and the date) and hanging it around the neck of 'a good-looking' young woman.⁹¹

In a similar manner, Carnegie presented his theft of the bark container now in the British Museum by claiming to have left objects for its owners that overcompensated their loss. One September morning in 1896 the party had ridden towards smoke coming from a campfire, hoping to find someone to kidnap. The intended victims escaped, but Carnegie was struck by their scattered possessions, including what he called 'native "portmanteaus"':

Of several that were in this camp I took two – my curiosity and desire to further knowledge of human beings, so unknown and so interesting, overcame my honesty, and since the owners had retired so rudely I could not barter with them. Without doubt the meat-tins and odds and ends that we left behind us have more than repaid them.⁹²

Carnegie portrayed this incident as a justifiable response to encountering unfamiliar cultures and an exchange that benefited both parties, even if one side did not consent. Through giving one 'portmanteau' to the British Museum (which he made a point of mentioning in *Spinifex and Sand*), Carnegie developed an intellectual justification for taking them. By resisting kidnap, in his view, their owners had relinquished their right to protest his actions. When a woman showed Carnegie another camp containing similar items, he wrote:

As the gin had shown us the well without demur, I left all these untouched. It was a struggle between honesty and curiosity; but it seemed too mean to take things, however interesting, when they had been left so confidently unprotected.⁹³

He added: 'I had no hesitation, though, in taking the gin with us, in spite of her unwillingness'.⁹⁴ Carnegie was in the desert as a private citizen, with no official authority to kidnap or to steal, but neither his publisher, contemporary

⁹¹ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 243. 'Gin' is a derogatory term for an Aboriginal woman or girl.

⁹² Ibid, 227.

⁹³ Ibid, 397.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 397.

readers or the Western Australian authorities seem to have questioned his actions. As he portrayed it, desert hardships meant that Aboriginal resistance in any form (including running away) was a threat to explorers' lives. This view was shared by members of the 1908 inquiry that exonerated members of the Canning Stock Route Expedition for chaining and mistreating Aboriginal people, on the basis that this had ensured the party's survival.⁹⁵ Seizing people and objects was thus framed as a legitimate response: conventional British standards of morality applied in such environments only at his discretion. Later writers, including Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson (see Chapter Seven), continued to develop the idea that British moral conventions could not survive in the Australian desert.⁹⁶

Carnegie continued to be interested in collecting in 1900 whilst in Nigeria, but found fewer opportunities there to acquire objects in such high-handed ways. He failed to persuade the owner of a tunic associated with 'Juju' to sell it:

Some of the Yorubas wear 'Jujus,' and one I saw was a splendid specimen of human credulity. ... This garment cost the owner £2, but I could not get him to part with it at any price.⁹⁷

Compared to the Western Australian desert, the Nigerian colonial regime and its relationship with local power structures placed some limits upon Carnegie's ability to use casual violence against indigenous peoples. His sense of authority threatened, Carnegie expressed an intense dislike of 'civilised' black men from other West African colonies who were working in Nigeria:

There is something about these 'whitemanised' niggers that makes my gorge rise. Nasty cheeky brutes, though as a rule quite cute enough not

⁹⁵ 'The Canning Enquiry', 8.

⁹⁶ Roslynn D. Haynes, "'Some Mystical Affinity': E.L. Grant Watson and the Australian Desert", in *Land and Identity: Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference*, ed. Jennifer McDonnell and Michael Deves (Armidale: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1997), 168–73.

⁹⁷ Carnegie, *Letters from Nigeria*, 37. 'Juju' is a misleading and pejorative term applied to aspects of African Traditional Religion. Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, 'African Traditional Religion in a Globalizing World', *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*, 1:8 (2014), 4–12 (p. 9).

to show any cheek that one can get hold of, it's just the manner. They don't like Nigeria a bit ... here they are kept in their place, and I trust always will be.⁹⁸

In 1900 he attacked a clerk from Sierra Leone for 'an insolent stare', jovially telling his sister that the victim threatened to prosecute him before realising that Carnegie was in fact the local magistrate.⁹⁹ For Carnegie, productive inter-cultural relationships relied upon mutual recognition of white supremacy. When he felt secure in his racial status, he could be 'friendly':

I seldom strike a black man, because I have always been able so far to make them do what I want peacefully ... but I am convinced that the only argument which appeals to a Lokoja man is a sound 'hammering' ... plant a wholesome dread in his bosom and he will be your slave for evermore.¹⁰⁰

This enthusiasm for the selective deployment of violence echoes with his comments about Aboriginal workers in Western Australia:

the most useful, contented, and best-behaved boys that I have seen are those that receive treatment similar to that a highly valued sporting dog gets from a just master...¹⁰¹

Carnegie described Warri in dog-like terms, calling him 'most useful as a retriever of any wounded pigeon ... Warri, I am sure, would have been invaluable to Sherlock Holmes'.¹⁰² He was alluding to Toby the dog, 'a queer mongrel, with a most amazing power of scent', who assisted the fictional detective in *The Sign of the Four*.¹⁰³ Carnegie originally planned to hire an Aboriginal ex-prisoner from Rottne Island to accompany the expedition, but worried that prison was 'apt to develop all their native cunning and treachery'.¹⁰⁴ He was therefore pleased when Breaden, a pastoralist born in central Australia, brought with him Warri, 'a fine, smart-looking lad of about

⁹⁸ Carnegie, *Letters from Nigeria*, 44.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 44–45.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 123. Lokoja was the capital of the British Northern Nigeria Protectorate.

¹⁰¹ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 154.

¹⁰² Ibid, 274.

¹⁰³ A. Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (London: Spencer Blackett, 1890), 109.

¹⁰⁴ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 149.

sixteen years'.¹⁰⁵ Carnegie sometimes acknowledged Warri's skills and loyalty, naming one site 'Warri Well' in recognition of his contribution.¹⁰⁶ He also included Warri in a studio portrait photograph of the team (Figure 14). This was in keeping with other Australian expedition parties during the later nineteenth century, which were now giving comparatively greater publicity to lower-class or non-white members.¹⁰⁷ Depicting Warri's presence also had reputational benefits for Carnegie: as Chapter Three demonstrated, colonisers could present themselves to white readers as benevolent authority figures by emphasising their positive relationships with some colonised peoples. Whilst granting that Warri had useful qualities, Carnegie placed him firmly at the bottom of the party hierarchy.

Carnegie's fury at 'civilised' black men in Nigeria had parallels with his expressions of dislike for and disgust of older Aboriginal women. Like many European commentators, Carnegie consistently depicted them as ugly and repulsive.¹⁰⁸ He sometimes portrayed them as merely ridiculous, provided they did not overtly resist him.¹⁰⁹ On several occasions he felt that older women were defying him, although he supposedly balked at abusing them to the same extent as male captives.¹¹⁰ He was particularly put out by one senior woman who his party kidnapped on 11 September 1896. She scratched, bit and spat at them; refused to eat, drink, walk or communicate meaningfully; and, whether from terror, confusion or defiance, soiled Warri's blankets.¹¹¹ The next day a sour Carnegie freed her because she continued to refuse to lead them to water and 'I feared she would die on our hands'.¹¹² We only know about this episode as Carnegie described it. However, it hints at one woman's ability to assert her agency during what must have been a very frightening experience. The defeated Carnegie speculated, rather hopefully, that her family might soon kill her.¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 149.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 215–16.

¹⁰⁷ Kennedy, 78.

¹⁰⁸ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 231, 239, 370, 393; Liz Conor, *Skin Deep: Settler Impressions of Aboriginal Woman* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2016), 326–64.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 239–40, 394.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 231–35, 394.

¹¹¹ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 231–35. Again pointing to Warri's low status in the party, it is surely no coincidence that the party wrapped the woman in his blankets, rather than those of the white men.

¹¹² Ibid, 235.

¹¹³ Carnegie, *Diaries*, III, 39–40.

Carnegie euphemistically alluded to using 'rough treatment' with the elder, immediately justifying this as necessary to his party's survival.¹¹⁴ 'Rough treatment' presumably alluded to physical violence; indeed, we know from other incidents that Carnegie was not slow to use violence against indigenous men. Euphemisms abound in his published account of the episode, where we find the party 'carry[ing]', 'securing', 'making her as comfortable as possible', and 'looking after her'.¹¹⁵ In his diaries we find other terms: 'rop[ing]' and 'extract[ing]'.¹¹⁶ The impulse to edit actions contravening social conventions about how 'civilised' men should treat women was apparently strong.¹¹⁷ Carnegie was more comfortable in alluding to violence against Aboriginal men, describing violence against women more obliquely. Indeed, the published and private accounts of this episode raise questions about the extent to which we can trust any of his diary entries, let alone the version of events told in *Spinifex and Sand*. There are limits to what people may be prepared to admit, perhaps even to themselves. In another episode Carnegie claimed that he and the other white men had freed a young woman because Warri 'was inclined to fall a victim to her charms'.¹¹⁸ In all these episodes, at least some degree of obfuscation and projection is probable.

Carnegie's reactions to colonial subjects hinged upon whether he believed they were resisting him. His portrayals of non-white peoples were rooted in racist ideology, but he sometimes allowed that specific individuals or groups possessed *some* positive qualities. These frequently patronising portrayals generally involved people whom he felt had showed him 'respect'. In Nigeria they included his servant Joseph Fagbile, who 'shapes well in spite of his Bible and Prayer Book'; and the 'most friendly and obliging' Abelude, King of Saro.¹¹⁹ His hatred of 'civilised' black men like the unfortunate clerk from Sierra Leone was linked to whether they explicitly acknowledged his power over them. Carnegie's obsession with the submission of colonised peoples is further suggested by his interest in a military badge that he sent to Helena in September 1900. It purportedly came from 'the coat or shirt of one of Rabbi's soldiers', presumably referring to Rābiḥ az-Zubayr, a Sudanese

¹¹⁴ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 232.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 231–35.

¹¹⁶ Carnegie, *Diaries*, III, 39.

¹¹⁷ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 231.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 407.

¹¹⁹ Carnegie, *Letters from Nigeria*, 35, 76.

warlord based in north-eastern Nigeria who had died in battle earlier that year.¹²⁰ Carnegie, who was not at that battle, perhaps valued the badge for its association with colonial victory.

In *Spinifex and Sand* Carnegie deliberately retold acquiring (and, as with the leg-chain, losing) objects in the desert in ways that portrayed him as an honourable pioneer battling a hostile environment. When discussing his motivations for the Western Australian expedition, he said:

The prospector in his humble way slowly but surely opens up the country He toils and labours, suffers, and does heroic deeds, all unknown except to the few.¹²¹

As a colonial official in Nigeria, Carnegie could not replicate some of the same collecting methods that he had used as an independent traveller in the Australian desert. He met with indigenous resistance throughout his career, right up to when an unknown Nigerian fatally shot him. Yet Carnegie's comparatively greater freedom to use violence in Western Australia meant that he could collect items without needing to establish positive relationships, even if he tried to frame these as transactions that mutually benefited Aboriginal people and himself.

Reading against the grain of Carnegie's expedition accounts, the glimpses we get of Warri show that moving across different colonised regions potentially caused significant personal strain. Warri's attitude towards people of the Kimberley and their material culture was ambivalent and is hard to interpret. He once actively brought some 'strange carved planks' he found 'hidden away in the bushes' to his companions' attention.¹²² He provided information about some other objects, telling Carnegie that he had seen some 'red beans' found in the desert (likely ininti seeds) back home in the MacDonnell Ranges.¹²³ When Carnegie found two unusual sandals made of strips of bark, Warri also remarked that 'Black-fella wear 'em 'long hot

¹²⁰ Ibid, 186.

¹²¹ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 144.

¹²² Ibid, 198.

¹²³ Ibid, 395.

sand'.¹²⁴ This was probably correct: other sources indicate that such footwear protected feet from sharp stones and hot sand.¹²⁵ Carnegie, presumably hoping for a more sensational backstory, downplayed Warri's knowledge and concluded that their use 'is not so far known'.¹²⁶ In *Spinifex and Sand* he then wrote about 'kurdaitcha' shoes, drawing an implicit link between these and the bark sandals. 'Kurdaitcha' shoes were made with emu feathers and human hair or animal fur, and according to colonial and anthropological texts they were used to undertake revenge killings.¹²⁷ Carnegie questioned Warri about kurdaitcha shoes but was disappointed: 'he gave the usual answer, "I dunno," and then added, probably to please me, as I had suggested the explanation, "Black-fella no more see 'em track, I think"'.¹²⁸ This was not the only topic about which Warri claimed ignorance.

Carnegie seems to have distrusted some of Warri's answers, for the young man was presumably one of those who frustrated Carnegie's enquiries about some restricted objects:

no tame boy (i.e., native who can speak English) will divulge their mysterious meaning. I have repeatedly asked about them, but have never succeeded in getting any answer beyond 'I dunno, gin (or lubra) no more see 'em; gin see 'em, she tumble down quick fella'.¹²⁹

Carnegie's words ('will') imply that he thought they were withholding information. Similar restricted objects were used around Warri's own Country and he probably had some basic knowledge about them, even if it was only that he should not discuss them with men like Carnegie. However, Warri's specific knowledge was potentially limited because he had worked for Breaden since the age of six, and Breaden spent many years living at stations

¹²⁴ Ibid, 236.

¹²⁵ Kim Akerman, 'Shoes of Invisibility and Invisible Shoes: Australian Hunters and Gatherers and Ideas on the Origins of Footwear', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2 (2005), 55–64 (61); Donald F. Thomson, 'A Bark Sandal from the Desert of Central Western Australia', *Man*, 60 (1960), 177–79.

¹²⁶ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 235.

¹²⁷ Akerman, 'Shoes of Invisibility', 59.

¹²⁸ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 236.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 347. Although 'gin' and 'lubra' are derogatory terms for Aboriginal women, Aboriginal speakers at the time would not necessarily have been using them in a derogatory sense.

away from the MacDonnell Ranges.¹³⁰ If Warri accompanied Breaden all this time then he may not have undergone a ceremonial initiation into adulthood, a time when new knowledge is shared with initiates. Although Warri seemed reluctant to discuss some restricted objects, he nonetheless actively brought the 'strange carved planks' to the party's attention. It is possible that Warri did not realise their special significance or that it went against law to discuss objects not from his area, group or totem.

According to Carnegie's account, Warri seems to have felt little in common with Aboriginal adults living 'traditional' lifestyles in Western Australia. At Halls Creek he met and learnt new songs from pastoral workers originating from other parts of Australia, but in the desert he seemed wary of attack.¹³¹ Carnegie thought that Warri 'stood in some awe of the Kimberley natives; "Sulky fella," he called them'.¹³² He was more comfortable dealing with two children whom the group had not (for once) forcibly kidnapped, as Carnegie reported that they became 'tremendous chums'.¹³³ Warri's discomfort with adult men may indicate that he had not yet been initiated into manhood. He could also have heard frightening stories about Aboriginal men of the northwest. Tiffany Shellam has studied Wajuk Noongar man Migeo's visit to the north in 1837 as part of a colonial expedition. Migeo's 'fear of the Waylo [a generic Noongar term for their northern neighbours] was deeply embedded in his psyche', she argues, and so for him 'the north-west was not the "opposite coast" to Sydney as it was for some explorers, but held its own, significant oppositional challenges to his southern Country'.¹³⁴ Warri is more likely than his white compatriots to have recognised and been disturbed by their transgressions upon other peoples' Country. His thoughts about the journey remain hard to understand: Carnegie once described him merrily hunting captives, 'as if we were going through all this trouble for pleasure', and he may have enjoyed some opportunities to travel, ride and chase.¹³⁵ Yet Carnegie once also 'chastised' Warri because he suspected that the latter had deliberately allowed a kidnapped boy to escape.¹³⁶ Little is known of Warri's later life, but he does not appear to have joined any more expeditions.

¹³⁰ 'Obituary', *Chronicle*, Saturday 22 March 1924, 19.

¹³¹ *Spinifex and Sand*, 333–34.

¹³² *Ibid*, 372.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 298.

¹³⁴ Shellam, *Meeting the Waylo*, 22, 26,

¹³⁵ *Spinifex and Sand*, 231.

¹³⁶ Carnegie, *Diaries*, III, 64.

At some point after Carnegie's expedition ended in 1897 Warri left Breaden, and by 1922 was reportedly living at the central Australian town of Alice Springs, presumably closer to his family.¹³⁷ Warri's apparent desire to avoid joining other expeditions could be linked to the privations of the Carnegie expedition (and the Carr-Boyd expedition earlier in 1896, which he probably accompanied Breaden on); its discomfiting encounters with Aboriginal people; and Stansmore's sudden death, an event that initially left the distressed Warri 'hardly able to speak'.¹³⁸

Warri did not generally act as an intermediary or cultural broker. Even without the party's frequent resort to violence he presumably found it sometimes stressful to meet people, including senior men, on unfamiliar territory and speaking unfamiliar languages. He also had to maintain his position amongst a group of armed and violent white men who nonetheless offered him comradeship and physical security. In April 1897 the party was briefly joined by 'Tiger', a 'Sturt Creek boy' who knew their host Mr. Stretch at Denison Downs Homestead.¹³⁹ 'Tiger' and Warri became 'great friends', but 'the new boy's presence put Warri on his mettle'.¹⁴⁰ What we know of Warri suggests a very different experience of traversing borders compared to the white travellers considered in this chapter. Unlike him, they occupied privileged places within local settler power structures and demonstrated little consciousness of crossing Aboriginal territorial boundaries. We have not heard Warri's own story, only Carnegie's highly selective interpretation of his words and actions in *Spinifex and Sand*. Despite this great absence, scratching beneath the surface of Carnegie's account reveals that Warri's experience of crossing borders was more complex and uneasy than Carnegie understood. Alongside 'Sir John's' ingenious escape and the senior woman's sustained defiance, Warri's experiences hint at how Aboriginal people might find ways to resist white men and their projects.

¹³⁷ 'The Big Spaces', *Observer*, Saturday 17 June 1922, 37.

¹³⁸ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 311.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 389.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 389, 399.

A bishop's picture of the north-west: Gerard Trower



Figure 15: Glass point acquired by Gerard Trower from 'Forrest River'

Kimberley points are closely associated with makers in northern Western Australia. Some are hafted to spear-shafts, which led one European to call this glass one, acquired near the Forrest River, a 'lance head'. This item actually seems to be a knife, for it possesses a resin handle that fits comfortably into the hand. Some Kimberley points were used as knives for a range of ritual or secular purposes. Others were not hafted at all, with the point alone apparently the intended final product. This delicately shaped point is in excellent condition, so was presumably used very carefully if at all.

Glass point with handle of unidentified resin, possibly spinifex. Unidentified maker; collected by 'the bishop of N. W. Australia'; donated by William Coleman Piercy in 1935. Photograph by the author.

PRM, 1939.3.210. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Nearly forty years after Carnegie's expedition, a very different collection arrived at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. William Coleman Piercy (1868–1938) bequeathed the museum a wide-ranging ethnographic collection of 243 objects before his death in 1938. Most (232 items) came from Nyasaland (now in Malawi), where he had been an Anglican missionary, and a few from Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Algeria, Morocco, India, Mexico, Trinidad and Britain.¹⁴¹ Piercy is not known to have visited Australia, however his bequest included a glass case holding nine items that he said were given to him 'by the Bishop of N.W. Australia, to illustrate the various aspects of his diocese'

¹⁴¹ William Coleman Piercy, 'Chinyansa specimens, Nyassaland (KOTAKOTA) and Specimens from other regions'. Related Documents File, PRM.

(see Appendix Four).¹⁴² Whilst small in number, these items help to illuminate one Anglican official's priorities and concerns regarding settlers and Aboriginal people in the north-west.

The bishop in question was almost certainly Gerard Trower (1860–1928), an English cleric who worked in England, New South Wales and Nyasaland before arriving in Western Australia.¹⁴³ Piercy and Trower were connected through the Universities Mission to Central Africa. Both men had joined the missionary society in 1902 and worked in Nyasaland; Piercy withdrew in 1906, whilst Trower continued as Bishop of Likoma until 1909.¹⁴⁴ In 1910 Trower became the first Anglican Bishop of North-West Australia, a challenging new diocese covering half a million square miles.¹⁴⁵ Anglican missionary activity in the region was very limited, so alongside his other duties Trower was told to establish an Aboriginal mission.¹⁴⁶ His ambitions focused on the Forrest River in the Kimberley, where a short-lived Anglican mission had been abandoned in 1897. In 1913 Trower re-established the mission, a physically and emotionally demanding venture, not least when he witnessed a colleague accidentally drown and had to drag the corpse back to shore alone.¹⁴⁷ Over the next fourteen years Trower was based in Broome, but he visited Forrest River Mission several times and praised its work. Yet aside from his missionary enthusiasm, Trower was 'seldom happy in the North-West'.¹⁴⁸ In 1927 he resigned and returned to England, dying there the next year.

The Pitt Rivers Museum still holds Piercy's collection from Western Australia in what is likely to be the original glass case that Piercy bequeathed

¹⁴² The points are catalogued as PRM, 1939.3.208–15; the pearl shell knife and asbestos block do not have a catalogue number. William Coleman Piercy, 'Notes by W.C.P.' Related Documents File, PRM.

¹⁴³ John Frewer (1883–1974), the second Bishop of North West Australia from 1929–65, is not known to have had a strong connection with Piercy or central Africa.

¹⁴⁴ A.E.M. Anderson-Morshead, *The History of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa 1859-1909* (London: Office of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1909), 438.

¹⁴⁵ 'A Pioneer Bishop', *The Advertiser*, Monday 29 September 1913, 17.

¹⁴⁶ 'A Pastoral Letter from the Archbishops and Bishops to the Church of England in the Commonwealth of Australia', *The Bush Brother: A Quarterly Paper*, 7:2 (January 1911), 112–17.

¹⁴⁷ 'The Romance of an Aboriginal Mission', in *The Bush Brother: A Quarterly Paper*, 17:2 (January 1921), 137–41 (p. 139).

¹⁴⁸ E.W. Doncaster, 'Trower, Gerard (1860–1928)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, 1990), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/trower-gerard-8857/text15547>> [accessed 4 March 2019].

them in. This case contained seven 'lance heads' (three glass and four stone points), an ornamental pearl shell knife of European style, and a polished block of asbestos (Figure 16).¹⁴⁹ Piercy said that they represented different activities: 'Pearl-fishing (Perth), Mining (Marbel Bar re [sic]) and aboriginal work (Forrest River)'.¹⁵⁰ The items complement each other visually. The green asbestos is crossed with bands of pale fibrous crystals, forming a counterpart to the pearl shell knife's iridescent surface and the points' green and clear glass. When Trower arrived in Western Australia, asbestos finds around Marble Bar in the Pilbara were attracting interest.¹⁵¹ Years later, he noted that the north contained 'the finest asbestos in the world'.¹⁵² Trower rightly recognised its importance: asbestos was used widely in industry for much of the twentieth century. Although it 'once symbolized the properties of a new modernist era', today the substance is better associated with the severe diseases caused by exposure.¹⁵³ The pearl shell knife might have been acquired in Perth, but the pearling industry itself centred around the north. It was probably not made by an Aboriginal person, although pearl shell was highly valued amongst Aboriginal, Asian and European peoples.¹⁵⁴ Trower was not alone in his excitement for the 'practically inexhaustible pearl oyster beds' of the north.¹⁵⁵ The bishop also believed that Aboriginal people in the north-west 'would develop into a useful people if they were allowed to thrive on their own territories unmolested'.¹⁵⁶ In his view missionary work did not count as negative interference, and the stone and glass points were probably collected on or near to Forrest River Mission. Some show traces of use, including chipped tips, suggesting that they were once used functionally. Collectively, Trower's gift to Piercy spoke to the raw economic and spiritual potential of the north.

¹⁴⁹ Piercy, 'Chinyansa specimens ...'; Piercy, 'Notes by W.C.P.'.

¹⁵⁰ Piercy, 'Notes by W.C.P.'.

¹⁵¹ 'North-West Prospects', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, Tuesday 18 May 1909, 13; 'Asbestos', *The Daily News*, Wednesday 16 February 1910, 3.

¹⁵² 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, Friday 28 August 1925, 10.

¹⁵³ Linda Waldman, *The Politics of Asbestos: Understandings of Risk, Disease and Protest* (London and Washington, DC: Earthscan, 2011), 2. The dangers of asbestos exposure only started to be widely publicised in the 1970s, so Trower would not have known about its toxicity.

¹⁵⁴ Kim Akerman and John Stanton, *Riji and Jakuli: Kimberley Pearl Shell in Aboriginal Australia* (Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1994), 58.

¹⁵⁵ 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, Friday 28 August 1925, 10.

¹⁵⁶ 'A Bishop on Politics', *The West Australian*, Monday 2 May 1927, 7.



Figure 16: Asbestos block linked to Marble Bar, pearl shell knife linked to Perth and stone and glass points linked to Forrest River.

Unidentified makers; collected by 'the bishop of N. W. Australia'; donated by William Coleman Piercy in 1935. Photograph by the author.

PRM, 1939.3.208-215. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

In 1925 Trower ordained James Noble, a missionary worker from North Queensland (and husband of the aforementioned Angelina Noble), as the first Aboriginal deacon in the Anglican Church. He told Noble that 'we aim at saving the remnant of your race still scattered over the northern part of Australia, and where uncontaminated by evil men, still virile'.¹⁵⁷ Several of Trower's clerical contemporaries shared the idea that Aboriginal peoples of the north were superior, more 'authentic' and filled with more potential than those of the south.¹⁵⁸ Yet although Trower was a strong proponent of missionary work, his efforts met settler resistance. He over-estimated how much Kimberley pastoralists would support missionary endeavours targeting Aboriginal people, and throughout its existence Forrest River Mission was 'the most [financially] impoverished Christian mission in Australia'.¹⁵⁹

In late 1913 Trower invited Ernest Gribble (1868–1957) to lead his new mission. Gribble was the son of John Gribble, whose allegations had caused Frederick Broome such problems in the 1880s. Ernest had previously worked

¹⁵⁷ Neville Green, *Triumphs and Tragedies: Oombulgurri an Australian Aboriginal Community* (Carlisle: Hesperion Press, 2011), 51.

¹⁵⁸ 'Bishop Riley in Sydney', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, Tuesday 1 January 1907, 27.

¹⁵⁹ Green, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 6, 35.

at a short-lived mission by the Gascoyne River, then in Queensland at Yarrabah Aboriginal Mission. In 1910 he resigned from Yarrabah, after suffering a breakdown potentially linked to torment concerning his own hypocrisy: vocally opposed to interracial sexual relationships, he had an extra-marital affair with an Aboriginal mission worker (and former child inmate) who gave birth to their daughter in 1908.¹⁶⁰ Christine Halse argues that he 'had little regard for Aboriginal culture' and limited knowledge of local cultures and languages, sitting rather at odds with Trower's desire for missionaries to develop a deep knowledge of indigenous beliefs and lifestyles.¹⁶¹ Gribble saw Aboriginal people as a 'degraded and depraved race', and supported their segregation from white society.¹⁶² At Forrest River he placed strict controls over Aboriginal people, with most baptised converts 'encouraged, and later compelled' to live in a fenced compound.¹⁶³ Children were separated from their families, living in dormitories away from (he hoped) traditional languages, beliefs and customs. Many dormitory children were from local families; others had been forcibly relocated from other places under the *Aborigines Act* 1905 (WA).¹⁶⁴ Cleric and anthropologist A.P. Elkin visited Forrest River in 1928 and was dismayed at the authoritarian regime, condemning Gribble as a 'conceited, uncouth tyrant'.¹⁶⁵

Many Aboriginal people living at and near the mission continued practising aspects of their culture despite Gribble's disapproval. Some tensions arose over competition for scarce resources. An Aboriginal man called Jinamie once emptied a container of petrol 'as he wanted the [metal] drum', obliging Gribble and other men to pull the mission's boat fifty miles to Wyndham in order to resupply.¹⁶⁶ Other tensions resulted from religious and cultural differences. In 1927 Gribble deposed some of his most trusted

¹⁶⁰ Christine Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man: A Biography of the Rev Ernest Gribble* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2002), 82–87.

¹⁶¹ Christine Halse, 'Autobiography and Identity: Will the Real Rev. Gribble Please Stand Up?', in *Proceedings of the 1st International Australian Conference in Religion, Literature and the Arts 1994*, ed. Michael Griffith and Ross Keating (Sydney: RLA Project, 1994), 153–62 (p. 156); 'The North-West Bishopric', *Western Mail*, Saturday 25 June 1910, 5.

¹⁶² E.R. Gribble, *The Problem of the Australian Aborigines* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1932), 89; Halse, 'Autobiography and Identity', 156.

¹⁶³ Green, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 12.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶⁵ Cited in Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man*, 158.

¹⁶⁶ E.R. Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1930), 186. Glass appears to have been more widely available at the mission.

converts because they had recently participated in circumcision rites.¹⁶⁷ Communication between missionaries and adult 'converts' was challenging, as the white missionaries could not (and sometimes deliberately would not) speak any Aboriginal languages, and most adult 'converts' spoke limited English.¹⁶⁸ In 1914 the Aboriginal missionary couple James and Angelina Noble accepted Gribble's request to leave their roles at Yarrabah and join him at Forrest River.¹⁶⁹ Angelina's eventful life and role in mission work has tended to be downplayed, but her impact at Forrest River was probably significant: generally speaking, missionary women tended to interact more profoundly with Aboriginal people than most missionary men, and Angelina was furthermore a gifted linguist.¹⁷⁰ Whilst it is hard to trace the couple's thoughts about the mission regime, the Nobles sometimes challenged Gribble's behaviour: after one argument in 1928 James Noble was so upset that he threatened to return to his own Country in Queensland.¹⁷¹

Some manifestations of 'traditional' Aboriginal material culture stayed visible at Forrest River Mission despite Gribble's wish to 'Europeanize the Natives'.¹⁷² As Aboriginal visitors or neighbours who broke mission rules risked having their spears and *woomeras* (spear-throwers) confiscated, their possession of them on mission ground seems to have been otherwise accepted.¹⁷³ The missionaries also acquired some traditional objects. In 1931 Alfred West, a businessman from Guildford (along the Swan River), sold the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology 76 Aboriginal objects from the Forrest River.¹⁷⁴ They included an axe head inscribed 'From Forrest River per Rev E Gribble 1920', and a shield described as 'ceremonial shield, Gotegota Merrie District, collected 1914, and repainted

¹⁶⁷ Christine Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble: A Successful Missionary?', in *Lectures on North Queensland History. No. 5*, ed. B.J. Dalton (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1996), 218–47 (p. 231).

¹⁶⁸ Halse, 'Autobiography and Identity', 153–62 (p. 155); Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble', 243.

¹⁶⁹ Noel Loos, *White Christ Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007), 147–48.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 147–48.

¹⁷¹ Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man*, 164.

¹⁷² Cited in Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble', 243.

¹⁷³ Green, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 25.

¹⁷⁴ Shawn C. Rowlands, 'An Artefact of Colonial Violence? A North Kimberley Plateau Shield and the Record of a Massacre', in *Weapons, Culture and the Anthropology Museum* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 37–54 (pp. 38–51).

to celebrate the shooting of 40 natives by police, 1928'.¹⁷⁵ Gotegotemerrie was one site of the 1926 Forrest River Massacre, and Shawn Rowlands suggests that people at the mission repainted the shield in 1926 or 1928 for use in a memorial ceremony.¹⁷⁶ Its presence suggests that Aboriginal residents choose to commemorate the dead in ways that engaged with their cultural heritage. When Trower visited the mission in 1922, its residents and neighbours also performed a corroboree and presented him with objects that may have included the points now in Oxford.¹⁷⁷ The happy bishop recorded: 'What a collection! Spears and spearheads, painted woomeras, head ornaments of feathers, spun goat's yarn and kangaroo corroboree ornaments'.¹⁷⁸

Trower's gift to Piercy of the Aboriginal glass knife (Figure 15), alongside the non-Aboriginal pearl shell knife, established an implicit comparison between Aboriginal and settler material cultures. Trower had a paternalistic attitude towards Aboriginal people but sometimes compared them neutrally or favourably with white people. He had sympathy for those who speared cattle, comparing them to rich white men who visited Africa on hunting trips and showing a more nuanced attitude than Barker, who refused to believe that people spearing sheep might not see it as a crime.¹⁷⁹ In general though, the bishop avoided publicly discussing settler violence. In 1911 he implausibly denied knowing anything about it, saying that 'I think the natives are well looked after; in fact, a little wholesome control would be beneficial, as the natives are getting somewhat cheeky'.¹⁸⁰ However, in 1926 he supported Gribble's allegations that settlers had recently massacred Aboriginal people near the Forrest River. The following year, a Royal Commission concluded that a police party had likely killed at least eleven people in events now known as the Forrest River Massacre.¹⁸¹ Trower had often supported Gribble in disputes and Halse calls the commission's findings a 'triumphant swansong' for the bishop, as it proved 'the mission's value as a

¹⁷⁵ Rowlands, 40, 51.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 49.

¹⁷⁷ Green, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 49.

¹⁷⁸ Cited in Green, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 49.

¹⁷⁹ 'A Pioneer Bishop', 6; Barker, *Letters to Guy*, 171–72.

¹⁸⁰ 'Nor'-West Natives', *The Daily News*, Friday 17 November 1911, 5.

¹⁸¹ *Report of Royal Commission of Inquiry into Alleged Killing and Burning of Bodies of Aborigines in East Kimberley and into Police Methods when Effecting Arrests* (Perth: Government Printer, 1927), xv.

force for protecting Aboriginals and justified his years of support' for Gribble'.¹⁸² Once Trower retired, however, the superintendent had few powerful protectors. Following concerns about his behaviour and the mass resignation of male mission workers, Gribble was dismissed from Forrest River Mission in 1929.¹⁸³

Trower's diocese in the north-west posed considerable challenges due to its size, poverty and tensions between local pastoralists, missionaries and Aboriginal people. This stood in stark contrast to Nyasaland, where 'he had built a large, vibrant Anglican community with all the badges of success: a cathedral, hospital, a clutch of schools and a dynamic Indigenous ministry'.¹⁸⁴ Trower took particular pride in Likoma's cathedral (completed in 1911), bringing photographs of it to Australia.¹⁸⁵ He told his new compatriots that 'the natives ... had practically built a cathedral ... which would do credit to any civilised town', and was 'an outward and visible sign of civilisation in the midst of the jungle, and impenetrable undergrowth of Darkest Africa'.¹⁸⁶ However, Trower's attempts to build a cathedral in northern Australia failed.¹⁸⁷ Seen in this light his gift to Piercy represents highlights from years of struggle: Trower once declared Forrest River Mission 'a really bright spot in the relations of black and white in North Western Australia', and Halse suggests that he saw it as 'one of the special achievements' of his episcopate.¹⁸⁸

Collecting the 'remote'

In understanding why the five travellers collected (or did not collect) what they did, we must dwell on the interplay between their personal and professional lives, the lives and perspectives of those from whom goods were sought, and wider social discourse concerning indigenous peoples. The experiences of 'careerists', as men and women consciously moving across multiple regional and national contexts, offers a useful means of exploring these interactions.

¹⁸² Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man*, 150.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 164–65.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 150.

¹⁸⁵ 'The Melting Pot of Central Africa', *The Daily News*, Friday 21 October 1910, 5.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Doncaster.

¹⁸⁸ Cited in Green, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 50. Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man*, 150.

Broome, Carnegie and Trower seem to have collected relatively little indigenous material outside of Western Australia. Carnegie showed the most consistent interest in collecting from indigenous people, although he did not apparently collect items during his time in Ceylon, and letters written to his family refer infrequently to collecting in Nigeria. Other colonial agents in Nigeria (like Carnegie's near-contemporary, Charles Stanley Partridge) collected widely; Carnegie apparently did not, despite working in busy towns and knowing influential local rulers, which presumably afforded him good opportunities to do so. What lies behind these disparities of interest in collecting across different places? Many factors were involved in non-indigenous collectors' abilities to acquire indigenous items extensively in certain places or contexts, but not others. They include collectors' diverse personal and professional ambitions, notions closely informed by the European and settler societies within which they operated.

In 1881 Broome, then governor of Mauritius, travelled to the island of Rodrigues (an outlying Mauritian territory) and acquired solitaire bones from William Vandorous, a Native American who was the ships' pilot for the island.¹⁸⁹ The solitaire, an extinct flightless bird related to the dodo, was of considerable scientific interest in the nineteenth century. It was endemic to Rodrigues, thus its bones were closely linked to territory over which Broome governed. Broome's acquisition of the bones can be interpreted as a display of territorial and scientific colonial power. Two years later, Barker attended a ceremony to drive in the first pole of a new telegraph line between Northampton (in the Mid-West region) and Roebourne (in the Pilbara).¹⁹⁰ She asked for some telegraph wire, which was hammered into a bracelet for her. Barker valued her bracelet because of what the new line symbolised, telling her son Guy:

How proud we ought to be that there are plenty of such brave and fearless men to be found, who step forward and say, 'We will carry your line for you; we will open up the country' I hope, dear, you are old enough to understand what I mean, and to thrill – soldier though we

¹⁸⁹ Jolyon C. Parish, *The Dodo and the Solitaire: A Natural History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 251.

¹⁹⁰ Barker, *Letters to Guy*, 50.

hope you are going to be some day – at the thought of these other dauntless soldiers in the battle of colonisation.¹⁹¹

Broome also collected the ceremonial trowels that he used to set foundation stones in new settlements, commenting that ‘when you see a colonial Governor with a great many silver trowels on his drawing room table, you may be sure that he has reigned over a prosperous and progressive community’.¹⁹² Such objects embodied colonial control over local resources and peoples.

The four white travellers discussed in this chapter saw Western Australia, and particularly its less settled areas, as offering great colonial potential. Broome held that:

The Colony ... [is] one of the few remaining parts of the British Empire in which there is still ample, almost boundless, scope for enterprise and settlement.¹⁹³

Trower also recognised the north’s economic potential, emphasising the perceived spiritual opportunities and obligations arising from its exploitation. In 1911 he co-signed a letter calling for support of missionary work particularly in northern Australia: ‘there is a very real call for immediate action if we are to fulfil the duty laid upon us. ... Lazarus lies at our gate’.¹⁹⁴ Carnegie had no interest in ‘saving’ souls, but recognised the economic and heroic possibilities offered by ‘remote’ parts of Western Australia. Like Barker’s stalwart telegraph-builders, he portrayed the prospector-explorer as a pioneer who ‘slowly but surely opens up the country’.¹⁹⁵

The three white collectors’ shared interest in more northerly parts of Western Australia was not coincidental. Colonial settlement in the north was relatively recent and limited in scale compared to the south. A sense that these areas were not yet fully exploited persisted. Broome and Carnegie’s

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 50–51.

¹⁹² ‘Laying the Foundation Stone of the Fremantle Town Hall’, *The West Australian*, Saturday 12 September 1885, 3.

¹⁹³ ‘Governor Broome’s Lecture’, Tuesday 26 May 1885, 3.

¹⁹⁴ ‘A Pastoral Letter ...’, 116–17.

¹⁹⁵ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 144.

decisions to give the British Museum items from the 'remote' north of Western Australia also suggests that they saw Aboriginal people from there as being of particular scientific interest. This view was widespread: in early 1911 an Australian Customs official alleged that an enormous English and German trade in forged curios was flourishing because:

the really primitive weapon, made by the wild aborigine without the aid of steel knives – is becoming yearly scarcer. Samples of the weapons of totally uncivilised blacks in the Gulf country [on the north coast] and the north of Western Australia are sent to England as patterns [for the forgers]¹⁹⁶

This somewhat dubious claim about a major European industry producing fake Aboriginal objects highlighted the distinctive role of places like northern Western Australia in European imaginations. The writer suggested that items made by 'authentic', 'primitive' and 'totally uncivilised' Aboriginal people could still be found there. Peoples of the north were frequently portrayed as more 'authentic' than their southern neighbours, who were increasingly depicted as degenerate or extinct (see Chapter Seven). In 1886, Noongar men Tommy Dower and Johnny Carroll petitioned Broome for land at Wanneroo (north of Perth) on which they and their families could live and farm. Officials responded by stereotyping them and their community, with John Forrest (then the commissioner for Crown Lands, and supposedly Dower's 'friend') telling Broome that 'the native population of Perth & its neighbourhood has dwindled down to a very few, for the most part old, decrepid [sic] and given to drunkenness, and in a very short time there will not be one left'.¹⁹⁷ Northern Western Australia did not only intrigue scholars and collectors. Imperial fiction and travel writing suggests a wide public appetite in Britain for such content.

Perceptions about the more 'primitive', 'uncivilised' and 'authentic' peoples of the desert and northern reaches of Western Australia did not reflect the complex experiences of those who lived there. Carnegie recognised that people in the desert participated in extensive Aboriginal trade routes, and engaged and experimented with European materials. The non-

¹⁹⁶ 'Forged "Curios"', *The Australasian*, Wednesday 25 January 1911, 29.

¹⁹⁷ Tiffany Shellam, 'The Collective Nyungar Heritage of an "Orphan Letter"', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 20:2 (2019), 1–30.

Aboriginal collectors considered in this chapter acknowledged that makers had contact with Aboriginal, settler or other migrant groups in and beyond their immediate locality. Broome gave the British Museum a message stick incorporating Aboriginal and European design elements (Figure 11), and Trower's 'lance heads' include some made with glass. All three men, and Barker, spoke favourably about the potential for settler and Aboriginal communities to co-exist if supported (or controlled) by the government, church or local settlers. In 1910 Trower and other Anglican leaders argued that Aboriginal peoples' 'moral and physical stamina gives way rapidly and completely upon contact with a white race', implying that missionaries could more easily 'uplift' and ensure the survival of those in remote parts of the north as they had had less contact with white people than did groups in the south-west.¹⁹⁸ Unlike Broome or Trower, Carnegie had no professional responsibility to promote coexistence between European and Aboriginal peoples. He collected several European metal objects whilst bartering with an Aboriginal group at a site that he called 'Family Well': an old iron tent-peg, part of a tin matchbox and some ironwork for a saddle.¹⁹⁹ A curious Carnegie sent these to the Police Magistrate at Melbourne, who suggested that they came from Ludwig Leichardt's ill-fated 1848 attempt to reach Perth from Queensland.²⁰⁰ Carnegie downplayed this possibility, saying that 'I think that trade from tribe to tribe sufficiently accounts for the presence of such articles'.²⁰¹ He had also seen oyster-shells in the desert 'that must have passed from tribe to tribe for at least five hundred miles', implying a relatively high opinion of Aboriginal trade routes.²⁰² Carnegie's disdain for the Leichardt theory may also reflect a reluctance to accept the possibility that other Europeans had preceded him in the region by fifty years. Like Broome and Trower, he acknowledged the existence of objects overtly combining Aboriginal and European materials and designs, but interpreted these in a way that would not diminish his self-fashioning as a pioneer in regions uncharted by white people.

In thinking about the significance of northern Western Australia to the four non-Aboriginal travellers (Broome, Barker, Carnegie and Trower), we

¹⁹⁸ 'A Pastoral Letter ...', 114.

¹⁹⁹ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 244.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 246.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 248.

²⁰² Ibid, 395.

need to understand their broader colonial worldviews. Each identified as British and their surviving writings convey claims about the supposed superiority of British culture and people. They usually portrayed themselves as distinct from indigenous peoples in thought and behaviour, although they occasionally connected Aboriginal practices with 'Western' customs like game-hunting or duelling that were, or had recently been, widely socially acceptable.²⁰³ These expressions of underlying similarities appear infrequently, but they implied that some indigenous peoples had the potential to be 'civilised', converted or otherwise turned into useful colonial subjects. The travellers also distinguished between indigenous peoples living in different places. Carnegie highlighted different Nigerian communities' supposed suitability for colonial exploitation, whereas Trower depicted Aboriginal peoples of the north as less 'corrupted' (and so more suited for conversion) than those of the south.

Northern Western Australia was a key site for Broome, Carnegie and Trower's professional ambitions, and this affected how they and Barker portrayed its inhabitants. Their interest in Western Australia's Aboriginal peoples was accompanied by, and often outweighed by, an interest in the land's potential for economic exploitation. Carnegie and Trower collected some geological material, and Broome's reports on the north emphasised its economic promise. The 'opening up' of the north to settlers and investment led to concerns about what would happen to Aboriginal people there. Carnegie was sceptical about missionary activity, but thought that some Aboriginal people would become useful workers if trained and controlled by white masters.²⁰⁴ 'It is marvellous', he pronounced, 'how soon a tame boy comes to despise his own people'.²⁰⁵ Broome and Barker regarded missionary work far more highly than Carnegie, but thought its supposed transformation of Aboriginal people into productive subjects required an extraordinary amount of settler investment. They also presented prison and the pearling and pastoral industries as additional sites for the 'civilising process'. Reports of widespread abuses against Aboriginal people in the north were a potential reputational risk to white people living and working there, and each collector tended to publicly deny or downplay these incidents.

²⁰³ 'A Pioneer Bishop', 6; 'Governor Broome's Lecture', Tuesday 19 May 1885, 3.

²⁰⁴ Carnegie, *Letters from Nigeria*, 139; *Spinifex and Sand*, 153–54.

²⁰⁵ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 154.

Carnegie hinted at violence but simultaneously claimed that the alleged 'awful cruelties perpetrated by the prospectors' were 'wholly imaginary'.²⁰⁶ He took pains to justify his own abuses, arguing that his party's need for water outweighed normal behavioural constraints. Embracing the role of the intrepid explorer forging into an unforgiving wilderness, Carnegie pre-emptively attacked potential critics:

... do not, you who have never known want or suffered hardship, be so ready to judge others who, hundreds of miles from their fellow-men, threatened every day with possible death from thirst, were doing their best to lay bare the hidden secrets of an unknown region, as arid and desolate as any the world can show.²⁰⁷

In fact, non-violent methods of obtaining water were available to the party, and Shino Konishi shows how their series of increasingly systematic and brutal kidnappings became 'an end in itself, providing the only excitement in a long, arduous journey through the desert'.²⁰⁸ Carnegie's rhetoric of life-and-death thus fails to convince. In his paper for the Royal Colonial Institute, Broome emphasised that pearling workers were treated benevolently, before moving to the seemingly safer topic of missionary work. Like Broome, Trower balanced competing allegiances and often avoided the issue of settler violence. All, therefore, downplayed or avoided discussing the violence involved in 'opening up' the north.

Lambert and Lester argue that 'it was not just the physical movement of individuals and their embodied presence in particular places that served to shape their [colonial travellers'] identities or ideas, but also how other places could be present with them'.²⁰⁹ These movements sometimes caused tensions. Carnegie struggled to adapt to the behaviour expected of colonial administrators in Nigeria. He was initially enthusiastic, proclaiming 'Oh! the joy of being a "vagrant" once more with my own little colony', hinting at how he had seen his previous life in the desert.²¹⁰ Reality did not always meet expectations, as a Nigerian holiday in 1900 revealed:

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 59.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 233.

²⁰⁸ Konishi, 51.

²⁰⁹ Lambert and Lester, 26.

²¹⁰ Carnegie, *Letters from Nigeria*, 7.

There are few things more aggravating than to arrive in a village where countless fowls, goats, and sheep are to be seen, and on asking to buy some to be told that there are none for sale, especially when you know it is done to spite the white man, and is just a piece of 'passive obstruction' of which these natives are past masters.²¹¹

When people in the desert resisted Carnegie he faced virtually no constraints on his responses, but in Nigeria he was obliged to justify his actions to his superiors. He was not the only traveller to have difficulties in transitioning from one colony to another, as Warri's case shows. Trower struggled to replicate the religious projects that had seemed to work so well in Nyasaland; and Broome's sheep-farming career in New Zealand may have led his colleagues in Western Australia's Legislative Council to expect him to be more staunchly pro-pastoralist than he was.

Aboriginal cultural material offered all of the five travellers discussed some professional advantages. Yet whilst I have often drawn links between the four white travellers and their engagement with Aboriginal cultures, Warri's experiences defy easy categorisation. The white travellers too experienced strain in moving across different colonial spaces, but Warri had considerably less professional status or freedom compared to them. His distinctive experience must be acknowledged, as a young Aboriginal man who had worked for and travelled with a settler since childhood, and was now part of a white-led expedition party invading the country of unfamiliar Aboriginal people. Recent scholarship on explorers offers potential insights into Warri's experiences although Carnegie did not apparently intend Warri to act as a cultural broker, unlike many of the Aboriginal people who accompanied white-led expeditions, like Garigal man Boongaree and Noongar men Mokare (Chapter Three), Migeo and Yee-lal-nar-nap (Tommy).²¹² Like them, Warri's recorded demeanour and actions show that moving across different settler and Aboriginal spaces gave rise to contradictory feelings and responses. In particular, he had to navigate

²¹¹ Ibid, 122.

²¹² See Tiffany Shellam, 'Mediating Encounters Through Bodies and Talk', in *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives*, ed. Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent and Tiffany Shellam (Acton: ANU Press, 2015), 85–102.

competing impulses to reveal and to withhold certain knowledge. Carnegie wanted Aboriginal cultural material and information, yet Warri supplied it inconsistently. The white travellers, most obviously Carnegie, also 'edited' their retellings of events, but their silences should not be interpreted in the same light as Warri's. Warri's failure to respond consistently to finding or discussing restricted items may have reflected a general wish not to break cultural law despite a limited degree of cultural understanding when it came to recognising restricted items. Whilst some commonalities can be traced between Warri's responses and those of the white travellers, his distinctive experiences must therefore be considered on their own terms.

The four white travellers discussed in this chapter had a professional interest in describing cross-cultural interactions in Western Australia, whether to reassure readers or listeners that Aboriginal peoples were content despite (or because of) contact with settlers, or to entertain audiences with descriptions of 'exotic' lands and their inhabitants. Broome and Trower both enjoyed relatively secure positions as colonial officials, whereas Carnegie's prospects were still unclear when he was in Australia. This difference may help to explain why, unlike the other two, Carnegie wrote scholarly articles about Aboriginal people and objects. Like Edward Hardman, his insecure career prospects seemingly motivated him to record and deploy ethnographic information in scholarly circles. Trower, like Carnegie, found it important to clarify where his collection came from. He identified the 'lance heads' as coming from the north-west, his zone of professional responsibility, and specifically from Forrest River, a place of personal and professional significance. In contrast, Broome did not appear to document the provenance of his collection in detail, beyond stating that it came from the north. These differing levels of provenance information suggest different motives for donating these objects.

The collection Broome presented to the British Museum is unsystematic. Three *wunda* shields are included, but the museum's register does not distinguish special characteristics that might explain why all three were presented. One spear is marked as being from the 'extreme north-west', although its appearance is more similar to examples found in the south-west,

suggesting a lack of interest on Broome's part in the object itself.²¹³ Some objects normally present in ethnographic collections from Western Australia are also absent. Although the collection features twelve weapons (or tools that could be construed as weapons) it lacks any points, which were widely produced and relatively easy to obtain in many places. In contrast, Broome's contemporary Hardman carefully distinguished the different purposes for which spears in his collection were used. Compared to Hardman and Talbot's collections, it is hard to discern much ethnographic logic to Broome's collection. It seems to represent opportunist collecting, something that seems to be the case for many other museum collections formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Carnegie and Trower's known collections similarly suggest collecting that was more opportunist than systematic. Carnegie's expedition accounts suggest that he acquired items he saw as distinctive in some way, be these through 'gifts', thefts, exchanges, 'confiscations' or 'finds'. Carnegie made strategic use of his acquisitions but did not attempt to assemble a systematic collection from the desert. Trower's collection from the Forrest River is too small to extrapolate from with much certainty. However, its smallness and the fact it is his only known collection remains significant, as is the fact that he recorded being given objects but does not seem to have actively sought them out.

We can see these men as pragmatic collectors, not necessarily deeply interested in ethnography or anthropology but willing to make the most of European interest in Aboriginal people from Western Australia. This seems to be borne out by their apparent lack of concerted collecting outside of Western Australia and seeming indifference towards collecting mission-sanctioned handicrafts or more 'civilised' products. Whilst Barker and Carnegie occasionally wrote about women's objects, the emphasis within these collections is on Aboriginal men or objects, like weapons and the container, that could be read as 'savage' or otherwise unusual.

²¹³ Curator's note, 'Oc,+2414', *British Museum*, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Oc-2414> [accessed 15 June 2021].

Conclusions

Collectively, these cases demonstrate how travellers' motives for collecting indigenous objects varied from place to place. Journeys to new colonies offered fresh opportunities to engage with indigenous peoples and objects, but their levels of engagement did not remain consistent. None were professional collectors, but I have argued that professional ambitions and insecurities impacted how and what they collected. When prospecting in Western Australia, Carnegie was conscious of family embarrassment that he had cut short his formal education and had not yet embarked upon a respectable career.²¹⁴ In 1893 he told Helena that 'perhaps some of these days you will see the poor black ba [sic] reading a paper before the Geographical Society! Castles in the air I fear!'.²¹⁵ Finding exploitable gold or a viable stock route through the Western Australian desert might have vindicated Carnegie's life choices; failure appears to have increased his efforts to gain status by deploying Aboriginal objects in British scholarly circles. Bishop Trower perhaps valued his visits to Forrest River Mission so highly because his other key hopes for the diocese were so often frustrated.

Broome, Carnegie and Trower were all motivated to collect Aboriginal objects from 'remote' parts of Western Australia and this interest seems to have stemmed, at least in part, from how these areas were portrayed in popular discourse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many in and beyond Western Australia saw Aboriginal peoples of the north as largely 'untouched' by European influence. Objects could become a form of cultural capital, passing through colonial networks and showcasing collectors' familiarity with the region's economic, scientific or spiritual resources. By comparing these objects with collectors' experiences in other sites, we can trace the importance of place and career ambitions in motivating different individuals' collecting choices. In particular, they reveal how some collectors materially engaged with Western Australia's northern 'frontiers', where colonial incursions evoked heightened moral concerns over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Chapter Six). Finally, considering the roles of people like Barker and Warri who were involved in collecting and interpreting material culture deepens our understandings of

²¹⁴ Peasley, xvii–xviii

²¹⁵ Ibid, 5.

travellers' experiences across time and place. Historians have explored the lives of many Aboriginal travellers who played significant roles as cultural intermediaries and interlocutors. Paying attention to the experiences of Warri and others who played different roles promises to significantly enrich understandings of how people have engaged with material culture across the British empire.

Chapter Five: Mining materials (c. 1880–1910)

Mining successes helped to transform Western Australia's colonial fortunes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter considers the interplay between mining work and ethnographic collecting during that time, exploring the significant number of objects that were given or sold by mining workers to British and Irish museums. After introducing some of the diverse regions, collectors and collections that share links to mining work, I ask how these speak to contemporary Aboriginal and settler mining practices as well as different perspectives concerning 'authenticity'. Focusing on the presence of spearheads made from broken telegraph insulators, I consider how objects can accrue value as they move across cultural contexts.

The mining industry significantly affected Western Australia's economic, political and social fortunes, and remains a major employer and income generator. Local Aboriginal people were long excluded from employment in the industry, which continues to have the potential to damage Aboriginal communities.¹ Mining enterprises have intruded upon and damaged significant sites, polluted landscapes and competed for key resources like water and timber. In 2020 Rio Tinto dynamited Aboriginal heritage sites at Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara, causing widespread anger and grief. A subsequent committee of inquiry stressed that the Puutu, Kunti, Kurrama and Pinikura Traditional Owners of the Pilbara are not inherently opposed to mining, and that Rio Tinto chose not to meaningfully engage with them to find a mutually acceptable way of mining the area.² One Traditional Owner reflected on the unequal relationship between her people and mining companies:

The loss we feel is compounded by [the] lack of power we have. ... By the fundamental conflict that affects each and every Traditional Owner

¹ Marcia Langton and Odette Mazel (2008) 'Poverty in the Midst of Plenty: Aboriginal People, the "Resource Curse" and Australia's Mining Boom', *Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law*, 26:1 (2008), 31–65 (pp. 46, 64).

² Joint Standing Committee of Northern Australia, *Never Again: Inquiry into the Destruction of 46,000 Year Old Caves at the Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara Region of Western Australia – Interim Report* (Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, December 2020), vii.

in the Pilbara who is forced to rely on what mining brings to the Pilbara and, each day, is a little more diminished, by what it does to the Pilbara.³

Notwithstanding these concerns, successive colonial, state and federal governments have long privileged the needs of the mining industry.⁴ Indeed, mining successes were key to Western Australia's economic transformation in the late nineteenth century, drawing money and migrants to a colony that had struggled to attract investment and attention since the early 1830s. Between 1891 and 1901 alone, Western Australia's recorded population rocketed from 49,782 to 184,124.⁵ This growth stemmed in large part from discoveries of commercially exploitable gold in the mid-1880s and 1890s. The subsequent creation or expansion of mines and associated settlements could lead to greater opportunities for work, trade and recreational links between settlers and Aboriginal people.⁶ However, as with the early days of the Swan River Colony in the south-west, tensions over land use could also lead to violence.

The collections and collectors discussed in this chapter are all associated with the Eastern Goldfields, Mid-West, Pilbara and Kimberley regions (see Map 3 for the key locations discussed). Commercially exploitable gold was discovered in these regions between the mid-1880s and mid-1890s, leading to the creation or expansion of colonial settlements.⁷ The Eastern Goldfields lie in south-east Western Australia, and colonists including David Carnegie flocked there after gold finds near Southern Cross (1887), Coolgardie (1892) and Kalgoorlie (1893). Tensions developed between colonists in the new settlements and those in Perth, and in the late 1890s settlers in the Eastern Goldfields unsuccessfully agitated to secede from

³ Ibid, 6.

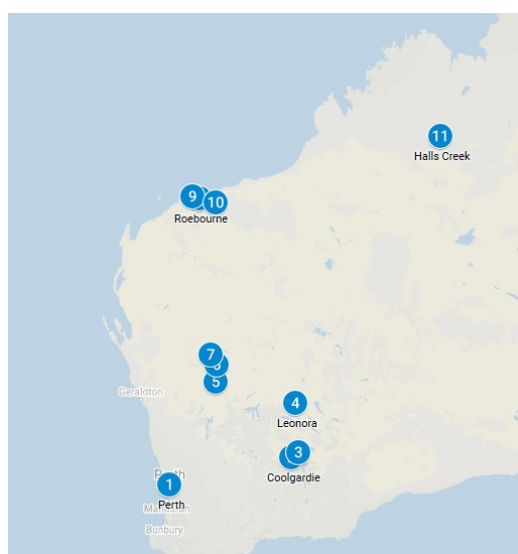
⁴ Benedict Scambary, *My Country, Mine Country: Indigenous People, Mining and Development Contestation in Remote Australia* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013), 11.

⁵ 'The Census of West Australia', *The West Australian*, Thursday 29 October 1891, 3; Malcolm A.C. Fraser, 'Census of Western Australia, 1901', *Government Gazette of Western Australia*, 34 (Friday 9 May 1902), 2053–58 (p. 2054). The 1891 census did not count Aboriginal people; the 1901 census counted some Aboriginal people with known European ancestry.

⁶ Fred Cahir, *Black Gold: Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria, 1850-1870* (ANU E Press, 2012), 9–20, 67–83.

⁷ In addition to gold, many other substances like copper, tin, nickel or coal were also mined.

Western Australia.⁸ Extending across central Western Australia, the Mid-West region contained the bustling Gascoyne and Murchison goldfields, which included the mining town of Cue (gazetted in 1893). In the north, mining sites sprang up in the Pilbara, including the goldrush towns of Nullagine (gazetted 1899) and Roebourne (gazetted 1866). In 1895 a discovery of gold at Halls Creek attracted up to ten thousand settlers to the Kimberley, although many moved on within a year. Aboriginal people living in all these places witnessed the sudden influx of colonisers and the rapid construction of colonial buildings and infrastructure.



Key:

- 1: Perth (*Wajuk Noongar*)
- 2: Coolgardie (*Wangkathaa*)
- 3: Kalgoorlie (*Wangkathaa*)
- 4: Leonora (*Kuwarra*)
- 5: Mount Magnet (*Badimaya*)
- 6: Cue (*Badimaya*)
- 7: Wilgie Mia (*Watjarri Yamatji*)
- 8: Roebourne (*Ngarluma*)
- 9: Karratha (*Jaburrara*)
- 10: Toweranna (*Ngarluma*)
- 11: Halls Creek (*Jaru and Kija*)

Map 3: Key locations discussed in Chapter Five

Map data © 2021 Google

The number of British and Irish ethnographic collections known to have been formed by mining workers outweighs those created by any other professional group between 1880 and 1910. I can identify with reasonable certainty at least 43 non-Aboriginal people who between these dates collected Aboriginal objects now in British and Irish museums. Of these, at least twelve (28%) were directly involved in Western Australian mining.⁹ They

⁸ The Eastern Goldfields Reform League's agitation contributed to finally persuading Western Australia's government to support Australian federation. Thomas Musgrave, 'The Western Australian Secession Movement', *Macquarie Law Journal*, 3 (2003), 97–98.

⁹ They are Thomas Birch and Emile Louis Bruno Clement, mine managers; Charles A.V. Butler, William Foggin, Edward Hooper and James Kerr, mining experts; William Dugald Campbell and Edward Townley Hardman, geologists; David Wynford

included prospectors, geologists and mining experts who assessed and worked at existing or prospective mines; owners and managers of individual operations; and the registrars and wardens of mining fields. Many other collectors were also interested in the colony's mining opportunities. Craven Ord, a policeman who donated objects to the British Museum (see Chapter Two), became a mining leaseholder; and Sir William Ingram, another donor to the museum, held significant mining investments in the state.¹⁰ Others worked in sectors associated with the industry, like the railways and telegraph network. Daisy Bates (see Chapter Seven) claimed that an Aboriginal man called Idiongu 'gave' her Wilgie Mia ochre mine and that a Yamatji man called Jaal (see Chapter Seven) made her heir to Wiluna, which settlers mined for gold.¹¹ In 1911 Louisa Charpentier gave Maidstone Museum 41 objects, many of which are associated with northern Western Australia. Her husband Leon was an engineering clerk and, whilst the couple's precise movements are not clear, he likely visited the colony in the late nineteenth century to take advantage of its mining boom.

This chapter focuses on ethnographic collections made by twelve mining workers (see Appendix Four for a full list). My intention is not to provide an in-depth analysis of each diverse collection, but to draw out common threads. All were acquired in Western Australia between 1880 and 1910. The earliest was probably made by geological surveyor Edward Hardman (see Chapter Three) and sold to the Dublin Museum of Science and Art (now the National Museum of Ireland) in 1888. Four years later Irish engineer Edmund Dowley, the warden and resident magistrate at the Kimberley goldfields, gave the museum objects including waistbands and ornaments. In 1896 James Kerr sold the City Industrial Museum in Glasgow (now Glasgow Museums) clubs, spear-points and other objects from the Pilbara and North Queensland, where he had been assessing and managing mining properties. Mining agent William Foggin donated spears and spear-throwers to the Hancock Museum in Newcastle (now Great North Museum:

Carnegie, prospector; John Spence Christie, businessperson with mining interests; Edmund Power Dowley, engineer and warden; and William Owen Mansbridge, warden and official in the Mines Department. For some, their Western Australian mining work formed one facet of a varied career.

¹⁰ 'Supreme Court: In Bankruptcy', *The West Australian*, Wednesday 13 November 1912, 5.

¹¹ Robin Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"? An Exploration and Critique of Aboriginalist Discourse Within Historical Photographic and Written Texts' (PhD thesis, Curtin University, 2015), 214.

Hancock, managed by Tyne & Wear Museums) in 1897. In the same year mining expert Charles Butler donated a shield, club and spear-thrower to the Pitt Rivers Museum, which he said were given to him by a party of prospectors who had got them from Aboriginal people in the Pilbara.¹² John Christie, who owned a Perth boot emporium, spent decades developing a claim at Siberia (later called Waverley) near Kalgoorlie.¹³ He sent spears, shields and a spear-thrower to the museum in his birthplace of Paisley in 1901.

The British Museum received a small flurry of mining-related collections at the turn of the century. The first came in 1898, when William Mansbridge donated six points that he 'obtained from the natives of the Kimberley Goldfields'.¹⁴ Formerly a telegraphist at Halls Creek and mining registrar for East Kimberley, Mansbridge was by this point acting warden for the East Murchison goldfields.¹⁵ That same year, prospector and expedition leader David Carnegie (see Chapter Four) donated 29 objects collected between Coolgardie and Halls Creek. In 1901 Scottish geological surveyor William Campbell donated six 'medicinal charms' from Kalgoorlie; and Thomas Birch, a former mine manager in the Murchison district, donated a message stick. The most recent acquisition considered in this chapter is Edward Hooper's 1932 donation of axe-heads and a spear-point, which he appears to have collected when working as a mining agent in Western Australia intermittently between 1894 and 1905.¹⁶

The final collector considered in this chapter is Emile Clement, whose wide-ranging career included time as a geologist and mining engineer. As Chapter One highlighted, his collections dominate European institutional holdings of Western Australian material. Between 1895 and 1900, Clement established and managed gold mines around Towranna (now Toweranna) in the Gascoyne and Roebourne. He also collected Aboriginal objects, mostly from groups near the Kimberley coast, before relocating to England in 1900.

¹² C.A.V. Butler to E.B. Tylor, 4 June 1901. Related Documents File, PRM.

¹³ 'Presbyterian Pioneers', *Western Mail*, Friday 28 March 1919, 37.

¹⁴ W.O. Mansbridge to the Superintendent of the British Museum, 11 March 1898. Correspondence file, BM Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory.

¹⁵ 'He's "Old Bill" to Ex-Diggers', *Sunday Times*, Sunday 18 February 1951, 10.

¹⁶ 'Notes from Diary of Edward Hooper', SLWA, 2202A.

Between 1896 and 1901 he supplied British and Irish museums with approximately 453 objects.¹⁷

Many collectors held positions of local power. Several had judicial roles: Mansbridge was acting warden and resident magistrate at East Murchison; Dowley was warden of the Kimberley goldfields; and Butler was a justice of the peace.¹⁸ Carnegie, who lacked official judicial authority, sought to control and punish Aboriginal populations independently. Tensions sometimes erupted between settlers over the treatment of Aboriginal people. In 1892 settlers at Halls Creek hanged three Aboriginal men despite Dowley's protests that the execution was legally invalid, and he later attempted (unsuccessfully) to bring a police officer to account.¹⁹ On other occasions contact was less fraught, perhaps even mundane. Carnegie and Hardman travelled with Aboriginal expedition members, and Campbell stressed the importance of seeking and documenting local knowledge about natural history and cultural practices.²⁰ When Mansbridge learned about a poisonous plant, he asked 'the natives' how they used it.²¹ Mansbridge reportedly developed an interest in Aboriginal people and 'their admirable traits' whilst working in the Kimberley, and after transferring to the East Murchison district in 1896 he 'adopted' an orphaned baby girl, whom he brought up with his children.²²

Many collectors' interests straddled western disciplinary boundaries, leading them to acquire flora, fauna, geological and paleontological material alongside Aboriginal objects. Campbell's interest in the small stones ('medicinal charms') that he gave to the British Museum stemmed not only from their cultural meaning and function, but the question of their geological

¹⁷ Coates, 'Lists and Letters', 138.

¹⁸ 'Our Lawlers Letter', *Geraldton Advertiser*, Monday 5 September 1898, 3; 'The Kimberley Goldfields', *The Daily News*, Saturday 18 June 1892, 3; 'Government Gazette', *Western Mail*, Friday 17 January 1896, 10. Mining wardens also presided as magistrates over the mining courts.

¹⁹ 'Conduct of Sergeant Drewry. Complaints of, - Resident Magistrate Kimberley Goldfields [E.P. Dowley; F.W. Lodge]', State Records Office of WA, AU WA S675-cons527 1892/0334.

²⁰ W.D. Campbell, 'The Need for an Ethnological Survey of Western Australia', *Journal and Proceedings of the Natural History and Science Society of Western Australia*, 3:2 (January 1911), 102–109.

²¹ 'An Unidentified Poison Plant', *Western Mail*, Friday 11 February 1898, 7.

²² 'He's "Old Bill" ...'.

origins.²³ Birch's interest in flora and fauna formed the subject of a local newspaper article:

Mr. Birch, manager of the Lady Forrest mine, about a mile from Cue, is a lover of Nature, and a keen collector of interesting objects ... Mr. Birch seldom goes out for a walk or drive without discovering something worth preserving.²⁴

Birch's donations to the Perth Museum included message sticks and a trap-door spider's nest.²⁵ Mansbridge, also a Murchison resident, donated weapons, insects, amphibians, mammals, birds and botanical specimens to the same institution.²⁶ The mining men's diverse collecting interests were probably influenced by their professional use of geological specimens to demonstrate sites' commercial viability and their own expertise. When Hardman donated geological specimens to Reverend Charles Nicolay's Geological Museum (a precursor to the Perth Museum), the clergyman pointedly told the geologist 'that it would not be to the advantage of his reputation if he left the colony without arranging his collection'.²⁷ Europeans were not the only miners to share a connection with these objects, however, as I will discuss.

²³ 'Obsidian Bombs', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, Saturday 22 December 1900, 5. For a more in-depth look at this material see Philip A. Clarke, 'Australites. Part 1: Aboriginal Involvement in Their Discovery', *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 21:2 & 3 (2018), 115–33; and 'Australites. Part 2: Early Aboriginal Perception and Use', *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 22:1 (2019), 155–78.

²⁴ 'Natural History on the Murchison', *The Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette*, Saturday 1 October 1898, 4.

²⁵ 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, Tuesday 9 May 1899, 5.

²⁶ See Appendix Four.

²⁷ Cited in McNamara and Dodds, 33.

Aboriginal mining



Figure 17: Bag holding *wilgee* (ochre) acquired by Samuel Talbot in the south-west

This bag, made from European sacking and tied with twine, was acquired near the Swan River in 1838. It contains red ochre, which Noongar peoples of this region call *wilgee*. Ochre holds cultural importance to Aboriginal communities across Australia, and is widely used to decorate rock art, bodies ceremonial and everyday objects; and in medicine. This ochre may have been traded into the south-west or mined locally.

European sacking, ochre. Collected by Samuel Talbot from the 'neighbourhood of the Swan River' in 1838.

BM, Oc1839,0620.26. © The Trustees of the British Museum

The economic and cultural importance of Western Australia's mining industry, and particularly its goldmining sector, made it a key site for debate and interventions regarding 'racial purity'.²⁸ Some Aboriginal people worked in settler-run mines from an early stage: for example, workers at the Geraldine lead mine (in the Mid-West region) in the early 1850s included Cornish miners hired from South Australia, Aboriginal prisoners, and ticket-of-leave convicts.²⁹ From the 1890s onwards, racist legislation increasingly prevented

²⁸ Patricia Bertola, 'Undesirable Persons: Race and West Australian Mining Legislation', in *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, ed. Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook, and Andrew Reeves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 123–40 (136).

²⁹ Martin Gibbs, 'The Geraldine Mine: The 1850s Lead Mining Frontier in Midwest Western Australia', *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, 34 (2016), 53–62 (p. 55).

or limited Aboriginal peoples' full participation in the industry, as well as that of vaguely defined groups like 'Asiatics' and 'Africans'.³⁰ Government regulations discouraged Aboriginal peoples' employment in mines from 1898 onwards, but some nevertheless continued to work for settler enterprises and provided (willingly or otherwise) goods and services such as local guiding, food, possum skin cloaks and sex.³¹ Others worked their own mines, including ones established long before colonial settlement. Yet whilst these mining links are now receiving greater scholarly attention, few *overt* traces of them are evident in the collections now in Britain and Ireland. None of the collections considered in this chapter contain items that are explicitly identified as mining tools. Some collectors would have found it hard to identify mining implements, especially when panning or quarrying tools like *yandies* or hammerstones might be used in other everyday activities.³² Ideological motivations, however, are likely also at play.

Aboriginal mining in Australia has taken place for tens of thousands of years. Before British colonisation and the introduction of settler mining technologies, people did not seemingly attach 'great economic or spiritual significance' to gold.³³ There is evidence for many other substances being highly valued and quarried, including crystal, greenstone, sandstone, obsidian, kaolin, ochres and basalt.³⁴ Ochre (iron oxide), particularly in its red form (Figure 17), is valued across many Aboriginal communities. Wajuk Noongar woman Fanny Balbuk Yooreel (1840–1907) famously guarded a red ochre pit near Lake Jualbup in Perth throughout her life.³⁵ Wilgie Mia, an immense mine in the Weld Ranges (in the Murchison district), undoubtedly accounts for some ochre now present in British and Irish museums.³⁶ Called Thuwarri Thaa ('red ochre hole') by Watjarri Traditional Custodians, it is the largest and deepest underground Aboriginal ochre mine in Australia, and

³⁰ Bertola, 130.

³¹ See, for example, Bracknell, 124.

³² Task-specific stone tools were used for quarrying deposits at some Aboriginal sites. Nicholas Peterson and Ronald Lampert, 'A Central Australian Ochre Mine', *Records of the Australian Museum*, 37:1 (1985), 1–9 (pp. 2–4).

³³ Cahir, 7.

³⁴ Ibid, 7.

³⁵ John C. Ryan, Danielle Brady, and Christopher Kueh, 'Where Fanny Balbuk Walked: Re-Imagining Perth's Wetlands', *M/C Journal*, 18:6 (2016), n.p.

³⁶ Several items associated with Wilgie Mia are in Britain. In 1971 J.P. Kruiskamp gave the British Museum a stone fragment, grinding stone and digging stick (BM, c1971,13.1–3), all covered in ochre and reportedly obtained from Wilgie Mia.

formed the hub of a vast exchange network.³⁷ Its ochres were exchanged over hundreds, sometimes thousands, of kilometres in every direction.³⁸ Daisy Bates visited the red ochre deposits in 1911, later saying 'I came out a woman in red. There was not an inch of me that had not been ochred all over'.³⁹ Wilgie Mia also attracted interest amongst the few settlers who described Aboriginal ochre mining.

In 1904 Henry Page Woodward, Western Australia's government geologist, called mining at Wilgie Mia 'primitive' but 'very interesting, as these natives work with their wooden tools much in the same manner as the ancient miners did in Great Britain with stone hammers'.⁴⁰ Commentators describing Aboriginal mining usually portrayed it as primitive, archaic, or comparable to prehistoric European practices. Mining was thus presented in a similar manner to Aboriginal and European hunting practices. Tom Griffiths suggests that colonists saw Aboriginal hunting as 'preoccupied with subsistence hunting', which they saw as culturally inferior to contemporary European hunting cultures despite often praising Aboriginal peoples' skills with spears and boomerangs.⁴¹ A few commentators allowed that Aboriginal people might prove effective at certain forms of mining work, although this praise sometimes served to criticise white miners. In 1911 a self-proclaimed 'Judicious Prospector' criticised white miners' performance at Marble Bar, complaining that 'I have seen more work done on a blackfellow's wilgey [ochre] mine, and done more systematically, too'.⁴²

Ochre frequently found its way into settlers' collections. A few British and Irish museums hold bottles or bags of it (in powder or cake form), and ochre powder residue or pigment covers many objects, including weapons, baskets, belts, ornaments and restricted items. Items collected at one location

³⁷ *Wilgie Mia Aboriginal Ochre Mine, Wilgie Mia Rd, Wilgie Mia Aboriginal Reserve via Cue, WA, Australia*, Australian Heritage Database (Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy) <https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;place_id=106044> [accessed 7 August 2019].

³⁸ Rachel Scadding, Vicky Winton, and Vivienne Brown, 'An LA-ICP-MS Trace Element Classification of Ochres in the Weld Range Environ, Mid West Region, Western Australia', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 54 (2015), 300–12 (p. 300).

³⁹ Daisy M. Bates, 'My Natives and I. No. 19: I Inherit Goldmines', *The West Australian*, Friday 13 March 1936, 27.

⁴⁰ Harry Page Woodward, *Report of the Murchison Goldfield* (Perth: Richard Pether, Government Printer, 1893) 16.

⁴¹ Griffiths, 12.

⁴² 'Correspondence', *The Pilbarra Goldfield News*, Friday 17 February 1911, 2.

could include ochres from multiple sources, and some ochre deposits were valued more highly than others.⁴³ For example, it is possible that the red and yellow ochres mined at Wilgie Mia and the neighbouring mine of Little Wilgie were used in different ways.⁴⁴ Watjarri Traditional Custodians class the former site as a restricted men-only place, so Wilgie Mia ochre could have been reserved for particularly special purposes and objects.⁴⁵ Clement and Dowley both collected samples of ochre pigment (see Figure 18), and their interest was not unusual. A visitor to the 1862 Great London Exposition noted that Western Australia's display contained a range of 'useful clays and pigments ... among others the Wilgi, with the qualities of which the natives are well acquainted and which would, no doubt, prove of service in the arts and manufactures of this country'.⁴⁶ Hardman remarked on the 'thick beds of red and yellow ochreous earth' ('called "wilgey" by the natives') in the Kimberley, suggesting that settlers could have commercially exploited these for paint had they not lain so far within the interior.⁴⁷ Settler accounts often mentioned ochre, but generally focused on its use in colouring bodies and objects, rather than how it was gathered and processed. Historic descriptions of Clement and Dowley's samples do not describe Aboriginal mining, instead focusing on how ochre was used as 'war paint' or decoration.⁴⁸ This emphasis, accompanied by the general lack of ochre samples in the mining workers' collections, suggests that collectors had little intrinsic interest in Aboriginal mining practices. This supports Philip Jones' suggestion that 'for European colonists in Australia, red ochre was at once too esoteric and too mundane a substance to attract much attention'.⁴⁹ During early colonial contact Aboriginal people seem to have chosen to trade red ochre samples only rarely with white people.⁵⁰ The special nature of Aboriginal quarries, which are often associated with ceremony and sometimes restricted to initiated men of a

⁴³ Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 348.

⁴⁴ John Clarke, 'Two Aboriginal Rock Art Pigments from Western Australia: Their Properties, Use, and Durability', *Studies in Conservation*, 21:3 (1976), 134–42 (p. 134); Scadding, Winton, and Brown, 310.

⁴⁵ Scadding, Winton, and Brown, 301.

⁴⁶ 'Western Australia at the Great Exhibition', *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, Wednesday 20 August 1862, 3.

⁴⁷ Hardman, *Report on the Geology ...*, 4, 22.

⁴⁸ See, for example, E. Clement, *Ethnographical Notes on the Western-Australian Aborigines* (Leiden: Brill, 1903), 7, 20; British Museum registration slips for Oc1898,1011.14.a–b and Oc1898,1011.15.a–b; an old NMI label calls the ochres donated by Dowley 'war paint'.

⁴⁹ Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 337.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 337.

certain status and responsibility, probably also meant that Europeans found it difficult to visit such places and witness miners at work there.



Figure 18: Bottles of red and yellow ochres acquired by Emile Clement in the north-west

Unidentified makers; collected from the Sherlock River; donated by Emile Clement in 1898.

BM, Oc1898,1011.15.a (left) and Oc1898,1011.14.a (right). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Some Aboriginal miners presumably worked with metal tools acquired from settlers, but others used and adapted existing technologies and objects. In the Pilbara, some adults and children panned for alluvial metals with the *yandy*, a multi-purpose shallow wooden dish used widely across Australia and often referred to generically as a *coolamon* (Figure 19).⁵¹ In 1906 approximately 300 Aboriginal people were panning at Nullagine for alluvial gold (discovered in 1886) and tin (discovered in 1892), which they sold to a

⁵¹ Scambray, 49.

storekeeper 'for flour, tea and sugar'.⁵² One settler described 'yandying' at the tinfields around Marble Bar in 1914:

This is done by means of a 'dug-out' oval-shaped wooden dish called a yandy. It is deep, light, and of exquisite workmanship. The material from which it is made is found in globe-shaped excrescences so often seen on the trunks and boughs of our Australian trees. ... The inimitable and delicate manipulation of this simple device by the blackwoman enables her, in defiance apparently of the law of gravitation, to shake the heaviest of the metals to the surface.⁵³

Women seem to have been particularly skilled in this work, which Sarah Holcombe suggests stemmed from their greater experience in using such vessels to winnow seeds.⁵⁴ In 1908 a settler noted that Aboriginal miners around Marble Bar 'can "yandi" tin where a white man would fail to save but the merest fraction; even the children are experts at it'.⁵⁵ Yandying continued well into the twentieth century, with galvanised metal dishes helping to support impoverished strikers during the Pilbara Strike (1946–1949).⁵⁶ Yet despite their effectiveness, and some settlers' interest in their use, none of the shallow vessels in British and Irish museums appear to have been explicitly identified by collectors as potentially used in mining.

⁵² Sarah Holcombe, 'Indigenous Organisations and Mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: Lessons from a Historical Perspective', *Aboriginal History*, 29 (2005), 107–35 (p. 110).

⁵³ 'The Nor'-West Proper', *Sunday Times*, Sunday 18 January 1914, 11.

⁵⁴ Holcombe, 111. 'The Nor'-West Proper'.

⁵⁵ 'I.O.O.F.', *The Evening Star*, Friday 3 January 1908, 3.

⁵⁶ Scambary, 53.



Figure 19: 'Yandying for Tin at Moolyella'

Historical photograph of unknown people taken by Ernest Lund Mitchell c. 1920. Moolyella is near Marble Bar, in the Pilbara.

State Library of Western Australia, 042186PD.

The kind of dishes suitable for yandying were multi-purpose tools, and not all would have been used in mining. Hardly any collectors seem to have linked such vessels with panning. A notable exception is Matthew McVickar Smyth, a sales consultant for Nobel Explosives (used widely in mining and agriculture) who travelled to Western Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He acquired some 'wooden scoops with which the natives "yandi" alluvial tin', and displayed them at his private museum in Perth, Western Australia.⁵⁷ Contemporary accounts and photographs of this museum show that it was dominated by geological specimens and Aboriginal objects, although the current whereabouts of the latter is not known.⁵⁸ Andrea Witcomb and Alistair Paterson suggest that they:

⁵⁷ 'Mineral Museum', *The Daily News*, Wednesday 27 April 1927, 4. For analysis of McVickar Smyth's museum see Andrea Witcomb and Alistair Paterson, 'Collections Without End'.

⁵⁸ Witcomb and Paterson, 'Collections Without End', 101, 105.

offered a contrast to the mineral collection that embodied not only the future of the state, but also the might of the technology offered by Nobel Explosives. Implicit in the way these objects were displayed and discussed is the idea that 'curios' were not part of the future.⁵⁹

In highlighting the use of the wooden scoops in yandying, McVickar Smyth could frame them as interesting counterpoints to settler mining work. The mining men giving and selling collections to British and Irish ethnographic museums did not follow his approach. The few *yandy*-like vessels entering these museums were recorded as carriers of water, food or babies, and not panning tools. Of the collectors considered here, only Clement is known to have collected the kind of vessels that could conceivably have been used in panning, although he did not allude to this when transacting them with museums. In 1896, for example, he sold a 'yandi' to the British Museum, but classed it as a 'water carrying' vessel rather than an item potentially linked to mining work.⁶⁰

For the most part, the collectors considered here were seemingly uninterested in Aboriginal mining processes. Some photographs, taken by Clement near Towranna and acquired by some of his museum clients, hint at why. Two depict men and women wearing body paint (likely ochre) and ornaments, outside a bough shelter.⁶¹ Ian Coates highlights the omissions in these images: the absence of anything (except some clothing) that 'refers to the existence of a relationship between Europeans and Aborigines' and the careful avoidance of 'all visual reference to goldmining ... despite the fact that it was a dominant feature of the Towranna landscape and the very reason for Clement's presence there'.⁶² In the photographs, he argues, Clement cultivated 'an "ethnographic" representation of his subjects, situating them in a manner designed to maximise their spatial and temporal remoteness from Europeans'.⁶³ This appealed to the racialised expectations of his museum clients and emphasised Clement's own credentials as a scholar and collector,

⁵⁹ Ibid, 103.

⁶⁰ BM, Oc1896,-.1027

⁶¹ Ian Coates, 'Golden Reflections: Artists, Entrepreneurs and Aborigines on the North-West Australian Goldfields' in *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, ed. Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 164–78 (p. 170).

⁶² Ibid, 170.

⁶³ Ibid, 170.

not as a mining worker. In a similar way other mining workers could have downplayed overt signs of Aboriginal and European mining activity in order to enhance their personal prestige and their collections' perceived value. Other collectors considered in this thesis, like Frederick Broome, also favoured Aboriginal objects that were not obviously syncretic. Perhaps they favoured an idea of 'authentic' Aboriginality over evidence that Aboriginal people engaged dynamically with the world around them. The case of mining collectors, however, suggests that this favouring of objects supposedly denoting 'pre-contact' Aboriginal cultures was not unrelated to collectors' concerns about their own social status.

Breaking and remaking the telegraph



Figure 20: Ceramic and chalcedony spear points 'from the natives of the Kimberley Goldfields' acquired by William Mansbridge

These delicately flaked points are thought to have been made in or near the Kimberley. Two are made from chalcedony, which is found widely in Australia. The others are made from a ceramic telegraph insulator, with tiny strips of the original glaze still visible. In Western Australia some points were used as knives or fixed to spear shafts for use in hunting, punishment and fighting; others were never used as practical tools. These four may fall into the latter category as, barring one damaged after entering the British Museum, their edges remain in fairly good condition.

Two ceramic (left) and two chalcedony (right) spear points. Unknown maker; donated by W. O. Mansbridge to the British Museum in 1898.

Left to Right: BM, Oc1898,0519.4, Oc1898,0519.5, Oc1898,0519.3 and Oc1898,0519.6. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The periods of intensive settler gold mining in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Murchison districts 'paralleled the escalating conflict between Aboriginal peoples and settlers'.⁶⁴ Collectors were often attracted by Aboriginal objects

⁶⁴ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 213.

that did not seem to explicitly engage with settler products and techniques. However, some also acquired items that were overtly linked to attacks on settler infrastructure. In this section, I will explore what the creation and collection of ceramic spear points made from repurposed telegraph insulators indicates about Aboriginal and settler communities' perceptions of each other and their objects.⁶⁵

During the nineteenth century, the electrical telegraph (first used commercially in 1837) was introduced rapidly across the world. Telegraph networks were an effective way for colonists to transmit messages across long distances, and became targets for vandalism and sabotage.⁶⁶ Those who damaged the telegraph did so for varied reasons. During the American Civil War some lines were cut in order to disrupt enemy communications, but some Great Plains warriors also used telegraph poles to make *travois* (a type of sledge) for carrying their dead and wounded.⁶⁷ When indigenous peoples attacked lines in colonial settings, their motivations were often interpreted simplistically. An 1879 article remarked that 'the telegraph line has very often had to suffer from the thievish propensities of natives', citing the theft of wire and solder in order to make weapons and tools in China, India and the Nubian Desert.⁶⁸ In Australia, colonists often portrayed Aboriginal attacks upon telegraph lines as stemming from a desire to use its supposedly superior components in their weapons.⁶⁹ However, as with the bracelet collected by Mary Barker (see Chapter Four), the creation of such objects could result from much more complex motives.

Points are amongst the most frequently found Aboriginal objects in British and Irish museum collections. They come in different shapes and sizes, and in a range of materials, including stone, quartz, glass, metal or

⁶⁵ 'Porcelain' and 'ceramic' seem to have been used interchangeably to describe this insulator material, but the term ceramics shall be used here for purposes of consistency.

⁶⁶ 'Haps and Mishaps of Land Telegraph Lines', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts, January 1854 to November 1897*, 810 (London: W. & R. Chambers, 1897), 427–30 (pp. 427–29).

⁶⁷ James Schwoch, *Wired into Nature: The Telegraph and the North American Frontier* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

⁶⁸ 'Haps and Mishaps ...', 428.

⁶⁹ Although British and Irish collections feature weapons made using insulator ceramics, this was not the only use to which the material was put. In 1901 a newspaper stated that 'aboriginal mothers climbed the telegraph posts to obtain the insulators which were much sought after for piccaninnies cutting their teeth'. 'Acta Diurna', *West Australian Sunday Times*, Sunday 20 January 1901, 1.

ceramics. Points were often used as spear tips, but many of the examples now in British and Irish museums were probably collected without having been used functionally in hunting. In 1936 the missionary J.R.B. Love wondered at the care with which Worora men made them, because ‘all this highly skilled labour is for one throw of the spear! The stone points are very brittle and consequently break when thrown, unless the spear should pierce a soft part of a beast ... The wonder is that such care is lavished on an article destined to have such a short life’.⁷⁰ Love’s interest centred on stone points, however more recent scholarly interest has focused on the production of points made with glass introduced after colonisation began. Rodney Harrison argues that glass Kimberley points ‘are items that were made largely for the consumption of the colonial “West”, as skeuomorphic “copies” of stone artefacts in glass’, although Kim Akerman and others have challenged the view that they were made largely to attract white collectors.⁷¹ Harrison’s call for scholars to reflect on objects’ material qualities, and particularly to avoid seeing raw materials as simple ‘substitutes’ for one another, forms an important backdrop to this section.

Glass, metal and ceramics were not usually found in Aboriginal material culture before British colonisation, although earlier contact with Asian and European traders meant that they were known about and used in some communities.⁷² Glass, metal and ceramics became much more widely available in Western Australia after colonisation began. Some Aboriginal people used them to create objects, often tools and weapons, that also utilised ‘traditional’ techniques or materials like wood and resin. A wish to obtain ‘new’ materials could help to foster positive intercultural transactions, although it could also cause tensions, as the case of Ernest Gribble’s emptied oil drum (see Chapter Four) demonstrates. Settlers did not consistently associate the use of metal and glass as evidence of physical conflict between Aboriginal people and settlers. Hardman alluded to moral and cultural

⁷⁰ J.R.B. Love, *Kimberley People: Stone Age Bushmen of Today*, additional text by David M. Welch (Virginia: D.M. Welch, 2009), 95.

⁷¹ Rodney Harrison, ‘“The Magical Virtue of These Sharp Things”: Colonialism, Mimesis and Knapped Bottle Glass Artefacts in Australia’, *Journal of Material Culture*, 8:3 (2003), 311–36 (p. 326); Akerman, ‘Discussion’, 133.

⁷² See Ian McIntosh, ‘The Iron Furnace of Birrinydji’, in *Mining and Indigenous Lifeworlds in Australia and Papua New Guinea*, ed. Alan Rumsey and James Weiner (Wantage: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2004), 12–30; Peter Grave and Ian J. McNiven, ‘Geochemical Provenience of 16th–19th Century C.E. Asian Ceramics from Torres Strait, Northeast Australia’, *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 40 (2013), 4538–51.

conflicts when describing the transformation of brandy-bottles into spearheads (see Chapter Three) but did not suggest that the glass itself was violently obtained.⁷³ The availability of bottles in many new settler communities meant that some Aboriginal people could obtain glass without conflict ensuing. The sourcing of ceramics, however, was a more overtly contentious issue.

Several of the mining workers' collections contain ceramic points.⁷⁴ Dowley's contains one made in the Kimberley district from a telegraph insulator, and Mansbridge's two 'made from telegraph insulators' (Figure 20).⁷⁵ Not everyone could or wished to acquire these objects. Hardman collected 25 'spear-heads' made from stone, rock crystal, iron, broken glass bottles and kangaroo teeth, but none from ceramics.⁷⁶ This likely stems from lack of opportunity, for he often visited places where telegraph lines were not yet built. No ceramic points have been identified amongst Clement's museum transactions between 1896 and 1901, although he referred to them in a 1903 paper, as did Carnegie in *Spinifex and Sand*.⁷⁷ Scholarship on Aboriginal points has focused on stone or glass ones, with comparatively little attention devoted to ceramic examples.⁷⁸ Yet although ceramic points in collections are outnumbered by those of stone or glass, they hold a distinctive significance.

In many newly established colonial settlements, settlers and Aboriginal people would have found ceramics far less readily available than glass. Prospectors and other early mining workers likely preferred lighter and sturdier tin or enamel vessels for their tableware, although as settlements

⁷³ Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', 61.

⁷⁴ It is possible that Hooper offered some to the British Museum. In a letter to curator Hermann Braunholtz, Hooper referred to having five 'arrow-heads', although he did not specify what these were made out of. Edward Hooper to H. J. Braunholtz, 1932. Correspondence file, BM AOA.

⁷⁵ NMI, AE:1892.730; BM Oc1898,0519.4–5.

⁷⁶ Hardman speculated that the kangaroo teeth were 'probably used in fishing, as they appear to have been attached to the shafts of spears' or used as ornaments. Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', 62.

⁷⁷ Clement, *Ethnographical Notes* ..., 5; Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 340.

⁷⁸ For further discussion, see Akerman, Fullagar, and van Gijn; Akerman, 'Discussion'; Rodney Harrison, 'Kimberley Points and Colonial Preference: New Insights into the Chronology of Pressure Flaked Point Forms from the Southeast Kimberley, Western Australia', *Archaeology in Oceania* 39:1 (2004), 1–11; Rodney Harrison, 'Archaeology and the Colonial Encounter: Kimberley Spear Points, Cultural Identity, and Masculinity in the North of Australia', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2:3 (2002), 352–77; Harrison, 'An Artefact of Colonial Desire?'; Paterson and Veth, 'The Point of Pearling'.

grew more ceramics would have arrived for domestic use or as parts of settler infrastructure projects. Because most ceramics resist electrical current, they were used in railway lines, streetlights and the telegraph network. Ceramic or glass insulators helped telegraph lines to work effectively, and breakages made the network significantly more difficult to operate.⁷⁹ Those building new lines sometimes abandoned broken insulators or exchanged them with Aboriginal people, however once set atop telegraph poles the unbroken insulators could also be dislodged by well-aimed stones.⁸⁰ Non-Aboriginal people, climactic conditions, and ineffective materials or installation practices also damaged the telegraph, yet settlers frequently blamed breakages on Aboriginal people.⁸¹ During the late nineteenth century, these real or imagined Aboriginal attacks became a source of significant settler frustration.

In 1869, Western Australia got its first electrical telegraph connection (between Perth and Fremantle), and over the 1870s and 1880s new lines were built between settlements including the Coolgardie goldfields and sites in the Murchison and Kimberley districts. The telegraph line extended across regions over which settlers had limited control, and insulator breaking became a recurrent problem in some places. In 1893 a police patrol returned to the Kimberley town of Wyndham with four Aboriginal prisoners 'accused of cutting Telegraph wires'.⁸² As evidence, the patrol retrieved around thirty insulators, a hundred yards of new wire, and 'a number of new spears which had been tipped with telegraph wire'.⁸³ The prisoners were sentenced to twenty five lashes each.⁸⁴ As it turned out, some Aboriginal people continued to cut lines and break insulators, and settler accounts often refer to spearheads being made from the pieces. In 1891 Dowley met Aboriginal prisoners suspected of damaging the line to Wyndham. An unidentified observer claimed that their possessions confirmed their guilt:

⁷⁹ Glass worked as well as porcelain, but I am aware of no points in British and Irish collections that have been identified as coming from a glass telegraph insulator. Collectors probably did not associate glass so closely with the telegraph line. See Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 126; 'Wyndham Notes', *The West Australian*, Friday 2 June 1893, 6.

⁸⁰ Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 126.

⁸¹ Chris Owen, "'Weather Hot, Flies Troublesome...': Police in the Kimberley District of Western Australia 1882–1901 (PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 2013), 260.

⁸² 'Northern News', *Southern Times*, Wednesday 17 May 1893, 1.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

The man and the two youths admitted the charge — a charge which was irrefutable as they possessed spearheads fashioned out of the telegraph insulators. After being cautioned and duly warned of the consequences of a repetition of the offence, they were told to prepare to return to their own country.⁸⁵

Dowley seems to have decided against further punishing the three (who had already been chained up and forced to go to Halls Creek along with other men, women and children Dowley deemed innocent of the offence) because he saw them as ignorant of settler law. Anger at damage to telegraph lines, however, meant that some settlers sought to circumvent the law. In 1890 one complained that telegraph wires and insulators were broken 'as fast as they are put up', and criticised the law that Aboriginal suspects must be captured and charged before punishment as 'absurd in the extreme'.⁸⁶ In 1893 another complained that Aboriginal people had broken at least 100 insulators between Denham Camp and Hell's Gate in the north, and that the remnants 'stand on the summits of the poles as a memorial of misfortune and misapplied energy'.⁸⁷ Broken bottles were placed along some lines in central and north-west Australia, in the hope that these would be taken instead of the more valuable insulators.⁸⁸

The breaking of telegraph insulators and subsequent obstruction of local and international communication represented an overt failure of colonial control. Conversely, it also speaks to Aboriginal agency in response to colonisation. These tensions did not stop some collectors from acquiring objects made from the damaged parts. In several mining workers' collections, points are explicitly recorded as being made from broken insulators. Some were described positively, with one police trooper observing in the late nineteenth century that some were 'works of art'.⁸⁹ In 1898 British Museum curator Charles Hercules Read told David Carnegie that 'I have just got some beautiful insulator and glass spear heads', possibly referring to the six

⁸⁵ 'Notes of Travels in the Far North of West Australia', *The W.A. Record*, Thursday 21 May 1891, 7.

⁸⁶ 'Kimberley Notes', *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, Wednesday 7 May 1890, 3.

⁸⁷ 'Wyndham Notes'.

⁸⁸ Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 126.

⁸⁹ 'Goldfields of the North', *The Daily News*, Thursday 29 August 1929, 6.

donated by Mansbridge.⁹⁰ And in 1903, Pitt Rivers Museum curator Henry Balfour noted that 'the spear heads made with such skill by natives of N.W. Australia from broken glass bottles, telegraph insulators, and the like, have long been familiar objects in museums and private collections, and need no description here'.⁹¹ Many accounts implied that Aboriginal peoples' main motive for damaging the telegraph was to manufacture spearheads. Clement noted that the 'insulators form splendid material for Spear-heads, as the Blacks have found out long ago, and it is not uncommon that these are knocked off the poles by them and thus interrupt communication'.⁹² This perception is in keeping with a general trend to portray settler products as evidently superior to those used before colonial contact. Yet insulator breaking was not only a strategy to obtain a functionally useful material.

The telegraph, a visible expression of colonial power, held practical and symbolic value for often isolated settlers. Some Aboriginal people presumably recognised that it was a significant means of connection between colonists and their families, friends and colleagues elsewhere. They may also have seen it as a physical intrusion that disturbed culturally significant landscapes. Deliberate insulator-breaking might thus be an act of anticolonial resistance even if Europeans did not recognise it as such. Whilst insulator ceramics were light and sharp, the desire to use them to make points could have involved more than simply functional motives. In 1936 Reverend Love wrote that most Worora men he knew 'still carry half a dozen stone-headed spears, making a handsome display with them', despite now turning to iron-headed spears for general use.⁹³ White ceramics look similar to white quartz, which was also used to make points. It is possible that Aboriginal makers saw insulator ceramics not as inherently superior to quartz, but as more easily obtained or of value in other ways. Collectors like Mansbridge and Dowley, who acquired white ceramic and quartz points, also seem to have recognised the visual similarities between these materials.

⁹⁰ Charles Hercules Read to David Wynford Carnegie, 17 May 1898. Correspondence file, BM AOA.

⁹¹ H.R. Balfour, 'On the Methods Employed by the Natives of N.W. Australia in the Manufacture of Glass Spearheads', *Man*, 1:5 (1903), 65.

⁹² Clement, *Ethnographical Notes* ..., 5.

⁹³ Love, *Kimberley People*, 106.

Telegraph lines evidently accrued different kinds of symbolic and practical value to the peoples living near them. Their insulators initially belonged within a key colonial power structure, and when broken and reworked into points moved into new Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contexts. They gained value in new ways, although their original association with the telegraph did not necessarily become insignificant. Some points seem to have been deliberately created as trade objects to capitalise on European collectors' interest. Therefore, whilst they are often associated with damage to telegraph networks, we cannot interpret their creation as simply stemming from the desire for a functional material. Whilst the potential significance of glass in making points has received significant scholarly attention, further consultation with Traditional Custodians and communities has the potential to deepen understandings about the special significance of ceramics to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal owners of points.

Intersections between professional and collecting practices

Ian Coates has rightly pointed out that narrowly categorising collectors according to their profession is not helpful when trying to understand their actions.⁹⁴ However, this chapter argues that following a broader and more flexible theme like 'mining work' across collections offer fresh approaches to how we think about objects and the people who made, used and owned them. Alistair Paterson and Andrea Witcomb have pointed out that large-scale collecting by private entrepreneurs and state actors often took place in parts of Western Australia 'driven by extractive economic industries with extensive internal frontiers'.⁹⁵ Following this theme enables underlying connections to be traced between diverse people, materials and parts of Western Australia.

European miners were often drawn to the same places as ethnographic scholars: regions where permanent colonial settlements were relatively new or small in scale. This 'remoteness' promised untapped riches, be it in terms of geological material or human research subjects. Few mining workers left detailed records about their contact with Aboriginal people and material culture, but some, notably Clement, Hardman and Campbell, tried to

⁹⁴ Coates, *Lists and Letters*, 140.

⁹⁵ Paterson and Witcomb, "Nature's Marvels", 23–24.

combine both strands of work. At some point before 1904, for example, Campbell collected three ceremonial boards made by Aboriginal associates in the Goldfields-Esperance region.⁹⁶ These items' function and meaning was still little-known to whites, although some non-Aboriginal collectors had previously taken ceremonial boards from Aboriginal communities.⁹⁷ Unusually, Campbell witnessed the three items being made, and whilst they are not thought to have ended up in Britain or Ireland, Campbell's description of the acquisition process reveal how his mining work seems to have helped to make complex intercultural negotiations possible.

In 1904, Campbell's paper on the 'dancing boards' of Western Australia was read before the Royal Society of Tasmania.⁹⁸ According to his account, local associates agreed to make him three boards at his survey camp at Boulder, near Kalgoorlie. Campbell noted that he 'had gained their confidence during three years' residence on these goldfields, otherwise it would not have been possible to induce them to make them'.⁹⁹ Their creation was to some extent collaborative, as Campbell supplied them with jarrah wood, and agreed to the men's 'request' to make and retain a fourth board.¹⁰⁰ The existence of this fourth object pleased Campbell, who compared it with the other three to confirm 'the faithfulness of their work'.¹⁰¹ The men possibly intended Campbell's provision of the wood to function not simply as 'payment', but a way of integrating him into the process of creating the boards. Jason Gibson, specifically discussing central Australia, highlighted that:

the presence of 'observers' to secret rituals was unlikely to have existed prior to settlers, and the trading of religious objects with new and entirely disconnected people was a relatively new phenomenon

⁹⁶ See W.D. Campbell, *Aboriginal Carvings, Port Jackson and Broken Bay, 1893–1896* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1899); W.D. Campbell, 'Native Dancing Boards', *The Antiquarian Gazette*, 1:2 (1908), 86–88; Campbell, 'The Need for an Ethnological Survey ...'; W.D. Campbell, 'An Account of the Aborigines of Sunday Island, King Sound, Kimberley, Western Australia', *Royal Society of Western Australia Journal*, 1 (1914), 55–82; Campbell, 'A Description of Certain Phallic Articles ...'.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 348–49.

⁹⁸ Due to a secretarial error, this was not published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, but was reproduced in 'West Australian Natives', *The W.A. Record*, Saturday 2 September 1905, 6. In 1910 Campbell rewrote the paper, which was published in 1911 as Campbell, 'The Need for an Ethnological Survey ...'.

⁹⁹ Campbell, 'West Australian Natives', 6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 6.

that obviously required cultural translation. Individuals who showed sincere interest in ritual and ceremony, in 'Law,' were being accommodated to some degree in order to legitimate their interactions.¹⁰²

As part of their agreement, the men sought to exert some control over the boards' use and future treatment. Campbell had to promise not to publish drawings of the items within Western Australia, although their publication outside of the state was reportedly seen as acceptable.¹⁰³ This agreement was kept at first, and when in 1905 Campbell's paper was published in *The Tasmanian Mail* and *The W.A. Record*, images were only included in the former publication.¹⁰⁴ In 1911 and 1914, however, drawings and photographs were published in the *Journal of the Natural History and Science Society of Western Australia*.¹⁰⁵ Campbell also asked the men to perform a ceremonial dance associated with the boards, however was:

unable to induce the aboriginals to produce their own articles of attire for the purpose of photographing them in dancing array, but after he [Campbell] had acquired the necessary articles some of them decorated themselves specially with them and exhibited several times the style of the dance.¹⁰⁶

The men's refusal to wear their own 'dancing array' presumably reflected a reluctance to reveal sensitive objects or knowledge to an outsider. Perhaps those who finally danced were swayed by the fact that they were using ornaments provided by Campbell, perhaps ones that they deemed 'inauthentic'. The men likely decided not to show highly sensitive content in their performance, for even Campbell himself felt that they 'would not fully divulge their [the boards'] meaning'.¹⁰⁷ This episode reveals how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people might negotiate concerns over the 'authenticity' of objects and information. It indicates that some European and Aboriginal

¹⁰² Gibson, *Ceremony Men*, 69

¹⁰³ Campbell, 'West Australian Natives', 6.

¹⁰⁴ 'The Aboriginal Dancing Boards of Western Australia', *The Tasmanian Mail*, Saturday 12 August 1905, 19, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Campbell, 'The Need for an Ethnological Survey ...', Plate 3; and W.D. Campbell, *Journal of the Natural History and Science Society of Western Australia*, 5 (1914), Plates 12–15.

¹⁰⁶ Campbell, 'West Australian Natives', 6.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 6.

people negotiated the transfer of objects in ways that left both reasonably satisfied, although it is important to remember that we only have Campbell's word for this, and that the men's conditions on publication were apparently not long honoured. Tension existed between the Aboriginal men's requirements and Campbell's willingness and ability to honour them, as his efforts to build trust over three years of geological work ran up against the need to publish his findings promptly in order to fulfil scholarly expectations.

The mining workers named in relation to the diverse collections in Britain and Ireland do share some commonalities. Many newcomers to Western Australia's goldfields were migrants from the eastern Australian colonies, and others came from even further afield.¹⁰⁸ However, those migrants did not generally send material to British or Irish museums. The 'field' collectors considered in this chapter were all closely connected with Britain and Ireland, often through birth, and were not representative of settler populations in most mining regions. Although some, like Carnegie, undoubtedly did backbreaking labour in unpleasant and dangerous conditions, they were all relatively privileged and well-resourced members of colonial society. They are also all male. Two wives, Louisa Hardman and Helen Kerr, were involved in transferring their husbands' collections to museums, but I have found no evidence that they travelled to Western Australia. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries settler men significantly outnumbered settler women across Western Australia.¹⁰⁹ Imbalances could be particularly acute outside of metropolitan areas: in 1891 just 10% of non-Aboriginal people living in the Kimberley goldfields were women and girls, compared with 48% in Perth.¹¹⁰ Given the peripatetic nature of certain forms of mining work like prospecting, mining workers were probably more likely than average to travel to Western Australia without female relatives. Despite this, miners' wives and daughters, nurses, and other

¹⁰⁸ David J. Gilchrist, 'Antipodean Owenite or Colonial Socialist: Charles Harper, Economic Development, and Agricultural Co-operation in Western Australia, 1890 to Development, and Agricultural Co-operation in Western Australia, 1890 to 1910' (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame Australia, 2015), 15.

¹⁰⁹ 'Historical Population', *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, Released 18 April 2019, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/historical-population/latest-release>> [accessed 16 April 2021].

¹¹⁰ Toby Burrows, 'Western Australian Colonial Census 1892 Processed Data', *University of Western Australia*, 2 April 2014, <<https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/en/datasets/western-australian-colonial-census-1892-processed-data>> [accessed 16 April 2021], 19.

women were present even during the tough early years of mining enterprises.¹¹¹ In 1895 a visitor to Coolgardie (a township established three years beforehand) remarked on its crowds of 'well-dressed people, including many women' (implied to be settler-colonists).¹¹² Women were not absent from mining districts, but the lack of collections associated with them suggests that they faced greater challenges in collecting or in being acknowledged as collectors.

Historically, the work of Aboriginal and settler women has been marginalised in Western Australia's mining histories. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, regulatory legislation and customary practice heavily restricted women's direct involvement in the Australian mining industry.¹¹³ Aboriginal women did perform surface work like tin and gold panning, although Europeans did not always consider surface mining to be mining activity. A few settler women were also leaseholders or did clerical work in mine offices. Women's involvement with the collections formed by the mining men whom I have discussed also warrants further exploration. Several collectors' wives, including Willamina Christie and Annie Mansbridge, lived with their husbands in Australia. Whereas the male collectors' professional roles, which often involved travel, seem to have aided their collecting, their wives are not recorded as having personally collected Aboriginal objects. They would nonetheless have interacted with objects in varied ways, through seeing, touching, cleaning, talking or writing about them. For Louisa Hardman and Helen Kerr, who organised the transfers of material gathered by absent or deceased husbands, this might have proven a particularly emotive exercise. The voices of the unnamed Aboriginal women who made, used or in other ways connected with the objects remain even harder to parse. Despite collectors' lack of overt written engagement with *yandying*, a form of work particularly associated with Aboriginal women, the presence of shallow

¹¹¹ Dorothy Erickson, 'Cinderella's Jewellery: The Gold-Rush Brooches of Western Australia', in *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, ed. Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 316–25 (p. 317). Also see Claire Wright, *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2013), a study of the Ballarat goldfields in Victoria in 1854.

¹¹² Julius M. Price, *The Land of Gold: The Narrative of a Journey Through the West Australian Goldfields in the Autumn of 1895*, Facsimile of 3rd edition of 1896 (Western Australia: Hesperian Press, 1981), 157.

¹¹³ Lenore Layman, 'Mining', *The Encyclopedia of Women & Leadership in Australia* <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0382b.htm>> [accessed online 22 January 2021].

dishes, as with the presence of ochres, suggest a range of other mining stories that could be drawn out about the material now in British and Irish museums.

Conclusions

The absence of material overtly linked to Aboriginal mining in these collections stems from multiple factors. Aboriginal ochre and stone mining operations are significant cultural sites, and like Wilgie Mia and Little Wilgie they have associated rituals or restrictions over who can enter them, when and how. Daisy Bates claimed that in the early 1900s Yamatji man Jaal (see Chapter Seven) gave her a flint initiation knife from 'Maiamba', 'a secret and sacred place visited only by the older men', and made her the heir to 'this shrine'.¹¹⁴ Yet Aboriginal people might withhold knowledge from settlers about where their quarries lay. Geographical and cultural factors often helped Aboriginal quarries to escape Europeans' gaze. Yet many collectors themselves, I argue, were also reluctant to engage with Aboriginal mining material. This reluctance correlates with wider discourse about Aboriginal culture, and a common tendency to seek 'authentic' objects lacking overt traces of engagement with colonial industries. There was a general trend in ethnographic collecting to exoticize Aboriginal people and set them apart as primitive and of the past rather than the present, even less the future. However, the special cultural importance of mining to settlers in Western Australia may also come into play. Mining was a key driver of Western Australia's economic development and population explosion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It also bolstered settler confidence and assertiveness when negotiating Western Australia's changing political relationships with Britain and the other Australian colonies (after 1901, states). Settlers frequently perceived mining as an essential part of Western Australia's purportedly bright, and white, future. This created tension when it came to depicting mining work done by Aboriginal people, who were commonly portrayed as a curious but fading remnant of the colony's past.

¹¹⁴ Bates added that Jaal promised to take her to the mine 'but soon after this episode, he was taken to Bernier Island'. Bates, 'My Natives and I. No. 19', 27. Robin Barrington discusses this episode and the mining industry's impacts on Jaal and his family in 'Who Was "Big George"?'.

Despite their apparent reluctance to engage with the topic of Aboriginal quarrying or panning, perhaps because they did not deem it to be 'proper' mining, collectors did not downplay all types of material engagement between Aboriginal people and settlers. Points made from ceramic telegraph insulators were perhaps easier to incorporate into racial ideologies. Some collectors may have seen these as symbols not of resistance to colonial culture, but as signs of its supposed superiority and eventual dominance. In Britain and Australia, the telegraph line was often represented as both a symbol and a vehicle of colonial dominance, modernity and 'progress'. This may help to explain why colonists were so keen to portray attacks upon the telegraph as motivated by a 'simple' desire for settler products. Such interpretations contained the more troubling implications of such incidents, framing indigenous perpetrators as opportunistic thieves motivated by the superior quality of settler products, rather than as saboteurs. Complicating matters further, though, these objects were not universally framed as evidence of cultural conflict and racial hierarchies. Rodney Harrison notes that white antiquarians often called Kimberley points 'beautiful objects', and emphasised their artistic rather than utilitarian qualities.¹¹⁵ Hardman emphasised not only their artistic but their functional brilliance, suggesting that glass versions evidenced cultural innovation and adaptability, rather than being items that should and would soon disappear. Whilst recent scholarship has focused specifically on glass artefacts, I have argued that the use of other 'settler' materials to make Aboriginal objects calls out for far more analysis.

Campbell's account of acquiring ceremonial boards also reveals some of the negotiations taking place over Aboriginal objects. Campbell highlighted an 1898 case when a police corporal 'found and seized' ceremonial boards.¹¹⁶ Aboriginal people persistently watched the local police station housing their stolen items, causing so much unease that a decision was made to send the boards away to the Perth Museum.¹¹⁷ Campbell expressed sympathy for the 'unfortunate' original owners, and in noting the bad feeling provoked by this incident he implicitly contrasted his own collecting approach.¹¹⁸ His overt willingness to negotiate with makers and secure contextual knowledge thus enhanced the perceived value of his own scholarship. Campbell portrayed his

¹¹⁵ Harrison, 'Archaeology and the Colonial Encounter', 364.

¹¹⁶ Campbell, 'West Australian Natives', 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 6.

informants as willing parties, yet many collectors did not register how their positions were colouring these transactions. For example, in 1897 an armed police corporal and tracker accompanied Alexander Morton, the curator of the Tasmanian Museum, as he entered a camp in the Murchison district and photographed and collected objects from Yamaji man Jaal (see Chapter Seven) and his family.¹¹⁹ Although Morton traded tobacco for information, objects and performances from Jaal and his family, as Robin Barrington comments, 'the metaphorical and technological links between colonisation, hunting, the gun and camera work are evident in Morton's collecting and photographic activities'.¹²⁰ Campbell acquired the boards on a more overtly equitable basis than had Morton, but their makers still expressed signs of discomfort.

The materials discussed illuminate important aspects of the relationships between Aboriginal people and settlers in mining regions. In particular, they reveal how diverse materials like ochre, *yandies*, 'dancing boards' and telegraph insulators acquired value, were used, repurposed and understood in complex ways as they moved through different hands. In this chapter I suggested that the mining workers who acquired Aboriginal objects perceived these objects' links with mining, if they saw it at all, as secondary in importance to their other uses. Some of the items discussed are linked to aspects of Aboriginal mining work, but there is no evidence that the collectors acknowledged these links. It is tempting to connect collecting with professional practice, and mining workers' acquisition of material with the interests and habits formed by their professional training and duties. However, any such interplay is complex. Several scholars have pointed out close links between European cultures of hunting and the collecting of indigenous material culture and Ancestral Remains.¹²¹ In her exploration of the thousands of Tasmanian stone tools acquired by Ernest Westlake in the early 1900s, Rebe Taylor reflected that 'collectors often mimicked the hunters whose artefacts they sought. They too became nomadic, they travelled far,

¹¹⁹ Barrington, 'Who was "Big George"?', 135–68.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 148.

¹²¹ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*; Simon J. Harrison, 'Skulls and Scientific Collecting in the Victorian Military: Keeping the Enemy Dead in British Frontier Warfare', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50:1 (2008), 285–303; John M. MacKenzie 'Collecting and the Trophy' in *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire*, ed. Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Ward (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 69–75.

camped out, brought home their quarry. They were protective of their territory'.¹²² But Taylor also noted that Westlake:

did not dig for stones, partly as he assumed there was no history to unearth, and partly as he had no need to – the artefacts lay on the surface in the thousands ... In this way Westlake's collecting was more like the Australian than the British collectors of his time. *They too were rapacious surface collectors* who shared Westlake's enthusiasm for going into the field [my emphasis].¹²³

Mining and collecting practices resist simplistic comparisons, as 'ethnographic' collectors' general lack of overt engagement with Aboriginal and European mining activity indicates. However, mining nonetheless offers a potentially fruitful lens through which to study colonial collections from Western Australia. As Taylor's words have suggested, the potential intersections between digging, mining and collecting are complex but rich.

¹²² Rebe Taylor, *Into the Heart of Tasmania: A Search for Human Antiquity* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2017), 26.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 25.

Chapter Six: Collections on a world stage (1900–1901)

Many collections from Western Australia were displayed at collectors' homes or at special meetings (as when David Carnegie spoke at the Anthropological Institute) before they entered a museum.¹ Transitioning from a private collection into a public museum usually meant that far more non-Aboriginal people would in theory now see them, however important exceptions to this pattern exist. This chapter discusses how some objects were displayed to large non-Aboriginal audiences *before* entering British or Irish museums, examining how Aboriginal material was used in Western Australia's state-sponsored displays at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 and the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901 (hereafter referred to as 'Paris 1900' and 'Glasgow 1901').² Aboriginal exhibits had a function to perform. In one commentator's words: 'wildflowers and native weapons, historical relics and photographs, *aid the beholder to appreciate what sort of land this is* [my emphasis]'.³ Western Australia's exhibition commissioners curated these (see Appendix Four) to promote an overarching narrative of settler dominance and Aboriginal obsolescence. To understand their strategies, however, it is important not only to consider the objects that were recognised as being 'Aboriginal', but other kinds of presence and absence throughout these events.

This chapter explores how some settlers used Aboriginal objects to depict Western Australia on the international arena. International exhibitions (also known as world or world's fairs, world expos and universal expositions) are a distinctive form of public event that developed during the nineteenth

¹ *The Athenaeum*, Saturday 26 March 1898, 410.

² Paris 1900 has received extensive scholarly attention. Key works in English include Richard D. Mandell, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967); Alexander C.T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siecle Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Also see Alexander C.T. Geppert, Jean Coffey and Tammy Lau, 'International Exhibitions, Expositions Universelles and World's Fairs, 1851–2005: A Bibliography' (Fresno: California State University, 2006). Glasgow 1901 has attracted less scholarly interest, and the major work is Perilla Kinchin and Juliet Kinchin (with contribution by Neil Baxter), *Glasgow's Great Exhibitions: 1888, 1901, 1911, 1938, 1988* (Wendlebury: White Cockade Publishing, 1988).

³ 'The Glasgow Exhibition', *Western Mail*, Saturday 17 August 1901, 47.

century.⁴ These ambitious events saw participating nations and colonies showcase their achievements through state-sponsored displays (this chapter's focus) and accompanying activities, which might include commercial 'concessions', scholarly congresses and sporting competitions.⁵ Some of the visitors who flocked to Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901 would have already seen Aboriginal objects displayed in public settings: in museum collections across Europe, or at special events like missionary exhibitions, educational lectures and even boomerang-throwing contests. Yet the international exhibition displays differed in important ways from these other contexts, and their deployment of Aboriginal objects illuminates wider settler strategies of disavowal.

As Emile Clement's success demonstrated, many curators were interested in acquiring Aboriginal objects, and by the turn of the century many British museums held ethnographic collections from Western Australia. Geography usually informed how these were displayed. Geographical displays were common; as were those that arranged items according to typological principles but still ultimately within differentiated regional contexts.⁶ In 1899 the British Museum housed a range of Aboriginal objects within cases devoted to 'Australia', situated within an overarching section devoted 'to the black races of the Pacific'.⁷ The use of typological approaches to organisation meant that individual objects from Western Australia were usually displayed alongside 'comparable' or 'equivalent' items from other

⁴ Important works on British and Australian international exhibitions (whether as hosts or participants) include Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Judith McKay, *Showing Off: Queensland at World Expositions 1862–1988* (Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press and the Queensland Museum, 2004); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Louise Douglas, 'Representing Colonial Australia at British, American and European International Exhibitions', *ReCollections: Journal of the National Museum of Australia*, 3:1 (March 2008), 13–32; Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011); *Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Richard Gillespie, Caroline Jordan and Elizabeth Willis (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008).

⁵ In this chapter the term 'participating nations and colonies' refers to a wide range of participants, including nations, formal colonies, 'dominions' (like Canada) and 'protectorates' (like Dahomey).

⁶ Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 66.

⁷ *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum* (London: Printed by order of the Trustees, 1899), 100.

places.⁸ Only a small minority of museums, notably the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, organised their displays with little reference to geography.⁹ However, no British or Irish museum displays appear to have included a case focusing solely on Western Australia or any single Australian colony, although the Torres Strait was the sole focus of two British Museum display cases in 1899.¹⁰ In contrast, displays at international exhibitions were usually designed to promote the products of an individual nation or colony.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Western Australian exhibition commissioners were tasked with promoting their colony's products and immigration potential. Inter-colonial rivalry at international exhibitions meant that their displays were structured very differently to the more geographically 'blended' displays found in many museums. Unlike in ethnographic museum displays, Aboriginal objects were also not the core focus of attention. The colonial officials preparing displays at the international exhibitions were not primarily concerned with increasing scientific knowledge or popular awareness about indigenous peoples. Aboriginal objects were framed as secondary to the 'main' exhibits at international exhibitions. Tracing the ways in which they were positioned in these events helps to show how colonial authorities used a wide range of material to promote specific narratives on a world stage.

The international exhibitions

International exhibitions were highly competitive spaces, in Graeme Davison's words 'the most important of the symbolic battlegrounds on which nations demonstrated their prowess and tested the strength of their rivals'.¹¹ Participating nations and colonies incurred significant expenses, so needed

⁸ In 1881, for example, Cases 72–74 in the British Museum's 'Ethnographical Room' contained 'hatchets of stone set in gum' (presumably *kodj*) alongside weapons and ornaments from other parts of Australia and the Torres Strait. *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum* (London: Printed by order of the Trustees, 1881), 108.

⁹ The University of Oxford agreed to continue donor Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers' general method of arrangement of objects at the Pitt Rivers Museum during his lifetime, and to make changes after that date only if 'the advance of knowledge' required it. Alison Petch, 'Weapons and "The Museum of Museums"', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 8 (1996), 11–22 (p. 13).

¹⁰ *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum* (1899), 100.

¹¹ Graeme Davison, 'Festivals of Nationhood: The International Exhibitions', in *Australian Cultural History*, ed. S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 158–77 (p. 158).

compelling reasons to do so: be it to raise their international profile, encourage trade or investment, or attract migrants. For most of the nineteenth century the international press mentioned Western Australian displays in passing, if at all. Lise Summers suggests that the colony's irregular exhibition participation before 1890 stemmed not simply from limited funds, but a 'reluctance to appear in a setting in which the colonists suspected they would be perceived as the "poor relations"'.¹² Western Australia did participate in a few exhibitions, although its limited contribution towards the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, held in London in 1851, was confined to products like timber and wheat.¹³ A more substantial display at the Great London Exposition (1862) included a large number of 'native weapons'.¹⁴ This was not unusual, as Aboriginal weapons (and, to a lesser extent, other objects) were often part of Australian colonies' displays at international exhibitions throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁵

This chapter concentrates on two large public displays organised by Western Australian settlers: their courts at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 and the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901. These displays were popular, and on the final afternoon of the Paris exhibition thousands of people reportedly thronged the Western Australian court.¹⁶ Before 1890, when Western Australia participated in international exhibitions it had promoted itself 'as a frontier society, and something of a hidden treasure, awaiting only

¹² Lise Summers, 'Hidden Treasure: Exhibiting Western Australia, 1860–90', in *Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Richard Gillespie, Caroline Jordan and Elizabeth Willis (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008), 5.1–5.15.

¹³ 'The Independent Journal', *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, Friday 1 August 1851, 2.

¹⁴ At least some were loaned by 'Captain Sanford', likely the former pastoralist and colonial official Captain Henry Ayshford Sanford (1822–1905). 'Western Australia at the Great Exhibition', *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, Friday 22 August 1862, 3.

¹⁵ See, for example, Emily Harris, 'Race and Australian National Identity at the 1866–67 Intercolonial Exhibition', in *Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Richard Gillespie, Caroline Jordan and Elizabeth Willis (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008), 3:1–3.16; Penelope Edmonds, '"We Think That This Subject of the Native Races Should be Thoroughly Gone Into at the Forthcoming Exhibition: The 1866–1867 Intercolonial Exhibition"', in *Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Richard Gillespie, Caroline Jordan and Elizabeth Willis (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008), 1–16.

¹⁶ 'Western Australia at the Paris Exhibition', *The Collie Miner*, Saturday 22 December 1900, 3.

the right entrepreneur to launch the colony'.¹⁷ An improving economy and greater political confidence (especially after responsible government was granted in 1890) led Western Australia to more proactively shape its international profile during the 1890s.¹⁸ Some settlers had criticised its performance at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) as too narrowly focused on jarrah timber.¹⁹ When in 1896 the colony was invited to participate in Paris 1900, its government planned an ambitious and more diverse display.

Western Australia at Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901

Decisions to participate in international exhibitions were politically and economically charged. The participating nations and colonies exhibited objects (and sometimes people) connected to their lands, which depending on the event were displayed in a collective space along with other participants, or in individual spaces dedicated to each exhibitor's own products (commonly referred to as a 'court'). Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901 happened during a time of momentous Australian political change, and Western Australia's courts were spaces where its settlers constructed an image of Western Australia and its supposed place in the world order.²⁰

Paris was already a globally acknowledged centre for international exhibitions when it held its fifth *exposition universelle* from April to November 1900 (the others occurred in 1855, 1867, 1878 and 1889).²¹ This exhibition extended across 108 hectares and attracted 50.8 million visitors over seven months, a record attendance figure not surpassed until 1967.²² One visitor declared that it must surely mark the outer limit of how large and complex an exhibition could be.²³ Scholars have often characterised Paris 1900 as a decisive turning point for international exhibitions, which subsequently

¹⁷ Summers, n.p.

¹⁸ However, Western Australia still did not participate or invest heavily in every international exhibition of the day. See 'Advertising the Colony', *The Daily News*, Saturday 21 January 1893, 2.

¹⁹ 'Parliament', *The Daily News*, Friday 15 September 1893, 3.

²⁰ The Bureau International des Expositions (founded in 1928) recognises Paris 1900 as an international exhibition, but not Glasgow 1901. However, Glasgow 1901's scope and scale compares with other recognised international exhibitions of the time, and contemporary reports portrayed it as one in name and reality.

²¹ Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 62.

²² *Ibid.*, 63.

²³ Cited in Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 98.

became more commercialised and less culturally ambitious.²⁴ Alexander Geppert suggests that its impact was more complex, but regardless it is clear that Paris 1900 was in many respects unprecedented in terms of size and ambition.²⁵

The 42 nations and 25 colonies participating in Paris 1900 could display items not only in their individual courts but in the main exhibition courts, where similar products from different places were grouped together in a manner not unlike some contemporary ethnographic museum displays.²⁶ These common spaces were spread across 18 sites, and challenged standard practices of exhibiting objects according to their national origin.²⁷ The complex classification system unexpectedly contributed to the exhibition's 'nationalization', however, as many participants chose not to exhibit in all the common spaces.²⁸ Western Australia focused on its own individual court amongst other colonial pavilions in the *Jardins du Trocadero*.²⁹ French organisers reserved half of the Trocadero exclusively for exhibiting French colonies, so Western Australia and other exhibitors struggled with limited space.³⁰ While Geppert argues that in practice the Trocadero pavilions formed part of the main exhibition courts and those of the European nations, they were also very visibly separate.³¹ Queensland refused to participate due to the limited space available; and Victoria objected to exhibiting itself as an outlying dependency.³² Western Australia invested heavily in its court (with total costs reaching £30,000) but had to fit everything into 6,700 square feet of indoor floorspace, and no outside space.³³ Whilst it was generally well received, some complained of the display's 'huckster shop appearance'.³⁴

²⁴ Mandell, xi; Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 64.

²⁵ Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 63–65.

²⁶ Ibid, 84.

²⁷ Ibid, 84–85.

²⁸ Ibid, 84–85.

²⁹ Ibid, 85–86. Not all the Trocadero exhibitors were colonies: Egypt, China and Japan had pavilions there too.

³⁰ Ibid, 86.

³¹ Ibid, 86.

³² 'Not Going to Paris', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, Thursday 17 November 1898, 5. 'Paris Exhibition', *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, Saturday 11 December 1897, 4.

³³ 'The Budget', *Western Mail*, Saturday 13 October 1900, 12; 'Paris Exhibition Commission', *Herald*, Wednesday 25 October 1899, 3.

³⁴ 'Westralian Exhibits', *Geraldton Advertiser*, Tuesday 8 January 1901, 3.

In July 1900, whilst the Paris exhibition was in full swing, Western Australia became the last Australian colony to vote for Federation. On 1 January 1901, it therefore joined the other five Australian colonies in the federated Commonwealth of Australia. Western Australia's exhibition commissioners, doubtless mindful that federation was likely, had already made some nods towards regional unity, setting up a reading room stocked with the major Australian journals next to their court.³⁵ As the only Australian colony officially participating in Paris 1900, they did not have to worry that visitors would be tempted away by rival Australian courts. Western Australia's court did not display products from other Australian colonies, but some observers felt that it nonetheless 'worthily upholds the honour of United Australia'.³⁶ The vaunting of Australian unity had other benefits. Henry Whittall Venn, president of Western Australia's exhibition commission for the Paris and Glasgow exhibitions, happily reported that their Parisian court had been able to capitalise upon the other colonies' absence: 'it put into the minds of the people that West Australia was Australia'.³⁷

After Paris, the next major international exhibition took place in Glasgow, the supposed 'second city of the British Empire'.³⁸ This exhibition was not intended to replicate the unprecedented scale of Paris 1900 but it proved very popular, attracting 11.5 million visitors over seven months. Western Australia's exhibition commissioners were keen to avoid a repeat of their cramped conditions in Paris.³⁹ This time, they secured a comfortable 7,000 square feet of space in the main Industrial Hall (neighbouring Canada's display, as was also the case in Paris), and a further 2,500 in the grounds where they displayed large timber exhibits.⁴⁰ The commission reused many Parisian exhibits, supplementing these with further shipments from Western Australia.⁴¹ They felt able to show the exhibits to better advantage in Glasgow, and the display was favourably reported in the press.⁴²

³⁵ 'Western Australia at the Paris Exhibition', *The West Australian*, Tuesday 13 November 1900, 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁷ 'The Paris Exhibition', *Western Mail*, Saturday 16 February 1901, 17.

³⁸ Kinchin and Kinchin, 56. The Pan-American Exposition, held in Buffalo, New York, also ran from May to November 1901, but lacked the more universal focus of Glasgow 1901.

³⁹ 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, Tuesday 19 August 1902, 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3. Reusing material was not unusual. For example, some Western Australian exhibits in Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901 had been exhibited at Coolgardie 1899. See

Until Federation, the Australian colonies tended to exhibit independently and competitively via their own separate courts.⁴³ When Glasgow 1901 opened, Western Australia was no longer a colony but a state in the Commonwealth of Australia. Inter-state relationships were now theoretically more co-operative, but in reality the Australians 'continued their separate, competitive existence' in their individual courts.⁴⁴ Western Australia found itself no longer the sole contender, with South Australia and Queensland also exhibiting. Some dismissed South Australia's court as 'a small, obscure stall for wine, with a few dingy and insignificant advertisements'.⁴⁵ Queensland posed a more serious threat, and Venn warned that unless Western Australia showed up 'at her best, it would be better, in my opinion, not to show at all'.⁴⁶ During the exhibition he seems to have collaborated more closely with Canada, another key rival, than with Queensland colleagues.⁴⁷ As Western Australia and Queensland's courts both highlighted their competitive mining industries, the idea of Australian collaboration seems to have been easier to discuss in theory than to work out in reality.⁴⁸

Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901 present challenges to researchers. A few photographs depict Western Australia's exhibits in situ but, with one exception (Figure 23), Aboriginal objects are not visible in them.⁴⁹ Written sources also contain significant gaps and omissions, with exhibition commissioners and visitors tending to describe Aboriginal objects only in passing. Researchers are helped, however, by the fact that most of the

Linda Young, "'How Like England We Can Be': The Australian International Exhibitions in the Nineteenth Century", in *Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Richard Gillespie, Caroline Jordan and Elizabeth Willis (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008), 12.1–12.19.

⁴² 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3.

⁴³ Unusually, Victoria and New South Wales attempted to exhibit more collaboratively at international exhibitions in Philadelphia (1876) and Chicago (1893). McKay, *Showing Off*, 8–9.

⁴⁴ Kinchin and Kinchin, 80–81.

⁴⁵ 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The Register*, Saturday 8 June 1901, 6.

⁴⁶ 'Letter from Mr. Venn', *Western Mail*, Saturday 17 November 1900, 9.

⁴⁷ See letter from Venn reproduced in B. Gleeson, *The Life of H.W. Venn* (History 20 Annual Essay, 1963) [manuscript]. SLWA, 48079069. Appendix I, 1–2.

⁴⁸ McKay, *Showing Off*, 61.

⁴⁹ 'The West Australian Court at the Paris Exhibition', *Western Mail*, Saturday 28 July 1900, 26; 'The Exhibition Illustrated: A Pictorial Souvenir of the Glasgow International Exhibition, 1901', University of Glasgow Library; 'At the Glasgow Exhibition', *Western Mail*, 17 August 1901, 33–35, 41.

Western Australian commissioners for Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901, including Venn, played the same roles and used many of the same objects and curatorial strategies at both events. Very few Aboriginal objects in British collections can be linked with certainty to an international exhibition. However, the largest surviving collection known to have been exhibited in Britain was donated to Glasgow Corporation Museum (now Glasgow Museums) in late 1901, shortly after that city's exhibition closed. On behalf of Western Australia's commission, Venn presented the museum with 52 Aboriginal objects that had been exhibited.⁵⁰ This chapter will use these alongside contemporary written and visual accounts to consider how and why they were used.

Physical presences in exhibition spaces

Most Honourable & Conscience Fearing Sir,

In your defence you made a certain reference to an expose made by a Gentleman named Walter Malcolmson ... And in the said defence, you referred to the Mission New Norcia ... I find:

The whole of the defence is void & [am] prepared to prove the same.

... I found that the mission New Norcia ... is nothing more than a money making enterprise, & a far worse a slavery system than even the American system was. ... It is only another kind of state prison, & the murder houses of the lords and ladies of Australasia.

Anthony Martin Fernando, 10 October 1903.⁵¹

This condemnation came from an Aboriginal man born in Sydney, who had by 1903 settled in the mining town of Peak Hill (in the Mid-West region). In a

⁵⁰ These are registered as: 1901.107.a–z; 1901.112.a–e; and NHDUP1901.112.f. 52 Aboriginal objects are currently listed in museum records, however Antonia Lovelace states that 53 were donated. Lovelace, 'The Pacific Collections at Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum', *Pacific Arts*, 5 (January 1992), 19–23 (p. 19).

⁵¹ A.M. Fernando, 'Reporting Cruelties towards the Natives by the Government Officials in All Parts of Australia', 10 October 1903, AU WA S3005- cons255 1903/0557A. State Records Office of Western Australia. Some editing for spelling and punctuation.

handwritten letter to the Western Australian authorities, Anthony Martin Fernando accused settlers locally and across the state of physically, sexually and economically abusing Aboriginal people. He addressed part of his letter directly to Henry Prinsep, the Chief Protector of Aborigines. When defending the government against criticism published in the international press, Prinsep had lauded New Norcia Mission. This angered Fernando, who accused the mission of oppressing its Aboriginal residents. Fernando's name is not listed amongst New Norcia's former residents, although it is possible that he had been taken to live there as a child.⁵² His words proclaim the existence of a very different Western Australia to the one presented by government officials. The government's response is in itself telling, for Fernando never received a reply.

Contemporary accounts confirm that Western Australia often used Aboriginal objects in its displays at nineteenth-century exhibitions. 'Native weapons' adorned the walls of its court at the Great London Exposition of 1862; and weapons again hung on the walls at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, giving the space 'a light and picturesque appearance' (Figure 21).⁵³ By the turn of the century, Aboriginal objects were evidently a normal inclusion in Western Australia's courts. Over the nineteenth century some Australian colonies created dioramas of Aboriginal people in their courts, and sometimes displayed Ancestral Remains.⁵⁴ However, Western Australia does not seem to have followed suit. Objects, particularly weapons; and 'fine photographs of the natives at work' were instead the key recorded aspects of its 'Aboriginal' displays at Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901.⁵⁵

⁵² Paisley, *The Lone Protestor*, 7.

⁵³ 'Great Exhibition', *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, Wednesday 10 September 1862, 4. An exhibited boomerang and throwing stick are now in the British Museum's collection (Oc.5476, Oc.3851). 'The Colonial and Indian Exhibition', *The Express and Telegraph*, Wednesday 25 August 1886, 7.

⁵⁴ Notably, mummified bodies were exhibited in Queensland's court at the Melbourne Exhibition of 1880–81. McKay, *Showing Off*, 35. I have not found instances of Ancestral Remains being exhibited in Western Australia's courts.

⁵⁵ Aymee de Marolles, 'Participation of Western Australia at the Universal Exhibition of 1900', *Le Moniteur de 1900 Organe de l'Exposition*, 26 (1900), 429–37 (p. 432).



Figure 21: Historical photograph showing Aboriginal objects from Western Australia displayed at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886

Wall display detail (right) and in situ (top).

Woodbury Permanent Photographic Printing Company, London (1900), 'Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886. Western Australia Court. No. 2'.

State Library of Western Australia, 1062B/2.



Exhibition courts were also filled with living people: members of the public, exhibition officials, servants, shopkeepers, performers and people who were being overtly 'exhibited'. The boundaries between these roles could be blurred, particularly for colonised peoples, who were a popular feature of many late nineteenth-century international exhibitions. For example, the British colonial section at Paris 1900 featured a Ceylon tea pavillion staffed by 'real natives in their clean white costumes'.¹ These workers served

¹ 'Thoughts from the Old Country', *Chronicle*, Saturday 29 September 1900, 9.

refreshments, and their very presence worked to promote interest in Ceylon's products. Living Aboriginal people were noticeably absent from either of Western Australian's courts, and this section will consider why.

In *Peoples on Parade*, Sadiya Qureshi explores the popular nineteenth-century British practice of paying to see 'foreign' (often colonised) peoples perform demonstrations of 'authentic' cultural practices. She argues that nineteenth-century international exhibitions incorporated 'displayed peoples' from their outset in 1851.² From the 1880s onwards displayed people increasingly formed part of specially designed 'native villages', where performers, sometimes numbering in their hundreds, displayed supposedly authentic cultural practices to visitors.³ Displayed people could be present on a small scale, as servants, attendants, guides or shopkeepers.⁴ However, Western Australia apparently included no Aboriginal attendants or performers at Paris 1900 or Glasgow 1901. This was despite a recommendation from James Thomson, a journalist with extensive experience in planning international exhibitions. Thomson was heavily involved in Victoria's preparations for the Melbourne International Exhibition (1880), Calcutta International Exhibition (1883–1884), Colonial and Indian Exhibition (1886) and Melbourne Centennial International Exhibition (1888), before relocating to Western Australia. In 1899 he wrote a letter to the *West Australian* suggesting how his new home could make a good showing at Paris 1900. Thomson suggested that 'if two or three native policemen could be sent as attendants the effect would be considerably enhanced'.⁵ The *West Australian's* editor was vice-president of the exhibition commission, but Thomson's suggestion was not taken up.

This reluctance to display living Aboriginal people was not confined to Paris 1900, as I have found no evidence that any of Western Australia's nineteenth-century European exhibition courts featured Aboriginal attendants or performers. Despite extensive scientific and anthropological interest, the Australian colonies hardly ever used Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander performers at international exhibitions, perhaps because all had attracted

² Qureshi, 253–55.

³ Qureshi, 253–55.

⁴ There also are no records of Aboriginal people attending Paris 1900 or Glasgow 1901 as members of the public.

⁵ 'W.A. at the Paris Exhibition', *The West Australian*, Monday 10 April 1899, 3.

international criticism about the treatment of these populations.⁶ Indeed, there is no evidence that any Australian colonial government seriously entertained the idea of using Aboriginal people as exhibits at overseas exhibitions, and although a group taken from Queensland may have performed for a short time at the World's Columbian Exposition (1893), they did so outside of the formal exhibition programme.⁷ Other subaltern groups were also excluded. During the nineteenth century Queensland's Melanesian indentured labourers and their descendents were also the subject of British and Australian humanitarian concern, and never featured in that colony's exhibitions.⁸ At exhibitions in Australia, however, Aboriginal performers were often more visible. The organisers of the Coolgardie 'International' Exhibition (1899) found a group to perform 'war dances' and weapons-throwing, which attracted a large audience.⁹ Judith McKay suggests that Queensland found greater benefits in focusing on Aboriginal people at Australian events, where visitors 'could congratulate themselves on their success as colonists and bringers of civilization. In Europe, and especially Great Britain, derogatory exhibits might have brought moral condemnation, which was to be avoided when Queensland was looking for population and capital'.¹⁰ Western Australia's exhibition commissioners presumably judged similarly that the potential risks of exhibiting living Aboriginal people in Europe outweighed the benefits.

The substantial budgets and complex exhibits prepared for Western Australia's displays at Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901 indicate that the lack of Aboriginal performers was not primarily due to financial or practical constraints. Instead, I suggest that their absence stemmed from Western Australian exhibition commissioners' desire to avoid attracting humanitarian criticism. From the 1880s and into the early twentieth century, reports about the treatment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia received increasing attention in Europe and America.¹¹ In August 1900, an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* proclaimed that 'A COMPLETE SYSTEM OF SLAVERY,

⁶ Douglas.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ J.M. McKay, "'A Good Show': Colonial Queensland at International Exhibitions', *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum, Cultural Heritage Series*, 1:2 (1998), 175–343 (p. 237).

⁹ 'The Exhibition Executive', *Coolgardie Miner*, Tuesday 30 May 1899. 6.

¹⁰ McKay, "'A Good Show'", 245.

¹¹ Curthoys and Mitchell, 404.

loathsome in the sight of liberty' operated there.¹² The *West Australian Sunday Times* quoted this article in order to show settlers 'how America views us'.¹³ Shortly before Glasgow 1901 opened, popular British newspaper *The Daily News* published a letter calling for the Australian Commonwealth to be 'rescued from the indignity of wearing the badge of veiled slavery' perpetrated in Western Australia.¹⁴ Although Aboriginal objects entered the Parisian and Glaswegian exhibition courts, Venn and his colleagues probably deemed the presence of Aboriginal attendants or performers (even native police who acted as colonial agents) too potentially disruptive for an international stage.

Although Aboriginal people were physically absent from the exhibition courts, one group of Western Australians was very much present. Most of the senior Western Australian exhibition commissioners involved in Paris 1900 held similar roles in Glasgow 1901. Many were influential settlers: the commissions' vice-president John Winthrop Hackett edited the *West Australian*; minerals curator Arthur George Holroyd was a major player in the mining industry; and powerful timber businessman Arthur George Davies was vice-chairman of the timber committee. Several travelled to Paris and Glasgow, oversaw the construction of the displays and escorted elite visitors around the courts. The following section considers how tracing individual commissioners' lives can illuminate how they depicted Aboriginal people.

The commissioners involved in popular exhibitions acted to legitimate not only the ideas and practices of empire, but their own status.¹⁵ Henry Venn (1844–1908), the president of Western Australia's commissions at Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901, was no exception. Originally from Adelaide, he emigrated to Western Australia in the 1860s. Between 1873 and 1878 Venn settled at Karratha pastoral station, on Ngarluma Country in the Pilbara. He later became one of the colony's political elite, holding the Legislative Council (and later Assembly) seat of Wellington. In 1896 he was publicly dismissed from his position as Commissioner of Railways and Director of Public Works for poor departmental performance. Venn may have hoped that the role of exhibition commissioner would improve his dented professional standing. In

¹² Cited in 'Westralian Slavery', *West Australian Sunday Times*, Sunday 14 October 1900, 11.

¹³ 'Westralian Slavery', 11.

¹⁴ 'Anglo-Australian Notes', *The Register*, Friday 17 May 1901, 6.

¹⁵ Hoffenberg, 31.

1901 he declined to contest his Wellington seat, and in 1904 tried unsuccessfully to become Western Australia's Agent-General in London.¹⁶ His application argued that working on the exhibitions had particularly equipped him for this role, not least that it had brought him 'into contact and close association with a large influential circle in Great Britain'.¹⁷ Venn used his involvement with the exhibitions to strengthen his professional position. Whilst he was in Paris a scandal erupted back home, with Venn (a married man) rumoured to have tried to seduce a married actress.¹⁸ Venn did not respond publicly to these reports and did not return to Western Australia until 1903.¹⁹ The highly embarrassing rumours likely increased his desire to stay away from the domestic political arena around that time.

Venn had contact with Aboriginal people over his lifetime, but the few biographical accounts written about him remain almost entirely silent about this.²⁰ One exception relates to his 1882 stance against a clause in the draft *Dog Act* 1883 (WA) that he argued was too severe upon Aboriginal people, although he was careful to broadcast his aversion to 'any Exeter Hall feeling' (that is, the concerns of humanitarian pressure groups).²¹ Venn actually had a notorious reputation for cruelty to Aboriginal people in the Pilbara during the 1860s and 1870s. In 1895 a writer to the *Coolgardie Pioneer* accused Venn of having branded a young Aboriginal boy, calling the failure to hold him to account 'a lasting disgrace to every succeeding Governor and Government, who have virtually made themselves accessories after the fact by winking at the atrocity'.²² A longer article five years later accused Venn of having had a seven- or eight-year-old boy (in the 1895 letter called 'Charlie') tied up, tortured and disfigured.²³ Venn allegedly branded the child repeatedly on the shoulders, buttocks and back with a 'T'; before forcing an Aboriginal man, 'under threats of death for non-compliance', to fire a gun loaded with salt into

¹⁶ 'The State Elections', *Bunbury Herald*, Saturday 16 March 1901, 3.

¹⁷ Cited in Gleeson, Appendix I, 1–2 (p. 1).

¹⁸ 'Venn and His Venus', *West Australian Sunday Times*, Sunday 14 July 1901, 5.

¹⁹ 'Mr. H.W. Venn', *The West Australian*, Friday 1 May 1903, 6.

²⁰ Gleeson; G.C. Bolton, 'Venn, Henry Whittall (1844–1908)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, 1990), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/venn-henry-whittall-8911/text15655>> [accessed 5 June 2019]; Stephen Smith, *Hon. H.W. Venn, Explorer-Statesman* (Claremont Teachers College, 1963).

²¹ 'Legislative Council', *The Daily News*, Saturday 26 August 1882, 3.

²² 'The Engineer Statesman', *Coolgardie Pioneer*, Wednesday 12 June 1895, 10.

²³ 'An Outback Outrage', *The Sun*, Sunday 10 June 1900, 3.

the wounds.²⁴ Years later the survivor, now an adult, reportedly still bore prominent scars.²⁵ *The Sun* claimed that the local magistrate hushed the matter up, 'though every settler knew the whole facts of the case'.²⁶ Ultimately, it said, the authorities accepted Venn's story that 'in the heat of the moment [he] had simply touched him with the branding iron while pushing him away' and excused the 'accident' on account of Venn's own youth.²⁷ In later life, the article further alleged, Venn joked about branding 'Charlie'.²⁸

Whilst disturbing allegations against Venn resurfaced over the years, they apparently had little impact on his political career. In 1901 the *West Australian Sunday Times* called Venn 'the flogger and brander of the aboriginals', and he was named in court when John Gribble unsuccessfully sued the *West Australian* for libel in 1888.²⁹ Gribble described reports that Venn had been 'tried but acquitted for wrongdoing against the natives', and a witness called it 'a common rumour down in the Nor' West that Mr. Venn had branded natives'.³⁰ As Chapter Four indicated, Gribble's court case failed after political interference, and Venn was not summoned to give evidence in court. The missionary's allegations had been extremely unwelcome to Governor Broome and the Legislative Council, of which Venn was now a member. In a further sign of entwining loyalties Hackett, the *West Australian's* powerful editor, later became Venn's deputy for the Paris and Glasgow exhibitions.

In this chapter I argue that Western Australia's exhibition courts must be understood not just in terms of who and what was present, but also who and what was not. The men on Western Australia's exhibition commissions knew that their community had a poor international reputation concerning the treatment of Aboriginal people. The following sections explore how they controlled the use of Aboriginal material of all kinds within the exhibition spaces. While the exhibits were marked by omissions, however, they also held the potential to subvert intended exhibition narratives.

²⁴ Ibid, 3.

²⁵ Ibid, 3.

²⁶ Ibid, 3.

²⁷ Ibid, 3.

²⁸ Ibid, 3.

²⁹ 'Venn and His Venus', 5.

³⁰ 'Supreme Court: Civil Side', *Western Mail*, Thursday 26 May 1887, 21.

Choosing ‘the necessary local colour’



Figure 22: Detail of *Wunda* shield displayed at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901

This wooden shield is 8 palm-widths long and 2 palm-lengths wide, and a handle carved into the back enabled its owner to carry it in one hand. Carved grooves snake down its front to form a large zigzag design, making it a *wunda* shield, a form used by many communities in Western Australia. The long grooves that help to deflect missiles are also culturally meaningful, and these ones seem to have been decorated with commercial paint rather than ochres.

Wood, pigment. Unidentified maker; unidentified collector; presented to Glasgow Corporation Museum by Henry Venn in 1901.

Shield, Glasgow Museums, 1901.107.at. Photograph by author, reproduced courtesy of Glasgow Museums.

Although Aboriginal people were absent from Western Australia’s exhibition courts, they were represented by over fifty objects (see Appendix Four) and probably some photographs. So far, it has not proven possible to locate the photographs; but we know more about many of the other exhibits. Contemporary written accounts, whilst sparse in detail, indicate what kinds of objects were visibly on display. They tell us that the Parisian exhibits included ‘native weapons’, some of which were sent from the committee of the Perth Museum, and others from ‘various sources’.³¹ It is possible that, as with some

³¹ ‘The Paris Commission’, *The West Australian*, Thursday 8 February 1900, 2.

earlier exhibitions, many were obtained with the help of police networks.³² Some came from Sergeant James Smythe, a police officer who had recently finished a posting in Marble Bar.³³ Some 'glass spear-heads, manufactured by aborigines from bottles and telegraph insulators' and acquired from J.E. Clarke of Fremantle (near Perth) were also displayed in the Parisian court.³⁴ These 'spear-heads' are probably the same items 'manufactured by the aborigines of the North-West' that are mentioned in the exhibition's accompanying handbook.³⁵ Western Australia's collective exhibit 'of native weapons' won a silver medal at Paris 1900, a commendation that suggests the judges were impressed by their perceived quality and curation.³⁶

When the Western Australian court in Paris was dismantled, some Aboriginal objects were presented to the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris.³⁷ Others were forwarded to Scotland, as the organisers had a larger court to fill in Glasgow.³⁸ Additional material was also shipped from Western Australia to Britain, including more 'native weapons' sent by the curator of the Perth Museum.³⁹ After the Glasgow exhibition ended, objects loaned by individuals like Smythe and Clarke presumably returned to their white owners. Others were presented to the Glasgow Corporation Museum as part of a donation valued at around £100 that included 'marsupial skins, mineral specimens, native weapons, model of poppet-legs [a structure used in mine shafts], and prospector's windlass'.⁴⁰ This was a strategic 'donation', as the recipient was expected to make reciprocal offerings to the Western

³² Baige Zylstra, "'Those Riches of Which We Are So Proud': Western Australian Geological Collecting for International and Intercolonial Exhibitions 1850-1890", *Studies in Western Australian History*, 35 (2020), 59–74 (p. 68)

³³ *Report of the Royal Commission, Glasgow International Exhibition, 1901* (1902), State Records Office of Western Australia (AU WA S20- cons964 1902/6321), 42. 'Marble Bar News', *Northern Public Opinion and Mining and Pastoral News*, Friday 9 November 1900, 3.

³⁴ 'The Paris Commission'. Their owner was probably James English Clarke, who worked for a shipping firm trading between Fremantle and the north-west. 'Personal Items', *Geraldton Guardian*, Tuesday 6 January 1920, 2.

³⁵ 'The Aborigines', in *Illustrated Handbook of Western Australia Issued by the W.A. Royal Commission* (Perth: Richard Pether, Government Printer, 1900), 46–49 (p. 49).

³⁶ 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, Saturday 19 April 1902, 6. Glasgow 1901 did not issue juror awards. 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3.

³⁷ So far, it has not proven possible to locate these objects.

³⁸ 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3

³⁹ 'The Glasgow Exhibition', *Western Mail*, Saturday 6 July 1901, 77.

⁴⁰ 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3. As discussed in Chapter Two, 'weapons' was often used as a catch-all term for Aboriginal objects of various kinds.

Australian Museum (commonly known as the Perth Museum).⁴¹ Compared with most other collections discussed in this thesis, the Glaswegian donation features a curiously narrow range of objects. Regardless of Perth Museum curator Bernard Woodward's hopes for reciprocal returns from his peers in Europe, I argue that his selection of objects was predominantly informed by their collective visual impact in Western Australia's exhibition courts.

Venn's donation of Aboriginal objects to Glasgow Corporation Museum consists almost entirely of 'weapons': 42 projectile weapons (27 spears or parts of spears, 11 boomerangs and 4 spear-throwers) and six shields. Two bullroarers, a wooden dish and a stone pounder complete the collection. Only a few 'types' or styles of object are included, which suggests that they were displayed collectively. Whilst the six Glaswegian shields are not identical in design, they appear to have been selected with a view to displaying them as a group. Five are *wunda* shields decorated with vivid red and white (or beige) ochres or paints (see Figure 22). The sixth is not a *wunda* shield, but features a similar zigzag design also using red pigment. The bullroarers may also have been chosen to visually complement the shields, as some elements of their appearance would have seemed comparable to European eyes.⁴² In a similar way, the spears were likely selected with an emphasis on their visual similarities, rather than to represent the diversity of spear-forms across Western Australia. Two decades previously Edward Hardman had distinguished between different spears, but those Venn donated to Glasgow were not apparently picked with an eye for variety. The relatively limited range of forms and decorations represented thus suggests that those selecting exhibits prized Aboriginal objects primarily for their collective appearance (see Figure 21), and this is borne out by other exhibition accounts.

Western Australia's exhibition courts in 1900 and 1901 contained no objects ascribed to Aboriginal people living at or near the four Aboriginal missions then operating in the southwest and northwest.⁴³ Colonial displays at international exhibitions often featured mission objects, marshalled to

⁴¹ Ibid, 3. In 1903 Woodward asked Glasgow's Corporation Museum to reciprocate with 'examples of the famous Repoussé enamels, or other of the works of your Arts and Crafts School'. Bernard Woodward to the Director, Corporation Museum, Glasgow, 19 May 1903, Glasgow Museums Resource Centre.

⁴² These are now restricted from public view.

⁴³ New Norcia Mission and the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission in the southwest; Beagle Bay Mission and Sunday Island Mission in the west Kimberley.

support narratives about how indigenous people were being 'civilised' through contact with settlers.⁴⁴ The absence of mission objects in the Western Australian courts is particularly unusual given that the accompanying exhibition handbook devotes a chapter to the Benedictine New Norcia Mission and another to the Trappist Beagle Bay Mission (near Broome, in the north west).⁴⁵ Like Frederick Broome two decades earlier, the Western Australian exhibition commissioners portrayed mission work as worthy, but were uninterested in displaying Aboriginal objects associated with them. Tensions over the comparative prominence of Catholic missions in northern Western Australia may have informed this choice not to represent mission work amongst the Aboriginal objects (the first Anglican Forrest River Mission was abandoned in 1897, and it was only in 1913 that Gerard Trower re-established it). Instead, the exhibition commission utilised wooden weapons, perhaps thinking these more 'authentic' than those made with metal; and Aboriginal exhibits that could be interpreted to allude to settlers' technical superiority, like chairs formed from weapons and Clarke's collection of spear-heads made from bottle-glass and telegraph insulators. These, the commissioners may have reasoned, more easily fitted into underlying exhibition narratives than did objects that (to them) showed more complex signs of intercultural entanglements.

After the Glasgow exhibition closed, the Western Australian exhibition commissioners decided to take some mineral exhibits to the Royal Exchange Exhibition of Colonial Products in London, which ran from March to June 1902.⁴⁶ No Aboriginal objects were apparently included at this smaller event, although they had made it into the courts at Paris and Glasgow. Western Australia's key aims for each exhibition site varied. Venn identified Paris 1900 as a way for Western Australia to attract international attention.⁴⁷ His major aim at Glasgow, in contrast, was to attract 'a desirable class of British people

⁴⁴ Harris.

⁴⁵ J.P. Perrin, 'The Spanish Benedictine Mission of New Norcia' and J.M. Drew, 'Beagle Bay Mission', in *Illustrated Handbook of Western Australia Issued by the W.A. Royal Commission* (Perth: Richard Pether, Government Printer, 1900), 166–72.

⁴⁶ Canada, Rhodesia and British North Borneo also participated in this small exhibition. The Western Australian government did not fund it; the state's expenses were borne by 'residents in London interested in Western Australia and its development'. 'The Glasgow Exhibition', *Western Mail*, Tuesday 18 March 1902, 6. Also see 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3, and 'Colonial Exhibition in London', *Western Mail*, Saturday 15 March 1902, 18.

⁴⁷ 'Welcome Home', *Southern Times*, Thursday 21 May 1903, 4.

to emigrate to this State and settle on the land'.⁴⁸ He was not the only one to make this distinction, as a contemporary noted that:

At Paris the Western Australian court ... was a good advertisement. But the Frenchman is not a colonist. ... Glasgow has many additional advantages. It is the centre of a thrifty, alert and ambitious people, who emigrate readily and are cosmopolitan in their scent for gain.⁴⁹

There was hope that exhibiting at the Royal Exchange would attract the 'strong financial men' working nearby at the Bank of England and Stock Exchange.⁵⁰ Western Australia's primary motive here was to attract investment rather than cultural prestige or settlers, and Venn and his colleagues presumably saw Aboriginal objects as less useful in achieving their aims.

The collection at Glasgow Museums indicates that the exhibition commissioners selected and displayed objects in ways that portrayed Aboriginal people according to hunter-gatherer tropes. This is borne out by contemporary written accounts, which almost always referred to the courts' Aboriginal exhibits as 'weapons' or 'spears'. This, along with the lack of objects from missions, suggests that Western Australian commissioners wished to set Aboriginal culture in sharp contrast to settler products on display. I have argued that visual appearance was an important factor in the choice of Aboriginal objects. Most were provided in multiples, indicating a decorative function, and this is borne out by similarities in the shield designs selected. As the following section discusses, however, the 'Aboriginal exhibits' conveyed particular ideological messages, but a much wider range of material actually connected to Aboriginal activity.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ 'Glasgow Exhibition', *Western Mail*, Saturday 11 May 1901, 57.

⁵⁰ 'West Australia in England', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, Tuesday 1 April 1902, 28.

Display strategies



Figure 23: Pounder 'for crushing Mulga seed' displayed at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901

Grindstones such as this were used in daily life, particularly by women for grinding seeds against stone slabs. This arduous work was often quickly replaced when pre-prepared European flour became available. This example was displayed in Glasgow without information as to its owner or origin.

Unknown maker; unknown collector; presented to Glasgow Corporation Museum by Henry Venn in 1901.

Pounder, Glasgow Museums, NHDUP1901.112.f Photograph by author, reproduced courtesy of Glasgow Museums.

For much of the nineteenth century Western Australia was poorer, less populous and less politically autonomous than other Australian colonies. At the turn of the century, however, its exhibition courts sought to convince visitors of its abundant natural resources and 'recent industrial and social progress'.⁵¹ The Glasgow court had three main sections: minerals; timber; and agricultural and general produce, all industries responsible for the state's new-found economic confidence. Extensive space was devoted to the booming mining industry, with the *Mining Journal* concluding that 'the mere spectacle ... is sufficient to awaken the interest of the most unenlightened'.⁵²

⁵¹ Kinchin and Kinchin, 81–82.

⁵² *Mining Journal*, Saturday 28 September 1901, cited as 'Glasgow Exhibition', *Western Mail*, Saturday 23 November 1901, 71.

Geological material became increasingly significant to the colony's exhibits in the later nineteenth century, and Baige Zylstra suggests that this reflects its increasing cultural as well as economic value: 'reflecting the unique geology of Western Australia and contributing to the colony's sense of a distinctive identity'.⁵³ It may seem surprising that so many Aboriginal objects appeared in the courts, given settlers' poor international reputation for the treatment of Aboriginal people. However, organisers' deliberate focus upon Western Australia's abundant natural resources and their successful exploitation by settlers perhaps demanded the inclusion of these objects.

Western Australia's displays in Paris and Glasgow compare with the typical approach taken by Australian colonies (and other exhibitors) during the nineteenth century. This approach involved exhibits being 'cramped together with little regard for the implications of their juxtapositions. With a preference for typological comprehensiveness, rows and rows of showcases and cascading piles of exhibits were common'.⁵⁴ Aboriginal objects were a normal, even expected, part of colonial displays at international exhibitions. Emily Harris notes that representations of the 'colonial Other' had long played an important role in the development of a white Australian national identity.⁵⁵ If machinery and other settler products represented Western Australia's future, then Aboriginal objects may have represented its supposedly disappearing past. The ways in which these objects were displayed differed sharply from many other types of material, conveying particular messages to visitors about Western Australia and the strength of its settler regime.

Walls and hallways

One visitor to Western Australia's court at Glasgow 1901 recorded that 'as an adjunct to decoration, boomerangs, spears, and other native weapons were happily utilised, and with a collection of stuffed marsupials, gave the necessary local colour to the court'.⁵⁶ Elsewhere, it was reported that 'the native weapons, which are such a material assistance to decoration, give

⁵³ Zylstra, 71.

⁵⁴ Douglas, 22.

⁵⁵ Harris, n.p.

⁵⁶ 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3.

additional variety and interest'.⁵⁷ This provision of 'local colour' was important. Like indigenous flora and fauna, Aboriginal objects added a 'sense of uniqueness' to colonies that had a relatively short settler history and were competing to promote their wares.⁵⁸ Yet this heritage was also consistently positioned as a decorative backdrop rather than a key attraction.

One visitor at Paris remarked that 'all around ... one sees hanging on the walls and on the staircases, bizarre specimens of aborigines' weapons'.⁵⁹ The few surviving photographs of Western Australia's courts at Paris and Glasgow do not reflect this abundance. These record particularly high-profile areas and exhibits: the main entrance, views of some sections, and a few close-ups of exhibits that were extremely striking (such as large trophies) or highly valued in other ways (such as the Southern Cross pearl, a natural cluster of pearls in the shape of a cross). Visitor reports from the Paris and Glasgow exhibitions indicate that Aboriginal objects were mainly hung on walls rather than in display cases. Peter Hoffenberg suggests that Aboriginal weapons 'gained value as contrasts to settler manufactures and fine arts, representations of the colonial commissioners' power to preserve the "authentic" past for display, and as goods to be exchanged for other exhibition displays', with particular comparisons drawn between ethnographic exhibits and Australian mining machinery.⁶⁰ In surviving photographs of Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901, Aboriginal objects are not seen hanging on the walls or nestled in the mining court. Yet although they were not apparently prioritised by those choosing the scenes to be photographed, they were nonetheless very visible to exhibition-goers. The wall of the main staircase in the timber court at Paris was used to exhibit 'the native weapons, ornaments, &c., and photographs of natives', enabling many people to see them.⁶¹ Several visitors' accounts mention the Aboriginal 'weapons' exhibits in Western Australia's courts at Paris and Glasgow, and suggest that they were generally seen as visually striking and pleasingly arranged.

⁵⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, Monday 8 July 1901, cited in 'Western Australian Court', *Western Mail*, Saturday 17 August 1901, 68.

⁵⁸ Harris, n.p.

⁵⁹ 'Letters of Appreciation', *The West Australian*, Saturday 23 August 1900, 3.

⁶⁰ Hoffenberg, 75, 131.

⁶¹ *Report of the Royal Commission, Paris International Exhibition 1900* (Perth: Perth Printing Works, 1900), 12; 'Western Australia at the Paris Exhibition', *Western Mail*, Saturday 28 July 1900, 29.

The display case

Like many Australian colonies, Western Australia's courts at Paris and Glasgow tended to display Aboriginal weapons on walls rather than in display cases.⁶² Some items, particularly the spears, were probably too long to exhibit effectively within the cases. Yet there were exceptions, as one visitor to Paris singled out a small glass display case featuring several objects 'of the highlet [sic] interest'.⁶³ The Aboriginal and European material inside held curiosity value and included 'a rain stone in use by the native priests'; glass 'spearheads' (presumably Clarke's collection); alongside items from the *Zeewijk*, a Dutch East India Company ship wrecked off the Western Australian coast in 1727.⁶⁴ We do not have the exhibition labels used in this case, although in keeping with usual exhibition practices they were probably brief.⁶⁵ Yet the objects all collectively spoke to Western Australia's early colonial history. The *Zeewijk* survivors were often represented as 'the first [white] settlers in Australia'.⁶⁶ As Chapter Five discussed, European commentators often associated ceramic and glass points with Aboriginal people who had not yet been fully integrated into (or eliminated by) settler regimes. Their inclusion alongside the 'rain stone', described as being still 'in use', seems to frame objects and user(s) as belonging to a precolonial past.

A stone pounder 'used by the Aboriginals for crushing Mulga seed' (Figure 23) was donated to Glasgow Corporation Museum.⁶⁷ Like the 'rain stone', it held little intrinsic visual appeal to European exhibition audiences. Unlike most of the other Aboriginal exhibits it could not easily hang on a wall, and would have occupied precious counter space. At Paris, 'stones used by the Aborigines for grinding the seed of the Mulga Scrub' were listed in the 'unclassified' category alongside soils and flowers, the *Zeewyck* 'relics' and

⁶² Douglas, n.p.

⁶³ Marolles, 433.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 432. In the 1880s and 1890s workers engaged in guano mining on islands in the Houtman Albrouks found many *Zeewijk* 'relics'. Jeremy Green, 'The *Zeewijk* Story and the Missing Second Wreck', *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*, 15 (2020) 333–64 (pp. 345–48).

⁶⁵ Douglas, n.p.

⁶⁶ 'Australian Beginnings', *The Advertiser*, Saturday 1 December 1923, 14.

⁶⁷ Glasgow Museums' registration number for the pounder (NHDUP1901.112.f) supports the theory that it was displayed in a different way to other Aboriginal exhibits. The others were legally accessioned on Wednesday 27 November 1901, whereas the pounder was accessioned on Monday 16 December 1901, suggesting that it was not handed over in the same consignment.

the 'rainmaker's stone', items that resisted conventional exhibition classifications.⁶⁸ Why, then, was the pounder exhibited? Hoffenberg's suggestion that Aboriginal objects were used to contrast settler mining equipment offers a potential explanation. The fact that it was explicitly recorded as linked to Aboriginal peoples' use of the mulga tree is important. The records from the Glasgow donation are not extensive, and this is the longest description provided by Venn concerning any of the Aboriginal objects' original use. An important Aboriginal food source, mulga trees were also used by settlers for animal fodder and fence posts.⁶⁹ At Glasgow 1901, Venn and the other commissioners may have intended the pounder to contrast with their displays of settler timber or food products. There are hints that it was displayed in a different section of the court to the other Aboriginal objects, giving weight to this interpretation. At any rate, the pounder's value to the curators of Western Australia's courts seems to have stemmed from how it was (or was thought to have been) used. It shows that the inclusion of Aboriginal objects did not rest on visual appeal alone, and that more investigation is needed into their interplay with other exhibits.

A trophy

'Trophies' were popular and striking exhibits at nineteenth century international exhibitions. Formed by arranging together a large group of similar objects, either of a natural resource (such as timber, gold or wool) or a manufactured good (such as canned produce), they evoked material power and abundance. Trophies were often time-consuming and expensive to assemble, so exhibitors focused on creating ones that promoted their land's most distinctive and valuable resources and industries. At Glasgow, Western Australia had gold, tin, wood, cereals, wine, wool and pearl shell examples.⁷⁰ Some trophies displayed indigenous resources in as natural a form as possible; others highlighted settler manufacturing industries: Western Australia's timber trophies, for example, included railway sleepers, part of a bridge and three railway trucks!⁷¹ Such trophies blur supposed boundaries

⁶⁸ *Catalogue of the Western Australian Court at the Paris Exhibition 1900* (Paris: Paul Dupont, 1900), 61.

⁶⁹ Barbara R. Randell, 'Mulga: A Revision of the Major Species', *Journal of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens*, 14:2 (1992), 105–32 (p. 109).

⁷⁰ 'Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3.

⁷¹ 'Western Australian Court', *Western Mail*, 68.

between 'Aboriginal' and 'settler' objects, although curators generally ignored or downplayed their Aboriginal associations.



Figure 24: Western Australia's pearl shell trophy at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901

Cover of *The Exhibition Illustrated: A Pictorial Souvenir of the Glasgow International Exhibition, 1901*, Saturday 13 July 1901, p. 1.

University of Glasgow Special Collections Sp Coll Bh12-a.26 Image by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Archives & Special Collections.

Visitor accounts do not mention Aboriginal objects as being part of the major trophies, but these displays likely stemmed in part from Aboriginal labour. Western Australia's pearl shell trophy consisted of four domed bays, each displaying relevant pearling-related objects against a large background of pearl shells.⁷² The effect was spectacular, and the trophy was acclaimed by visitors. A souvenir magazine, *The Exhibition Illustrated*, published a photograph of one bay (Figure 24).⁷³ Its focal object, apart from pearl shells, was a hard-hat diving suit. The *Illustrated Handbook of Western Australia* produced for Paris 1900 portrayed the increased use of diving suits (introduced to Western Australia in the mid-1880s) and Asian divers, rather than free diving and Aboriginal divers, as a mark of progress:

In the early days ... the services of the aboriginal natives of the country were called into requisition as divers or beach-combers, when not required in their ordinary station work. These natives were the servants of their employers under annual agreement ... Gradually the more primitive native divers gave way before those equipped with dresses, and now but few natives are employed in pearling, and those principally in beach-combing.⁷⁴

This passage misrepresents pearling's long history of unfree labour and Aboriginal workers' continued presence in this industry.⁷⁵ An array of pearling-related products were displayed in the bays of the pearl shell trophy, including

⁷² 'Western Australia at the Glasgow Exhibition', *The West Australian*, Friday 9 August 1901, 2.

⁷³ *The Exhibition Illustrated: A Pictorial Souvenir of the Glasgow International Exhibition, 1901*, Saturday 13 July 1901, 1.

⁷⁴ Walter Kingsmill, 'The Pearling Industry', in *Illustrated Handbook of Western Australia Issued by the W.A. Royal Commission* (Perth: Richard Pether, Government Printer, 1900), 119–28 (p. 123).

⁷⁵ In 1905, for example, the Roth Commission found that the pearling fleet working from Broome were circumventing laws concerning Aboriginal workers. *Report of the Royal Commission on the Condition of the Natives* [Roth Report] (Perth: Government Printer, 1905), 10.

a dessert service made from pearl shell and silver. No recognisably Aboriginal products, such as shells carved with cultural designs, were reportedly included.⁷⁶ This, along with the exhibition handbook's downplaying of Aboriginal labour, suggests an attempt to erase the industry's notorious history. If so, this seems to have been largely successful. Known visitor accounts did not refer to abuses perpetrated by Western Australia's pearling industry or other settler enterprises, despite some having recently been publicised in the British press.

An Aboriginal 'trophy'?

The inclusion of Aboriginal objects in Western Australia's pearl shell trophy may have been considered an unnecessary distraction. However, one visitor to Paris 1900 remarked that 'trophies are made up of lances, of arrows, of clubs, and of a number of other weapons', suggesting that some Aboriginal objects were displayed in comparable ways.⁷⁷ It is possible that the visitor meant 'trophy' to describe objects taken through conflict, but the context suggests that they intended the meaning that it had now accrued in international exhibition contexts over the nineteenth century. This implies that some objects were displayed in ways evocative of the more 'formal' exhibition trophies. This leads me to consider the potential symbolism of another display method, the chair of weapons.

⁷⁶ 'Western Australia at the Glasgow Exhibition', 2.

⁷⁷ Marolles, 432.



Figure 25: Detail of historical photograph showing chair in Western Australia's court at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901

Annan Photo, Glasgow; 'Glasgow International Exhibition'.

Royal Western Australian Historical Society, P1999.7182. Reproduced with permission of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society.

Writers describing Western Australia's exhibits at Paris and Glasgow paid relatively little attention to the Aboriginal objects. However, several singled out some unusual assemblages exhibited in Paris: two European-style chairs made from Aboriginal weapons.⁷⁸ The names of those who made the weapons is not known; the exhibition commission had them turned into chairs by a non-Aboriginal woodcarver in Perth.⁷⁹ A Western Australian journalist wrote that:

The materials used in their construction consist of native weapons, namely – kylies [boomerangs], dowarks [clubs], and

⁷⁸ 'The Paris Exhibition', *The West Australian*, Monday 22 January 1900, 3; 'Paris Exhibition', *The Daily News*, Wednesday 7 February 1900, 4; Marolles, 432.

⁷⁹ 'The Paris Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3; 'Paris Exhibition', *The Daily News*, 4.

shields arranged in most ingenious and pleasing devices, and, notwithstanding the peculiar materials, producing seats which are really as comfortable as they are handsome.⁸⁰

After Paris 1900 ended the chairs travelled to Glasgow, where one is visible in a photograph of the timber court (Figure 25). The legs and seat of the chair are hidden behind a table. Its back, made with five boomerangs, is visible, as are arms that may have been formed using clubs. Given the extreme rarity of such chairs, the rest is likely similar in form to a 'rustic chair made of native weapons' displayed at the Western Australian International Mining and Industrial Exhibition (1899) in Coolgardie.⁸¹ A photograph of the Coolgardie chair has not been found, but it was called 'an ingenious curiosity ... The seat is formed of shields, the back of boomerangs; and the legs and other parts of other weapons'.⁸² Such chairs are highly unusual, and their symbolic value is worth exploring.

Many communities have created chairs featuring images of weapons, with historic European examples including ones engraved with decorative imagery like cupids' arrows or heraldic designs.⁸³ More recently, Trawlwoolway artist Julie Gough's sculpture 'Some Tasmanian Aboriginal children living with non-Aboriginal people before 1840' (2008) trapped unfinished tea tree 'spears' representative of taken children within the framework of an old chair.⁸⁴ Chairs made *from* weapons are much rarer, and there are few parallels to those displayed in Paris and Glasgow. Modern examples are often portrayed as inherently disturbing, due to their physicality and tangible connections with violence. One example is the fictional 'Iron Throne', the physical seat of office around which the characters of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* fantasy novels (1996-) jostle for power.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ 'The Paris Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 3.

⁸¹ 'Exhibition Notes', *The Sun*, Sunday 26 March 1899, 1. This exhibition was an international exhibition 'in rhetoric rather than reality'. Young, n.p.

⁸² 'Exhibition Notes'.

⁸³ Several elite examples made during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are held by the Royal Collections Trust and the Victoria and Albert Museum. See, for example, Royal Collections Trust, RCIN 31831.10; Victoria and Albert Museum, W.53-1980; and 1062A1 to 1062A/2-1882.

⁸⁴ Judith Ryan, 'Disquiet and Resistance in the Art of Julie Gough', *Artlink*, June 2013 <<https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/3958/disquiet-and-resistance-in-the-art-of-julie-gough/>> [accessed 1 March 2021].

⁸⁵ George R.R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1996); *A Clash of Kings* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1999); *A Storm of Swords* (New York:

Made from the sharp weapons of vanquished foes, Martin conceived it as a dangerous, ugly and intimidating symbol of conquest made 'by blacksmiths not by craftsmen'.⁸⁶ Other chairs emerged in Mozambique using guns collected after the 1977–1992 civil war. One, 'Throne of Weapons' (2001) by Cristóvão Canhavato (Kester), was purchased by the British Museum in 2002. This sculpture evokes complex responses, with different viewers reading it as an embodiment of violence or as a sign of positive progress since the war.⁸⁷ This second association is linked to the guns' more recent history, for when war ceased they were transformed into art as part of a peace initiative.⁸⁸ Despite this somewhat more optimistic reading, many viewers nonetheless find Canhavato's work 'visually disturbing rather than aesthetically pleasing'.⁸⁹ Such chairs are widely read as troubling objects, in large part because their components are inherently linked to violent acts.

Unlike these recent examples, the two chairs displayed in Paris and Glasgow were apparently not intended to discomfort or disturb. At Paris, they were even put on a landing for weary visitors to rest on.⁹⁰ It may not have been coincidence that spears were not mentioned in relation to the chairs, despite featuring elsewhere in the courts. Given that Aboriginal spears were often described being used in acts of violence against settlers, they may have retained too many troubling associations to feature in furniture intended for respite and entertainment.⁹¹ One visitor account indicated that boomerangs, a 'curious' and 'deadly' weapon, made up much of the chairs, but associated these with the killing of animals rather than humans.⁹² The treatment of the Coolgardie chair in 1899 also suggests that such chairs of Aboriginal weapons were not intended to disturb non-Aboriginal audiences. At that exhibition's opening ceremony Charles Riley, the Anglican Bishop of Perth,

Bantam Spectra, 2000), *A Feast for Crows* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 2005); *A Dance with Dragons* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 2011).

⁸⁶ Cited in Kirsten Acuna, 'George R.R. Martin: No One Ever Gets the Most Iconic Part of 'Game of Thrones' Right', *Business Insider* (28 October 2014) <<https://www.businessinsider.com/george-rr-martin-no-one-gets-game-of-thrones-iron-throne-right-2014-10?r=US&IR=T>> [accessed 17 May 2019].

⁸⁷ John Holden, *Throne of Weapons: A British Museum Tour* (Trustees of the British Museum, 2006), 11, <www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/throne/throne.pdf> [accessed 17 May 2019].

⁸⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 17.

⁹⁰ Marolles, 432.

⁹¹ In 1899, for example, a doctor visiting Braeside Station (in the Pilbara) was fatally speared. 'The Braeside Tragedy', *Western Mail*, Saturday 19 April 1912, 12.

⁹² Marolles, 432.

sat on a 'chair constructed of native weapons'.⁹³ He is unlikely to have done so if it seemed to him an obviously disturbing creation.⁹⁴

The chairs of weapons were not apparently large or imposing, but they were striking. They helped to evoke abundance to at least one visitor, who felt that 'the colonial committee has gathered together so many of these interesting weapons that two armchairs have been made up of them'.⁹⁵ Like the major trophies, they suggested colonial dominance. The commission's object list included them within the timber section, unlike other Aboriginal items classed in the 'agricultural, pastoral and general products' section.⁹⁶ This separate designation apparently rested on the notion that they were a settler rather than Aboriginal product. Exhibition organisers, and perhaps visitors, may have seen them as resources modified and controlled by settlers, not dissimilar to the raw pearl shells in the pearl shell trophy. This blurring of distinctions between Western Australia's natural resources and first peoples, as we have seen elsewhere, was a recurrent theme in collectors' commentaries.

The exhibits discussed here help to reveal how and why Western Australian exhibition commissioners deployed Aboriginal objects. Many decorated the walls of their courts, a standard exhibition practice. They were not deployed in the most high-profile counters of the courts, which prioritised settler products, but were instead linked in a range of ways with the past, through juxtaposition with 'modern' settler products and some European 'relics'. 'Modern' products made with the likely involvement of Aboriginal people were not acknowledged as the result of Aboriginal labour. Finally, with the chairs of weapons, Aboriginal objects were portrayed as a form of raw resource, controlled and transformed by settler ingenuity. Given international humanitarian concerns regarding Western Australia, these strategies presumably helped the commissioners to control an exhibition narrative emphasising the settler community's internal stability and strength.

⁹³ 'Opening Day', *Coolgardie Miner*, Wednesday 22 March 1899, 5.

⁹⁴ Green, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 3; 'Interview with Bishop Riley, *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, Friday 4 February 1898, 2.

⁹⁵ Marolles, 432.

⁹⁶ *Report of the Royal Commission, Glasgow International Exhibition, 1901*, 39, 42.

Conclusions

Starting from the first international exhibition, Aboriginal material had the potential to subvert the intentions of those curating colonial displays.⁹⁷ At the Great Exhibition in London (1851), a British visitor who saw four model 'canoes of the aborigines of Van Diemen's Land' subsequently deplored the slaughter of Aboriginal Tasmanians.⁹⁸ Australian exhibition commissioners had to work to control the subversive potential of such material.

In order to understand how exhibition courts conveyed colonial ideologies, I have argued, it is important to consider the interplay between the racialised Aboriginal exhibits and other kinds of material. Western Australia attracted widespread praise for the range and quality of its exhibits at Paris and Glasgow. Its exhibition commissioners also managed to avoid attracting mainstream criticism about settlers' treatment of Aboriginal people. Yet whilst the Aboriginal exhibits were usually portrayed as decorative and mentioned only passing in commissioners' reports and visitor accounts, they were not only used in decorative ways. The absence of certain exhibits, and the ways in which others were chosen and displayed, indicate a more complex exhibition strategy, and reveal how objects were deployed in attempts to uphold colonial ideologies.

Collectively, Western Australia's use of objects at Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901 promoted settler interests and promised a prosperous future. In this chapter, I suggested that Western Australia's exhibition commissioners used Aboriginal objects to support this overarching narrative of settler progress and divert attention from ongoing allegations about the mistreatment of Aboriginal people. Their display choices minimised the disruptive potential of Aboriginal presences in the exhibition space. Living Aboriginal people were kept away. Sadiah Qureshi argues that events featuring displayed people 'were significant sites for the production of natural and intercultural knowledge' and 'created a lasting legacy by shaping early anthropological inquiry, encounters between peoples, and broader public attitudes towards ethnic difference, and in so doing, helped define what it means to be

⁹⁷ Douglas, 26.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 26.

human'.⁹⁹ Western Australia's exhibition officials decided not to engage with this widespread practice, and I have argued that any consideration of the exhibits needs to acknowledge this simultaneous absence.

Amongst the material that was displayed, recognisably Aboriginal objects speaking to long-term engagement with settlers were largely omitted. The lack of certain kinds of Aboriginal objects like material from mission stations, or items that incorporated metal or pearl shell, increasingly reads as part of an effort to downplay Aboriginal people's participation in settler society. Those objects that did go on display were framed to speak to narratives of settler progress and dominance. Aboriginal objects were presented as archaic curiosities; like the components of the chairs, the 'rain stone' and glass spearheads; and the other sources of 'local colour'. Finally, Aboriginal involvement in 'settler' products like the pearl shell trophy was minimised. Western Australia's settlers' increased economic confidence and enthusiasm for performing on the international exhibition arena in the late nineteenth century is well attested in scholarship.¹⁰⁰ As I have shown, however, they had to balance this with the desire to avoid attracting humanitarian criticism.

The strategies used by Western Australia in 1900 and 1901 had not always been embraced by Australian settlers. For example, Elizabeth Willis argued that some colonists sending Aboriginal objects from Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania to the Paris Exhibition of 1855 intended these to exemplify Aboriginal industry, adaptability, and shared humanity.¹⁰¹ Nearly five decades later, Aboriginal objects from Western Australia were displayed as essentially obsolete curiosities, helping organisers to downplay Aboriginal peoples' historic contributions as well as their place in the state's present and future.

⁹⁹ Qureshi, 284.

¹⁰⁰ Summers; Zylstra.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Willis, "'The Productions of Aboriginal States': Australian Aboriginal and Settler Exhibits at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855", in *Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Richard Gillespie, Caroline Jordan and Elizabeth Willis (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008), 2.1–2.19.

Chapter Seven: The Cambridge Expedition to Western Australia (1910–1912)

In previous chapters, I suggested that ethnographic collections could be used to construct a particular narrative about Aboriginal people and their supposed capacity to survive and ‘adapt’ to colonisation. Aboriginal culture was frequently portrayed as inherently a thing of the past, unable to stand up to (white) modernity. During the early twentieth century Aboriginal cultural identity came under increasing attack from settler authorities. Government officials acknowledged that Aboriginal people had a *potential* part to play in Western Australia’s future but saw this firmly on white settlers’ terms, thus passing the *Aborigines Act* 1905 (WA) and other policies that restricted people’s freedoms and broke up families and communities.¹ A key motive was to ‘breed out’ Aboriginality through separating successive generations of ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal children and controlling their later marriage choices. In 1937 Western Australia’s Chief Protector of Aborigines A.O. Neville hoped that through these measures settler society would in time ‘eventually forget that there ever were any aborigines in Australia’.² This chapter investigates the impact of these attitudes and policies upon three members of the 1910–1912 University of Cambridge Expedition to Western Australia (hereafter referred to as the ‘Cambridge Expedition’). The ways in which these researchers acquired and interpreted material (see Appendix Four) fed into longstanding Eurocentric notions about Aboriginal antiquity and fragility. When scrutinising their accounts of collecting, however, clear narrative inconsistencies emerge.

¹ For the impact of these policies see Haebich, *Broken Circles*; and *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the South West of Western Australia, 1900–1940* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1992).

In the early twentieth century individual state policy and legislation had the dominant influence on Aboriginal people in Australia, but the Commonwealth of Australia also passed legislation limiting Aboriginal citizenship and welfare rights. Coral Dow and John Gardiner-Garden, ‘Overview of Indigenous Affairs: Part 1: 1901 to 1991’, 10 May 2011, *Parliament of Australia*, <https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/pubs/bn/1011/indigenouaffairs1> [accessed 20 March 2021].

² Cited in Russell McGregor, “‘Breed Out the Colour’ or the Importance of Being White”, *Australian Historical Studies*, 33:120 (2002), 286–302 (p. 293).

Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European scholarly and popular interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures was stimulated by a series of expeditions with explicitly anthropological aims. Aboriginal people acquired a central place in the production of anthropological theory, with many scholars holding that their practices shed special light onto universal questions relating to human sociality.³ The dominant evolutionary paradigm led research to be fuelled 'either by the belief that Aboriginal people were doomed to extinction by the operation of natural laws or by the belief that access to the authentic pre-colonial practices was about to disappear'.⁴ These ideas were not unique to anthropology: as earlier chapters highlighted, a wide range of collectors saw Aboriginal peoples as valuable sources of knowledge about wider humanity but deeply vulnerable in the face of colonisation. Several explicitly portrayed knowledge about Aboriginal people as being of practical use to colonial rulers. This historical relationship between anthropology and imperialism was complex, and as Nicholas Thomas notes, whilst 'the prosecution ... can bring forward an enormous range of evidence [for anthropology's service of imperialism] ... it is important to recall that anthropology has never been just this or entirely that'.⁵ Later in the twentieth century, Geoffrey Gray argues, social anthropologists in Australia worked hard to demonstrate that their discipline could assist government in controlling and managing Indigenous peoples.⁶ On the other hand, some anthropologists like Donald Thomson explicitly wished to advise governments to respect Aboriginal culture and land rights.⁷ Before World War One anthropologists had also developed complex connections with colonial agents and museum workers, as anthropology developed as an academic discipline.⁸ Some

³ Nicolas Peterson '“Studying Man and Man's Nature”: The History of the Institutionalisation of Aboriginal Anthropology', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2 (1990), 3–19 (pp. 3–4); L.R. Hiatt, *Arguments about Aborigines: Australia and the Evolution of Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴ Peterson, 'Studying Man and Man's Nature', 4.

⁵ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 7.

⁶ Geoffrey Gray, *A Cautious Silence: The Politics of Australian Anthropology* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007).

⁷ See *Donald Thomson: Man and Scholar*, ed. Bruce Rigsby and Nicolas Peterson (Canberra: Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, 2005).

⁸ Key works exploring these connections include Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973); Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999); McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, 60–99; Alison Petch, 'Notes and Queries and the Pitt Rivers Museum', *Museum Anthropology*, 30:1 (2007), 21–39.

performed dual roles, like Walter Roth and Daisy Bates, who alongside their anthropological work were also appointed as Aboriginal 'Protectors'. The Cambridge Expedition researchers' relationships with colonial authorities, particularly the ways in which they capitalised upon, helped or hindered government measures against Aboriginal people, therefore demand further analysis.

In 1910 two English scholars from the University of Cambridge arrived in Western Australia to embark upon an expedition to the north-west. Expedition leader Alfred Brown (later Radcliffe-Brown) and his assistant Elliot Watson were joined by Daisy Bates, an Irish anthropologist living in the state.⁹ Shortly after arriving, Brown told an interviewer that:

The expedition ... has to a certain extent a double object. I am, of course, interested primarily in the aborigines, but I am taking Mr. Watson with me, and he as a zoologist will study the interesting fauna of the country. Broadly speaking, our desire is to add to the knowledge of the peculiar customs, religions and morals I may call them, of the aborigines.¹⁰

Brown particularly wished to settle contemporary scholarly debates regarding totemism (the association of social categories and groups of humans with non-human species) and other social structures, so the work of Aboriginal translators and mediators was central to their plans.¹¹ Although small in size, the expedition's aims were clearly ambitious.

⁹ From around 1920, Alfred Reginald Brown (1881–1955) adopted the style A. Radcliffe Brown, and in 1926 he formally changed his surname to Radcliffe-Brown. Alan Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70. I refer to him by the surname that he used during the Cambridge Expedition.

Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson (1885–1970) published as E.L. Grant Watson. Daisy Bates (1859–1951), born Daisy May O'Dwyer, married Jack Bates in 1885 and retained this surname for the rest of her life, concealing a bigamous marriage in 1885 to Ernest Baglehole.

¹⁰ 'Study of Native Races', *The West Australian*, Saturday 10 September 1910, 9.

¹¹ Ibid. 'Totemism' was the subject of repeated Western scholarly debate from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries onwards. Deborah Bird Rose, 'Common Property Regimes in Aboriginal Australia: Totemism Revisited', in *The Governance of Common Property in the Pacific Region*, ed. Peter Larmour (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013), 127–43 (pp. 131–32).

The Cambridge Expedition shares links with the influential 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits in terms of its motivations as well as personal and professional connections.¹² The seven researchers who went to Torres Strait in 1898 had aimed to perform an ‘unprecedentedly comprehensive anthropological study’, and included specialists in psychology, medicine and linguistics.¹³ Their experiences and later work proved extremely significant for the professionalisation of anthropology. Following the 1898 expedition, explains Henrika Kuklick, ‘armchair anthropologists became an endangered species’, as expedition leader Alfred Cort Haddon’s arguments ‘became conventional wisdom: the anthropologist could understand “native actions ... from a native and not a European point of view” only by direct observation of custom in context’.¹⁴ The expedition researchers’ own networks were also influential: ‘virtually all members of the first professional generation of British sociocultural anthropologists were somehow the intellectual progeny of the Torres Straits Expedition’.¹⁵ Brown was trained at Cambridge by Haddon and W.H.R. Rivers, another 1898 expedition member, and both mentors were also involved in planning the 1910 Cambridge Expedition.¹⁶ As this chapter will discuss, however, Brown’s actual interactions with Indigenous Australians and with material culture differed in important ways from the 1898 expedition to the Torres Strait.

The Cambridge Expedition generated a wealth of academic and newspaper articles, memoirs and novels. It also resulted in a large amount of Aboriginal material leaving Western Australia for the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge (MAA). Scholarly treatments of the expedition are curiously fragmented, perhaps because it took such a disjointed form and because the researchers’ accounts do not always correlate (see Chronology, Table 1). In October 1910 the researchers abandoned their first fieldwork site

¹² At that time, the Torres Strait was spelt plural.

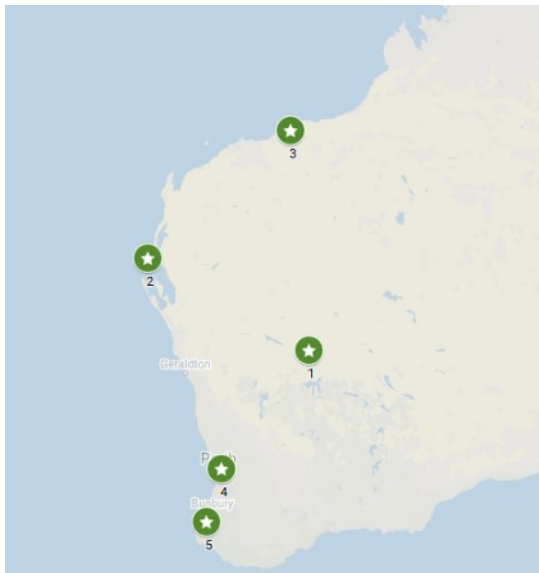
¹³ Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse, ‘Introduction: Cambridge and the Torres Strait’, in *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, ed. Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–22 (p. 1).

¹⁴ Henrika Kuklick, ‘Fieldworkers and Physiologists’ in *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, ed. Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 158–80 (p. 159).

¹⁵ Henrika Kuklick, ‘Personal Equations: Reflections on the History of Fieldwork, with Special Reference to Sociocultural Anthropology’, *Isis*, 102 (2011), 1–33 (p. 25).

¹⁶ Adam Kuper, ‘The Anthony Wilkin Student’s Proposed Expedition to Western Australia, 1909–1910’, *Canberra Anthropology*, 9:1 (1986), 60–67.

near the town of Sandstone in the Mid-West region. They established their second base at Aboriginal lock hospitals on Bernier and Dorre islands in Shark Bay (Gutharraguda), off the north-west coast. Over the next months the three also journeyed to other places in the Gascoyne and Pilbara together or independently. Around April 1911 they split for good, with Brown completing his fieldwork in the north-west.



Map 4: Key locations discussed in Chapter Seven

Map data © 2021 Google

Key:

- 1: Sandstone (initial fieldwork) (*Kuwarra and Badimaya*)
- 2: Carnarvon, Dorre and Bernier islands (subsequent fieldwork) (*Yinggarda and Malkana*)
- 3: Port Hedland (site/limit of Brown's later fieldwork) (*Kariyarra*)
- 4: Guildford (claimed site of Watson's grave-robbery) (*Wajuk Noongar*)
- 5: Wonnerup and Capel (probable site of Watson's robbery) (*Wardandi Noongar*)

Scholars have long focused on the experiences of one or other of the three researchers. Bates, Brown and Watson each came to play a significant role in shaping how Aboriginal people were construed in academic and popular discourse. Their expedition's influence has been considered most extensively in relation to Watson's subsequent literary output, particularly his six 'Australian' novels exploring the psychological effect of the Australian 'wilderness'.¹⁷ Watson seems to have undergone a psychological crisis during the expedition, which profoundly shook some of his beliefs concerning science, evolution and imperialism. Many of his subsequent writings engage with his expedition experiences. Neither Brown or Bates reflected so publicly upon their own experiences and these are subsequently less discussed in

¹⁷ Hope Kynoch, 'The Life and Works of Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson' (PhD thesis, Monash University, 1999), 14; also Roslynn D. Haynes, 'Dying of Landscape: E.L. Grant Watson and the Australian Desert', *Australian Literary Studies* 19.1 (May 1999), 32–43.

biographical accounts, with the notable exception of the rapidly deteriorating professional relationship that culminated in Bates publicly accusing Brown of plagiarism in 1914.¹⁸ Brown's expedition fieldwork strongly influenced his theories of the social organisation of Aboriginal groups, but scholars looking at his work have tended to focus on his own academic publications and later anthropological studies, rather than look more holistically at the researchers' experiences.¹⁹ This emphasis in treatments of Brown's work is linked to subsequent developments in his career and in the field of anthropology. During the Cambridge Expedition Brown was far more interested in researching the social relations that shape society, rather than material culture. In this he diverged from his mentor Haddon, who was fascinated by the material knowledge and culture of Torres Strait Islanders.²⁰ Brown's academic foci, like many of his contemporaries and later social anthropologists, was predominantly on forms of social organisation and religious belief rather than material culture per se.²¹ This shift of emphasis was long-lasting: Henrika Kuklick argues that many post-war anthropologists' work is characterised by 'a disregard for material goods'.²²

The three Cambridge Expedition researchers' interactions with Aboriginal people and material culture during their travels have received relatively little academic or public attention. In contrast, the actions of some Swedish contemporaries have become notorious.²³ Members of the first Swedish Scientific Expedition to Australia (1910–1911), led by zoologist and ethnographer Eric Mjöberg, surreptitiously stole several Ancestral Remains from the Kimberley and smuggled them back to Sweden. In *Två Resenärer*.

¹⁸ Isobel White, 'Mrs Bates and Mr Brown: An Examination of Rodney Needham's Allegations', *Oceania*, 51:3 (1981), 193–210.

¹⁹ Meyer Fortes, 'Radcliffe-Brown's Contributions to the Study of Social Organization', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 6.1 (1955), 16–30; Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The Modern British School* (London: Routledge, 1996); Michael Asch, 'Radcliffe-Brown on Colonialism in Australia', *Histories of Anthropology*, 5 (2009), 152–65.

²⁰ Anita Herle, 'The Life-Histories of Objects: Collections of the Cambridge Anthropological Ex. to the Torres Strait', in *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, ed. Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 77–105 (pp. 77–79).

²¹ Dan Hicks, 'The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect', in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Cultural Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25–98 (p. 36).

²² Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 268.

²³ Mathias Bostrum, 'Contextualising Yngve Laurell's Australian Collections, 1910–1911', in *Encountering Aboriginal Languages: Studies in the History of Australian Linguistics*, ed. William B. McGregor (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 2008), 147–62.

Två Bilder Av Australier (*Two Travellers. Two Images of Australians*), Claes Hallgren scrutinised Mjöberg's testimonies and those of his expedition party, some of whom had disagreed with their leader's practices.²⁴ In 2004 the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm handed Ancestral Remains stolen by Mjöberg back to Traditional Custodians in the Kimberley, a process that prompted reflection on the role of repatriation ceremonies as rituals of reconciliation.²⁵ Whilst the Cambridge Expedition researchers' actual or attempted disinterments are occasionally mentioned in discussions about thefts of Ancestral Remains, they have not yet been extensively discussed.²⁶

In recent years, a range of studies have explored Aboriginal peoples' experiences of anthropologists and anthropological expeditions.²⁷ Two key studies have considered the perspectives of some Aboriginal people who met the Cambridge Expedition researchers. Jade Stingemore's archaeological study of Bernier and Dorre islands used extant material culture to investigate the living conditions of Aboriginal lock hospital inmates, rather than relying on the accounts of European residents.²⁸ Robin Barrington has studied the experiences of Jaal, a Yamatji man who met with the expedition team at Sandstone, and, later, on the islands.²⁹ Such studies form an important counterbalance to European travellers' accounts and suggest that the

²⁴ Claes Hallgren, *Två Resenärer. Två Bilder Av Australier. Eric Mjöbergs Och Yngve Laurells Vetenskapliga Expeditioner 1910–1913* (Uppsala: Kultur i fokus, 2003) [Two Travellers. Two Images of Australians: Eric Mjöberg's and Yngve Laurell's Scientific Expeditions 1910–1913]; Claes Hallgren, 'Eric Mjöberg and the Rhetorics of Human Remains', in *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 135–44.

²⁵ Lotten Gustafsson Reinius, 'The Ritual Labor of Reconciliation: An Autoethnography of a Return of Human Remains', *Museum Worlds*, 5:1 (2017), 74–87.

²⁶ Paul Turnbull, *Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead in Colonial Australia* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 351; Turnbull, 'The Ethics of Repatriation: Reflections on the Australian Experience' in *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation: Return, Reconcile, Renew*, ed. Cressida Fforde, C. Timothy McKeown, Honor Keeler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 927–39 (p. 935).

²⁷ Works include Martin Thomas, 'Unpacking the Testimony of Gerald Blitner: Cross-cultural Brokerage and the Arnhem Land Expedition', in *Exploring the Legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition*, ed. Martin Thomas and Margo Neale (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2011), 377–401; Anthony Redmond 'Tracks and Shadows: Some Social Effects of the 1938 Frobenius Expedition to the North-west Kimberley', in *German Ethnography in Australia*, ed. Nicolas Peterson and Anna Kenny (Acton: ANU Press, 2017), 413–34.

²⁸ Jade Louise Stingemore, 'Surviving the "Cure": Life on Bernier and Dorre Islands under the Lock Hospital Regime' (PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2010).

²⁹ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?'; Robin Barrington, 'Unravelling the Yamaji Imaginings of Alexander Morton and Daisy Bates', *Aboriginal History*, 39 (2015), 27–61.

Cambridge Expedition researchers were minor figures, albeit ones whose detrimental influence could be long-lasting, in already eventful Aboriginal lives.

The Australian material presented by Brown to the MAA was not his first ethnographic collection. Andamanese material obtained during his fieldwork from 1906 to 1908 is held at the MAA, Horniman Museum and the Field Museum in Chicago; some items from the Northern Territory are held at Southern Illinois University Museum.³⁰ These collections have not been widely studied. Brown discussed material culture extensively in his monograph *The Andaman Islanders* (1922), albeit largely relegated to an appendix; but barely referred to Western Australian objects at all in his publications.³¹ Historians have given more attention to Bates' engagement with Aboriginal material culture, particularly during her time at Ooldea in South Australia between 1919 and 1934, and Robin Barrington has examined her partially unfulfilled promises to deliver Yamatji *bamburdu* (message sticks) when travelling with the Cambridge Expedition.³² Many other aspects of the team's collecting remain unexplored. However, as this chapter demonstrates, they offer important insights into complex relationships between researchers, theorists, settlers and Aboriginal people.

Chronology

Bates, the oldest of the three researchers, was a self-trained anthropologist, journalist and advocate for Aboriginal 'welfare'. She lived in Ireland, England, Queensland and New South Wales before travelling in 1899 to Western Australia. Bates claimed that she went to there to investigate allegations published in *The Times* about the abuse of Aboriginal people in north-west

³⁰ The MAA later transferred Ancestral Remains acquired by Brown to the Duckworth Collection, also in Cambridge. Marta Mirazon Lahr, 'A Brief History of the Duckworth Collections' (March 2011), *Leverhulme Centre for Human Evolutionary Studies, University of Cambridge*, <<http://www.human-evol.cam.ac.uk/history.html>> [accessed 3 June 2021]; Claire Wintle, *Colonial Collecting and Display*, 5; Nan Bowman Albinski, *Directory of Resources for Australian Studies in North America* (Clayton: National Centre for Australian Studies, 1992), 18.

³¹ A.R. Brown, *The Andaman Islanders: A Study in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 407–94.

³² Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, 292–303; Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 62, 198–99.

Australia.³³ She was still living in the state in 1904, when its government appointed her to continue researching Aboriginal groups. Another six years later, Bates was enthused at the prospect of collaborating with Brown, who wished to study Aboriginal kinship concepts. As a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, Brown specialised in social anthropology.³⁴ After finishing an initial period of fieldwork in the Andaman Islands in 1908 he returned to England and became friendly with Watson. Brown invited the younger man, who was also at Trinity studying natural sciences, to join his Australian expedition as a zoologist or 'assistant anthropologist'.³⁵ As expedition funds were limited, he agreed that Watson could collect and sell zoological specimens during their travels.³⁶ Although Watson was not knowledgeable about anthropology, he was keen for adventure and impressed by the charismatic Brown. In the event, however, tensions between expedition members soon emerged.³⁷ Brown found Bates tiresome, and she disliked his personality, socialist politics, and probably his relatively humble social origins.³⁸ Each was forceful and opinionated, and their personalities and working practices clashed. Watson admired and allied himself with Brown against Bates, but sometimes fumed about his leader's perceived arrogance.³⁹

After Brown arrived in Perth in September 1910 he, Bates and Watson set out for Sandstone township, arriving there in late October.⁴⁰ A major ceremonial event ('corroborree') connected to male initiation rites was due to

³³ Bob Reece, *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2007), 30.

³⁴ Meyer Fortes, 'Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, F.B.A., 1881–1955 a Memoir', *Man*, 56 (1956), 149–53.

³⁵ E.L. Grant Watson, *But to What Purpose: The Autobiography of a Contemporary* (London: Cresset Press, 1946), 84. The venture was originally conceived as a collaboration between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, but ultimately only the latter was involved. The expedition was under the direction of a committee of scholars and funded through the Anthony Wilkin Studentship at the University of Cambridge, with further support from the Royal Society, oceanographer Sir John Murray, and Australian pastoralist Samuel Mackay. 'Study of Native Races', *The West Australian*, 9; 'Ethnological Progress', *The West Australian*, Tuesday 20 January 1914, 8.

³⁶ Grant Watson, *But to What Purpose*, 84.

³⁷ E.L. Grant Watson, 16 October 1910, NLA, Papers of E.L. Grant Watson (MS 4950/11).

³⁸ White, 195.

³⁹ E.L. Grant Watson, 25 November 1911. NLA, Papers of E.L. Grant Watson (MS 4950/11).

⁴⁰ Bates held dual roles during the expedition: as government attaché to the expedition, and as a government-employed Travelling Protector of Aborigines 'with power to take half-castes and hand them to police'. White, 208.

occur nearby, so they established a camp and hired several workers.⁴¹ These included two Aboriginal (presumably Yamatji) men from a nearby camp who were deemed to be 'more or less adapted to the presence of white Australians'.⁴² Watson suggested that they were initially reluctant to join the expedition:

Their reluctance arose from their natural fear of going amongst strange and possibly hostile tribes. ... These bearded middle-aged men answered to the names of Tea-cup and Coffee; their native names were Mindooloo and Perrepierremarra.⁴³

Mindooloo and Perrepierremarra worked as interpreters, intermediaries and informants. Perrepierremarra also sang in Ngarla (a language spoken in the Pilbara), which Brown recorded onto a wax cylinder now in the British Library. At Sandstone Bates also met Jaal (c.1870–1915), the influential Yamatji man who had been one of her informants at Nannine in 1908.⁴⁴ Jaal, also known as 'Big George', was well known to settlers in the Murchison district and had experience with other researchers: in 1897 Alexander Morton (see Chapter Five) visited his camp with armed police and 'persuaded' Jaal and his family to disrobe, exchange objects and be photographed.⁴⁵ Bates was presumably pleased to see Jaal again, and claimed that he made her the heir to goldmines in his Country.⁴⁶ The researchers' fieldwork seemed to bode well.

Everything changed on Sunday 30 October, when police raided the camp seeking Aboriginal men suspected of recently killing eleven Aboriginal people at Laverton and Lancefield. They took the opportunity to seize many others. In all, they forced away the murder suspects; Jaal and other men and women suspected of having syphilis, who were taken in chains to the lock hospitals; and Stolen Generations children, who were taken to institutions far away from their families. Those they left behind did not return to the camp, and Mindooloo and Perrepierremarra's presence is not reliably recorded after

⁴¹ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁴ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 130. Although Bates described Jaal as a Ngaiaiwonga and Wanmula man I follow Barrington's lead in referring to him as a Yamatji man. Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', ix.

⁴⁵ Barrington, 'Unravelling the Yamaji Imaginings ...', 32, 34.

⁴⁶ Bates, 'My Natives and I, No. 19'.

this point. A disappointed Brown decided to abandon fieldwork near Sandstone and travel to Bernier and Dorre islands. He and Watson headed for the coast whilst Bates, in her capacity as Travelling Protector, accompanied the murder suspects to Perth.

Brown and Watson set up camp on Bernier in November, and were re-joined by Bates later that month. Their fieldwork on Bernier and Dorre capitalised upon the forced confinement of Aboriginal people there. Between 1908 and 1918 settler authorities used the islands as 'lock hospitals' to isolate and treat Aboriginal people deemed to have venereal disease (non-Aboriginal people were not subject to such confinement). Inmates from across the north-west had either been physically forced to the islands by police, or otherwise 'persuaded' to come. Upon arrival, all were effectively prisoners and subject to indefinite detention until they died or were 'cured'. Segregated by age and gender, men were mainly kept on Bernier, and women and children away on Dorre. The authorities tolerated and encouraged some cultural expressions like hunting and dancing, but the inmates' suffering was intense:

The accounts of Bates and Watson fail to convey the unimaginable torture and anguish experienced by Yamaji and other Aboriginal people exiled on the islands. They were operated on, the details of which may never be known, and witnessed the daily deaths of kin and strangers. All the while living close to the graves on a remote archipelago where the spirits of the dead and the living had no escape. The daily invasive and painful medical treatments, surgery, distress, grief and loss experienced by many Yamaji exiled far from family and country is vividly described by Bates.⁴⁷

Brown and Watson spent much of their time with the men on Bernier; and Bates on Dorre, although they also visited other places like the coastal town of Carnarvon (Kuwinywardu). In January 1911 Bates saw Jaal there and noted that he 'was too wasted from venereal [disease] and operations to speak'.⁴⁸ Unlike many inmates, Jaal was ultimately released from Bernier that September and managed to make it home to the Mid-West region before dying in 1915.

⁴⁷ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 131.

⁴⁸ Cited in Barrington, 'Unravelling the Yamaji Imaginings ...', 42.

The atmosphere on the islands was tense, with the resident doctor and white stockman reportedly 'taking shots at each other with their rifles amongst the sand-dunes'.⁴⁹ Watson was generally on good terms with Brown, and they travelled together along the Gascoyne River in early 1911. Watson then left for the south-west, where he robbed Aboriginal graves before leaving the state in February 1911. Intrapersonal frictions between Brown, Bates and the island authorities culminated that April, with Bates' departure from the lock hospitals. She returned to the Mid-West region by way of Perth. After finishing fieldwork at Bernier, Brown spent some months visiting pastoral stations around Carnarvon and Port Hedland (Marapikurrinya) in the Pilbara. He left Western Australia in early 1912.

From Perth lecture halls to island lock hospitals and rural pastoral stations, the researchers engaged with a wide range of Aboriginal and settler men, women and children. Some Aboriginal people clearly played vital roles as informants and intermediaries. Of these, Minoodoloo, Perrepierramarra and Jaal had the most extensively documented engagement with the researchers. It is probably not coincidence that all three were apparently middle-aged men, as Brown often sought senior men as informants.⁵⁰ Aboriginal women may also have been less willing to engage with the male researchers. Brown's use of men's restricted objects was probably a contributing factor, as the researchers had no access to women's material that they could use in a similar way.

The researchers' accounts diminish Minoodoloo, Perrepierramarra and Jaal's personalities and actions. Brown himself did not refer to them by name in his publications. Several of Bates' stories 'juxtapose Jaal's fearsome masculinity against claims of her own superior magical powers', helping her to 'create her own persona, and establish her status and reputation'.⁵¹ And in his memoir *Journey Under the Southern Stars* (1968), Watson portrayed Minoodoloo and Perrepierramarra as useful interpreters, but fearful of hostile

⁴⁹ Grant Watson, *But to What Purpose*, 122.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Brown, 'Handwritten Diary, 8/5/1911 to 10/7/1911', Papers of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, transferred from the Haddon Library to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge in September 2002. MAA (OA5/1/43 [1]), 2–3; A.R. Brown, 'Three Tribes of Western Australia', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 43 (1913), 143–94 (p. 151).

⁵¹ Barrington, 'Unravelling the Yamaji Imaginings ...', 42–43.'

tribes.⁵² They had, he said, joined the expedition due to Brown's 'almost magical power' of persuasion and a desire for 'white-man's food'.⁵³ This characterisation positioned Brown as the dominant driver of successful intercultural contact. Watson also gave their names to non-white servant characters in his fiction. In *Where Bonds are Loosed* (1914), the young Solomon Islander boy 'Coffee' is 'like an intelligent dog who loves his master'.⁵⁴ A kidnapped Aboriginal interpreter called 'Teacup' becomes similarly devoted to his white master in *The Mainland* (1917).⁵⁵ And, in a 1924 article that blended fact with fiction, the 'simple and good-natured' interpreter 'Mindoolo' is terrified at the thought of being eaten by another tribe, whereas the expedition leader (a thinly veiled portrait of Brown) confidently subdues the threat through his knowledge and strength of character.⁵⁶ These racial stereotypes emphasised the supposedly superior power of various white male characters.

Brown, Bates and Watson met many Aboriginal people whose freedom had been curtailed by colonial settlement and government policies. Bates noted that the Western Australian government's decision to create lock hospitals on Dorre and Bernier was sparked by a suggestion from anthropologist Walter Roth, which she called 'the unhappiest decision ever arrived at by a humane administration, a ghastly failure, as it proved, in the attempt to arrest the ravages of disease, and an infliction of physical and mental torture little short of inhuman'.⁵⁷ Bates implied that a core problem with the lock hospitals stemmed from inadequate government engagement with local anthropological knowledge:

Regardless of tribe and custom and country and relationship, they [the inmates] were herded together, the women on Dorre and the men on Bernier. Many had never seen the sea before, and lived and died in terror of it.⁵⁸

⁵² Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 21, 29, 32–33.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁴ E.L. Grant Watson, *Where Bonds are Loosed* (London: Duckworth, 1914), 32.

⁵⁵ E.L. Grant Watson, *The Mainland* (London: Duckworth, 1917).

⁵⁶ E.L. Grant Watson, 'The Sacred Dance: Corroboree of Natives of North-West Australia', *The English Review*, 1924, 817–27 (p. 818).

⁵⁷ Daisy M. Bates, 'My Natives and I, No. 16: With the Cambridge Expedition', *The West Australian*, Wednesday 4 March 1936, 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

Bates was not alone in expressing qualms about the mistreatment of Aboriginal people. Brown unsuccessfully tried to stop police targeting their first fieldwork site near Sandstone in October 1910, and during one raid hid two men in his tent.⁵⁹ Afterwards, Watson told his mother that a constable ('a wretched man') had 'insisted on going through the camp & kidnapping some half dozen individuals'.⁶⁰ The researchers' objections to these incidents are not proof that they saw them as morally wrong; indeed, they were themselves personally complicit. Bates recounted that they had all helped the constable as he 'collected a few old men and women', and that she herself persuaded the targets to unwittingly enter the tent where he waited to capture them.⁶¹

The Western Australian government had appointed Bates to fulfil two roles during the Cambridge Expedition, as government attaché to the expedition and as a Travelling Protector of Aborigines directed 'to look into the Native problem'.⁶² In the latter capacity she assisted in kidnapping several 'half-caste' children to be brought up in institutions. Bates exploited her relationships with Aboriginal people, telling the Chief Protector of Aborigines that:

They do not associate me as yet with the raids and visits of inspection, but they appear to think that Brown and Watson are connected with the police in some way as if they accompany me to a camp the members hide. Whereas when I go by myself they do not fly from me. I do not want to destroy that confidence.⁶³

Researchers' qualms about raids and coerced inspections were thus bound up with practical concerns about protecting the expedition's fieldwork.

⁵⁹ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 44. Michael Asch, on the evidence of some of Brown's later work, argues that 'far from living at peace with colonialism, Radcliffe-Brown actively sought to undermine it in public debate and in scholarly discourse'. Asch, 153.

⁶⁰ E.L. Grant Watson, 31 October 1910, NLA, Papers of E.L. Grant Watson (MS 4950/11).

⁶¹ Bates, 'My Natives and I, No. 16', 21.

⁶² Barrington, 'Unravelling the Yamaji Imaginings ...', 42.

⁶³ Cited in Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 71.

The three researchers' various accounts of the Cambridge Expedition, as I noted, are often inconsistent.⁶⁴ Bates downplayed Brown and Watson's presence and fieldwork abilities, and they frequently underplayed her role, sometimes erasing all reference to her. Some inconsistencies in how events and individuals were described may be inadvertent; others seem deliberate. Bates, for example, depicted herself as possessing superior local knowledge to the Cambridge men; whereas her presence would have weakened the aura of rugged masculine independence running throughout Watson's accounts. In *Journey Under the Southern Stars* (1968) he mentioned neither Bates nor his mother and stepfather's presence in Western Australia. Another inconsistency involves Bates' portrayal of the Dorre and Bernier lock hospitals. In April 1911 she told a reporter 'nothing more could I am sure, be done for the natives than is now being done there'.⁶⁵ Bates chose not to mention that the Medical Superintendent felt she was 'interfering with' inmates and had asked her to leave 'at the first opportunity'.⁶⁶ She painted a grimmer picture in her better known reflections of 1936:

There is not ... a memory one half so tragic or so harrowing, or a name that conjures up such a deplorable picture of misery and horror unalleviated, as these two grim and barren islands of the West Australian coast that for a period, mercifully brief, were the tombs of the living dead.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Brown remained interested in Australian anthropology throughout his career. His publications include A.R. Brown, 'The Distribution of Native Tribes in Part of Western Australia', *Man*, 12 (1912), 143–46; A.R. Brown, 'Beliefs Concerning Childbirth in Some Australian Tribes', *Man*, 12 (1912), 180–82; A.R. Brown, 'Three Tribes of Western Australia'; A.R. Brown, 'Rafts', *Man*, 16 (January 1916), 8–9; and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The Social Organization of Australian Tribes', *Oceania*, Reprinted as *Oceania Monographs*, 1 (Melbourne, 1931), 1:1–4 (1930).

Bates was also a prolific writer, and relevant publications include Daisy M. Bates, 'Native Decorative Art', *Western Mail*, Saturday 30 March 1912, 5, 14; a 1936 series of newspaper articles entitled 'My Natives and I' (published by the *Adelaide Advertiser* and syndicated to the *West Australian* and *Western Mail*), which formed the basis of her memoir Daisy M. Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent Among the Natives of Australia*. (London: Murray, 1938); and Daisy Bates, *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, ed. Isobel White (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1985).

Watson alluded to the expedition in much of his fiction, and also described it in his memoirs *But to What Purpose* and *Journey Under the Southern Stars*.

⁶⁵ 'Study of Native Races', *The West Australian*, Friday 14 April 1911, 5.

⁶⁶ Barrington 'Who Was "Big George"?', 130.

⁶⁷ Bates, 'My Natives and I, No. 16', 21.

Was this evidence that Bates was always disturbed by the lock hospitals, but only later felt free to publicly express this concern? Or an attempt to capitalise upon changing social attitudes? As I will show, during the expedition all three researchers acted in ways that would have damaged their reputations had they become widely known. All avoided or carefully framed references to these events in their publications, but studying their engagement with Ancestral Remains and objects reveals some of the ways in which this occurred.

Table 1: Itinerary of Cambridge Expedition members, June 1910 to January 1912

This overview includes only major known movements. Precise dates are often unavailable due to varying accounts from the participants.

	Events in common	Notable individual activity	
June to September 1910	University of Oxford withdraws from expedition, Brown is appointed leader (July). ⁶⁸	Brown	Arrives in Albany (September). Gives lecture 'Primitive Man in Western Australia' in Perth (30 September).
		Bates	Delivers several lectures and newspaper interviews in Perth.
	Researchers meet in Perth (September).	Watson	Arrives in Albany (June); travels to Perth, Kalgoorlie, Southern Cross and Bullfinch Mining camp where he prospects and collects, then returns to Perth. ⁶⁹
October 1910	Researchers leave Perth (13 October), arrive in Sandstone (22 October) and establish fieldwork camp (25 October).	Brown	Confirms Bates' service for six months at expedition's expense (4 October). Hires Louis Olsen (Swedish cook and handyman), Mindooloo and Perrepierremarra.
		Bates	Appointed 'Travelling Protector' during expedition by WA Government (October).
	Police raid camp, seizing Jaal and others (30 October).	Watson	Gives lecture 'Darwinism of To-day' in Perth (7 October).

⁶⁸ White, 208.

⁶⁹ The delay in Brown's arrival in Western Australia presumably relates in part to his marriage in Cambridge in April 1910.

	Events in common	Notable individual activity	
November and December 1910	Researchers arrive at Bernier and Dorre; conduct fieldwork.	Brown	Travels to coast with Watson and Olsen, does fieldwork with men on Bernier. Visits Dorre and plans to rob graves there (late November or early December)
		Bates	Visits Perth before joining Brown and Watson at Bernier in late November. Fieldwork with women on Dorre.
		Watson	Travels to coast with Brown and Olsen, does fieldwork with men on Bernier. Visits Dorre and plans to rob graves there (late November or early December)
January to March 1911	Fieldwork continues at Bernier and Dorre; individual or joint visits to Carnarvon, Perth and along the Gascoyne River.	Watson	Robs graves in the south-west (January or February). Departs Western Australia via Polynesia and Canada (February).
April 1911 onwards	Fieldwork ends at Bernier and Dorre; Brown and Bates separately conduct research elsewhere (April)	Brown	Visits cattle and sheep stations between Carnarvon and Port Hedland. ⁷⁰ Gives lecture 'The Aborigines of North-West Australia' in Perth (3 November). ⁷¹ Departs Perth for England in December 1911 or January 1912. ⁷²
		Bates	Visits Perth, does fieldwork in Peak Hill district and the south and south-west. ⁷³

⁷⁰ White, 193.

⁷¹ 'Our Aborigines', *The West Australian*, Saturday 4 November 1911, 12.

⁷² White, 208.

⁷³ Ibid, 208.

The collections

In 1914 and 1915 Brown presented 118 Aboriginal objects acquired during the expedition to the Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology in Cambridge (now the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) (see Appendix Four). The presentation included significant numbers of stone tools (35), potentially restricted items (20), boomerangs (13) and message sticks (11). 28 items, just under one quarter of the collection, might be construed as weapons. Of these, two are knives purportedly used in circumcision, which probably speak more to Brown's interest in ceremonial practice than their functional role as weapons or cutting tools.⁷⁴ Unlike many collectors, Brown was less interested in collecting spears and spear-points, although these were usually far easier to acquire than restricted items.

The collection is not particularly large given the expedition's duration and collecting opportunities. Between June 1910 and August 1911 the eight members of the contemporaneous Swedish Scientific Expedition to Australia acquired over 1,000 artefacts and Ancestral Remains, mainly from the Kimberley.⁷⁵ The Cambridge Expedition seems to have been less well-resourced, and its members less focused on collecting. Brown, after all, was predominantly interested in information about kinship structures rather than objects. In her writings Bates showed much greater interest in Aboriginal material culture, and may well have been involved in acquiring some items that Brown donated to the MAA. Watson's own collecting focused upon zoological specimens. He sent many insects, sometimes acquired from miners and Aboriginal people, to private collectors; some collected live animals escaped while he was awaiting Brown's arrival in Australia.⁷⁶ Watson collected zoological specimens not only for interest but for profit: an approach that may have influenced a series of potential thefts of Ancestral Remains from sites on Bernier, the south-west and the Gascoyne region.

⁷⁴ When describing different Aboriginal peoples, Brown generally highlighted whether they practised circumcision. Since the early 1870s, European writers identified circumcision as a key cultural difference and 'boundary' between coastal and inland Aboriginal communities of Western Australia. Martin Gibbs and Peter Veth, 'Ritual Engines and the Archaeology of Territorial Ascendancy', *Tempus*, 7 (2002), 11–19 (p. 14).

⁷⁵ Åsa Ferrier, 'Dr Eric Mjöberg's 1913 Scientific Exploration of North Queensland's Rainforest Region', *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 4:1 (2006), 1–27 (p. 2).

⁷⁶ Grant Watson, *But to What Purpose*, 99–104; *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 28, 35.

The researchers also collected voices. Men, women and children spoke or sang for Brown into a phonograph that imprinted recordings onto wax cylinders, some of which are now in the British Library.⁷⁷ Although relationships between researchers and the mostly unidentified performers were marked by unequal power dynamics, a nod towards mutual exchange was made. Bates rather dismissively remarked that in return for recording lock hospital inmates, Brown 'regaled them with "Peer Gynt" and "Tannhauser" and "Egmont" and Sarasate, to which they listened politely'.⁷⁸ The recordings' contents have not yet been fully identified and translated but, like those made during the Swedish Scientific Expedition, performers probably withheld some restricted material from researchers and perhaps from other fellow inmates.⁷⁹

'Magic' and message sticks



Figure 26: Message stick acquired by Alfred Brown in the Pilbara

This small message stick is linked to Burduna people living in the Ashburton-Gascoyne region of the Pilbara, where it was made in or before 1912. Its maker stripped a stick of bark, tapered its edges, and worked down its sides to form smooth surfaces ready for engraving. Both sides were etched with a similar design: a central column surrounded by accompanying lines of zig zags. This one's maker, carrier, intended recipient(s) and message remain unknown.

Wood. Unidentified maker; collected by Alfred Brown in the Pilbara between 1910 and 1912; donated by Brown in 1915. Photograph taken by the author.

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge; 1915.20.30.

Once Aboriginal objects moved into the hands of non-Aboriginal collectors, their usage changed. Previous chapters discussed how objects were put on

⁷⁷ British Library, Radcliffe-Brown Collection, C682.

⁷⁸ Daisy M. Bates, 'My Natives and I, No. 17: Among the Living Dead', *The West Australian*, Friday 6 March 1936, 25.

⁷⁹ Bostrum, 154.

walls or in cabinets at homes, museums, and exhibitions, now seen and held predominantly by non-Aboriginal people with little cognisance of their prior usage and meanings. The Cambridge Expedition researchers probably packed up some of their acquisitions quickly to await export and these 'conventional' European display contexts. Yet this was not always the case, and they continued using certain items in predominantly Aboriginal settings as tools to assist in fieldwork.

Watson's accounts of the expedition emphasised Brown's charismatic personality and ability to influence Aboriginal people and settlers alike.⁸⁰ He also recorded that Brown asserted authority by showing some Aboriginal groups 'magic sticks' in his possession.⁸¹ These items were small and easily portable: 'we had carried, at first, heavy revolvers, but these we discarded for magic sticks concealed in small linen bags'.⁸² The 'sticks' were presumably men's restricted objects made from wood. Walter Baldwin Spencer and Francis James Gillen's influential anthropological work *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899) had mentioned 'magic sticks' as a term for ceremonial boards, stressing that they were very different to message sticks.⁸³ Message sticks are made and used by many Aboriginal groups across Australia, whilst ceremonial boards derive predominantly from the central and western deserts. Both can be made of wood, feature incised designs and be easily portable; but message sticks can generally be seen by anyone, although not everyone is capable of reading them.⁸⁴ Ceremonial boards are restricted items, and none but appropriately initiated adult men should see or handle them. Brown abided by some cultural restrictions: he would only show the items to men, and sometimes only to senior men.⁸⁵ Works like *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* told European scholars that many Aboriginal communities saw ceremonial boards as powerful objects, and Brown probably decided to use them before arriving in Western Australia. He certainly possessed at least one when starting fieldwork in Sandstone,

⁸⁰ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 18, 21, 30–31.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸³ Grant Watson, *But to What Purpose*, 84; Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 141.

⁸⁴ Lindy Allen, 'Message Sticks and Indigenous Diplomacy', in *Conciliation on Colonial Frontiers: Conflict, Performance and Commemoration in Australia and the Pacific Rim*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith and Penelope Edmonds (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015) 113–131 (pp. 120–121).

⁸⁵ Grant Watson, 'The Sacred Dance', 821.

which, given his recent arrival in Australia, was likely sourced from a non-Aboriginal collector or dealer.⁸⁶

According to Watson, one of Brown's steps to establish effective fieldwork relationships was to tell Aboriginal communities that he could use his 'magic sticks' to kill anyone (even, by implication, senior men) who 'wished him evil'.⁸⁷ In this way, Brown may have been attempting to use restricted objects like pointing sticks, which could be used to harm or kill. Some people might indeed have been intimidated and seen him as a wielder of supernatural power, but anthropologists could equally have misunderstood why the objects seemed to assist his fieldwork. Communities may have seen Brown's possession of them as an unusual occurrence needing closer study, or evidence of his trustworthiness and close relationships with other Aboriginal groups. The objects also helped to build rapport in unexpected ways. When Watson and Brown met men near Sandstone, the former's (unconsciously) sexualised hand movements when holding a 'magic stick' caused 'roars of appreciative laughter and thus, by accident, we had established a human relationship more profound than any language'.⁸⁸

Like Brown, Bates acquired some objects deemed to be spiritually powerful and intimidating. In 1914 she described having a 'stick' that had belonged to Aboriginal people in the Gascoyne region, saying that 'the southern natives ... believe that it has fire in it. While I keep it in my tent no native will approach the place without my express permission'.⁸⁹ When and where Bates acquired it is unclear, and she generally downplayed her possession of restricted material when discussing the Cambridge Expedition. Instead, Bates claimed that 'my adopted kinship has ever been the secret of my success with all aborigines', and that she gained a special status due to her ministrations at the lock hospitals.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 30.

⁸⁷ Grant Watson, 'The Sacred Dance', 821.

⁸⁸ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 30.

⁸⁹ 'Life Among the Blacks', *Sunday Times*, Sunday 20 September 1914, 30.

⁹⁰ Bates, 'My Natives and I, No. 17'.

It was at Dorre Island that I became 'Kabbarli,' grandmother to the sick and the dying there, and Kabbarli I was to remain in all my wanderings'.⁹¹

Instead of deploying items of spiritual power like Brown's 'magic sticks', Bates described carrying message sticks between lock hospital inmates and their families back home:

Between Dorre and Bernier and all over the central North-West, I delivered these letter-sticks, bringing back the gossip of camps, news of the births, deaths and marriages, of initiations and corroborrees and quarrels, to the interest and delight of the dying exiles.⁹²

Bates framed these deliveries as acts of compassion, yet they also helped her research. In 1911 she alluded to how message sticks helped her to gain the trust of senders and recipients:

I have also a number of such introductions to many of the Peak Hill natives [Yamatji people in the Murchison region], which will be most useful to me when I return. I must go back very soon, lest all these things should be forgotten. It is necessary to strike while the iron is hot
....⁹³

Jaal and other inmates gave Bates message sticks to deliver to family and friends in the Mid-West region.⁹⁴ Bates delivered some to their intended recipients and promised to deliver at least fifteen others in return to those incarcerated on Bernier, Dorre and Rottnest islands.⁹⁵ Yet she never returned to the lock hospitals, instead using the entrusted objects in other ways.⁹⁶

In 1912 four message sticks in Bates' possession were photographed for a newspaper article.⁹⁷ Bates claimed that Yamatji people from the Peak

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ 'Study of Native Races', *The West Australian*, Friday 14 April 1911, 5.

⁹⁴ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 62.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 62. The Aboriginal prison on Rottnest Island officially closed in 1904, however a forced labour camp remained in operation until 1931.

⁹⁶ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 62.

⁹⁷ Bates, 'Native Decorative Art', 5, 14.

Hill and Lake Way districts had given her three to deliver; the fourth was made by an 'Ashburton native' incarcerated on Bernier.⁹⁸ Bates claimed that the fourth stick told the man's wives how to find their way to him, but that he and the women were now all dead.⁹⁹ Bates can be an unreliable witness, but her story highlights the potentially highly personal nature of such objects. She seems to have recognised that their makers were trying to maintain close relationships despite incarceration, making her failure to deliver many message sticks particularly disturbing. Bates deployed some in her research, and gave others to a settler family in Perth.¹⁰⁰ Returning to the lock hospitals would have been hard given the tense circumstances of her departure, but this is probably not the only explanation for her failure. In 1912 Bates relocated to work further east, where these particular message sticks would have held far less practical value as fieldwork tools.

Brown and Bates blurred the ways in which restricted objects and message sticks were traditionally used, using them to assert authority in different ways. To Watson, Brown wielded 'magic sticks' to demonstrate power. Brown himself did not extensively discuss them, perhaps wishing to emphasise other ways in which he built relationships with research subjects, such as through discussing kinship networks. Bates' accounts downplayed her use of 'magic sticks' during the Cambridge Expedition, and emphasised her carrying of message sticks. These deliveries helped Bates to develop her contacts and reputation amongst Aboriginal research subjects, and advertise her benevolence to white readers. Here, as elsewhere, she positioned herself as a researcher whose power rested upon bonds of trust and affection with her subjects. Bates implied that of the researchers she slotted most easily into Aboriginal kinship networks, claiming that she had to classify Brown and Watson as her 'sons' to allay fears that they were policemen.¹⁰¹ Bates thus used her carrying of message sticks to develop a model of authority that spoke to European cultural assumptions about compassionate feminine power. In many (although not all) Aboriginal communities, however, men had

⁹⁸ Ibid, 14.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 14. All elements of a message stick, including motifs, size, shape and the variety of wood, have the potential to convey meaning. Piers Kelly, 'Australian Message Sticks: Old Questions, New Directions', *Journal of Material Culture*, 25:2 (2020), 133–52 (p. 134).

¹⁰⁰ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 62.

¹⁰¹ Bates, 'My Natives and I, No. 16'.

acted as the carriers of message sticks.¹⁰² Some lock hospital inmates and their families probably saw women as legitimate messengers, particularly as more Aboriginal women are recorded in these roles from the early twentieth century onwards.¹⁰³ Others may have been uncomfortable entrusting message sticks to women in general or Bates in particular, but they had few other options. Bates' use of message sticks, like Brown's 'magic sticks', speaks to the hard decisions that Aboriginal people had to make when dealing with anthropologists and other colonial agents.

The researchers initially made some efforts to abide by Aboriginal expectations about how restricted objects and message sticks were used and who could access them. Indeed, their successful deployment as tools to support the research process depended upon this. Despite the power imbalance between the researchers and those they studied, Aboriginal cultural practices and expectations about the objects were therefore given some weight during the expedition itself. Like William Campbell's promise not to publish restricted items in Western Australia (see Chapter Five), however, later on such considerations were given less weight.

¹⁰² Piers Kelly (personal communication, 30 November 2020).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Objects and ideas of cultural change



Figure 27: Carved boab nuts from the Kimberley acquired by Alfred Brown

The hard shells of these seed pods were probably carved in the Kimberley in the early twentieth century. They depict a range of indigenous and non-indigenous plants and animals, including a horse head and bridle. The level of detail with which it is etched indicates that the artist was very familiar with horses, which arrived in the Kimberley in the late nineteenth century.

Boab seed pods. Unidentified maker(s); collected by Alfred Brown between 1910 and 1912; donated by Brown in 1914. Photographs taken by the author.

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge; 1914.70.66 (left) and 1914.70.67 (right).

The Cambridge Expedition researchers propagated the view that Aboriginal culture was highly vulnerable to 'modernity'. In a 1910 interview, Brown explained that their venture was spurred by the notion that Aboriginal people 'personify in certain features a stage in the past history of man everywhere' and that valuable opportunities for study were disappearing: 'Western Australia has been chosen because the aborigines there are rapidly dying out'.¹⁰⁴ Like many contemporaries, the researchers wanted to find traces of Aboriginal knowledge and practices from before extensive colonial

¹⁰⁴ 'Study of Native Races', *The West Australian*, Saturday 10 September 1910, 9.

settlement.¹⁰⁵ The 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits had been similarly motivated by 'salvage ethnography' and a desire to record the 'old ways'.¹⁰⁶ However, the items now in the MAA complicate Brown and Bates' claims about the imminent demise of Aboriginal culture.

A range of personal and professional factors influenced the researchers' ideas about Aboriginal culture and its survival prospects. Their expedition was only possible because university funders accepted Brown's argument that in certain regions, Aboriginal traditions were disappearing and had to be recorded before it was too late. In 1937 Brown continued to portray Aboriginal people as dying out, although he attacked the notion that they were 'already decaying' at the onset of colonisation and firmly blamed the ongoing attitudes, actions and policies of white Australians.¹⁰⁷ Bates believed that Aboriginal culture could not survive prolonged contact with 'civilisation': her associate Arthur Mee stated that in Bates's view:

their race is bound to disappear ... It has been her [Bates's] idea that their lives should be controlled and cared for with that fact in view. They should be left as free as possible, to pass from existence as happily as may be.¹⁰⁸

Roslynn Haynes points out that Watson came to see Aboriginal culture as 'not only appropriate to its milieu but more persuasive than the European materialism and scientific reductionism in which he had been trained'.¹⁰⁹ Describing a corroboree at Sandstone, he reflected that 'the prehistoric had been brought into the present'.¹¹⁰ Although Watson found elements of Aboriginal culture attractive, whether he thought they would long survive the 'modern' era was another matter.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Sutton suggests that anthropologists often continue to underestimate the resilience of 'classical' Aboriginal cultural forms in the present day. Peter Sutton, *Native Title in Australia: An Ethnographic Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁶ Herle, 95–96.

¹⁰⁷ Asch, 154–56.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Mee, 'Introduction' to Daisy Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent Among the Natives of Australia* (London: John Murray, 1947), 1–5 (p. 4).

¹⁰⁹ Haynes, "Some Mystical Affinity", 168.

¹¹⁰ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 35.

When writing about the expedition, Brown frequently described the loss of cultural knowledge: the forgetting of significant places, genealogical information, and object forms. In a diary entry written in the Kimberley in 1911, he noted that ‘the natives of these parts have ceased since 15 or 20 years ago to perform their totemic ceremonies’.¹¹¹ In a 1916 paper discussing rafts he stated that ‘at the present day they are rarely, if ever, used. My description is based on the statements of natives and of white settlers who have seen them in use in former time’.¹¹² This interest in ‘pre-colonial’ cultures was widespread and not confined to commentators writing about Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Renato Rosaldo has highlighted the prevalence of ‘imperialist nostalgia’, the ‘mourning for what one has destroyed’.¹¹³ However, despite Brown’s interest in gathering information about ‘pre-contact’ social structures, some of the items now in Cambridge very overtly referenced recent cultural changes. These were objects of ambivalence, but also some attraction, to the researchers.

Brown’s donation to the MAA included two carved fruit pods (commonly called nuts) from the boab tree (Figure 27), which grows in the Kimberley and adjacent parts of the Northern Territory.¹¹⁴ Since at least the late 1800s, some Aboriginal people in the Kimberley carved designs onto the shells, although it is not clear whether this practice had pre-colonial roots or was part of a distinctive new craft industry targeting European buyers.¹¹⁵ There is evidence for some boab nuts being used as rattles in performances, and for their decorations changing as markets for curios grew from the early twentieth century.¹¹⁶ Whatever the case, colonial expansion influenced many carvings. Older nuts are fragile and break easily so few early examples survive, but those that do tend to feature geometric designs similar to designs on spear-throwers and other objects that likely depict ancestral country.¹¹⁷ Depictions of people and animals grew more common after contact with settlers, and

¹¹¹ Brown, ‘Handwritten Diary, 8/5/1911 to 10/7/1911’, 4.

¹¹² Brown, ‘Rafts’, 9.

¹¹³ Renato Rosaldo, ‘Imperialist Nostalgia’, *Representations*, 26 (1989), 107–22 (p. 107).

¹¹⁴ Patrick McConvell, Thomas Saunders, and Stef Spronck, ‘Linguistic Prehistory of the Australian Boab’, in *Proceedings of the 44th Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society*, ed. Lauren Gawne and Jill Vaughan (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2014), 295–310 (p. 295).

¹¹⁵ Akerman, ‘From Boab Nuts to Ilma’, 106.

¹¹⁶ Gaye Sculthorpe, ‘Designs on Carved Boab Nuts’, *COMA*, 23 (1990), 37–47 (p. 43).

¹¹⁷ Akerman, ‘From Boab Nuts to Ilma’, 106.

proved attractive to non-Aboriginal collectors. In 1896 Emile Clement sold the British Museum three boab nuts variously engraved with concentric circles, kangaroos, birds, snakes, fish, plants and a pearling lugger.¹¹⁸ The two presented by Brown to the MAA depict indigenous fauna alongside newly introduced animals: one shows horses, fowl, emu tracks and a crocodile; the other fowl, a bird-like creature, a lizard, and two monkey-like creatures.¹¹⁹

The same motifs that helped to attract European buyers also held cultural significance to Aboriginal artists. Kim Akerman emphasises the creative decisions involved in carving:

each carved or decorated boab nut reflects a deeper aspect of the aesthetic nature of its creator. ... The motifs chosen allow an insight into cognitive processes employed by the artist in creating not just an object for sale but a vehicle to transmit perceptions of the world from the artist's own cultural perspective.¹²⁰

The presence of non-indigenous animals on the nuts now at the MAA indicates their artists' familiarity with colonial settlements. Horses were widely used in the Kimberley by the early twentieth century, and held cultural significance for settlers as well as Aboriginal people. One nut shows two monkey-like creatures chained by the waist. They are unlikely to represent humans: not only do they have tails, but police officers in the Kimberley usually chained Aboriginal prisoners by the wrists, ankles and, notoriously, the neck.¹²¹ Brown guessed that the artist '[pro]bably saw them at some white man's house'; they might alternatively show monkeys kept by Asian settlers or visiting vessels.¹²² Brown seems to have acquired it from someone other than its original carver, and called it 'a very poor specimen', suggesting that it was already in bad condition (so potentially some years old) by 1914.¹²³ At least one prominent local colonist had kept monkeys as pets within living memory. In 1899 Craven Ord, a police officer in the Kimberley, visited Perth

¹¹⁸ BM, Oc1896,-.1048–1050.

¹¹⁹ MAA, E 1914.70.66 and E 1914.70.67.

¹²⁰ Akerman, 'From Boab Nuts to Ilma', 107.

¹²¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on the Condition of the Natives*, 13–14, 18–21; Owen, "'Weather Hot, Flies Troublesome...'", 168–69.

¹²² Collector's note, 'E 1914.70.67', *Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, <<https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/objects/492308>> [accessed 3 March 2021].

¹²³ Ibid.

with a Moor macaque and Leonine monkey that were exhibited in the Perth Zoological Gardens.¹²⁴ No monkey species are indigenous to Australia, so the carvings indicate their curiosity value to settlers and Aboriginal people alike. Brown probably did not get them carved to order, for he travelled rapidly in the Kimberley, and pods suitable for carving must be harvested around April or May before the shell starts to crack.¹²⁵

The researchers' decision to do fieldwork at Dorre and Bernier was one of many moments of disjuncture between the idea of recording 'untouched' Aboriginal practices, and the reality. Another example occurred when Brown purchased a wooden pointing stick that incorporated human hair cord and a piece of glass reportedly taken from the stopper of a decanter.¹²⁶ Brown claimed that the object would have been more interesting if it had used quartz instead of glass, but that although the latter 'made it less valuable to me, it made it more valuable to the man who possessed it, who would not sell it for a long time'.¹²⁷ Brown's interpretation sat squarely within widespread narratives about Aboriginal people specially valuing European products, as discussed in Chapter Five. Yet it does not tell the whole story. Brown clearly took trouble to acquire this item, suggesting that it interested him despite or even because of the glass. Its (presumably Aboriginal) owner's initial refusal to sell it may have been a strategy to drive up the price that the interested Brown could be convinced to pay.

Many items in Brown's collection are linked to his 1911 and 1912 visits to pastoral stations in the north-west. These quick-moving journeys enabled Brown to gather genealogical information from different groups, but spending little time in places went against his own standards of good fieldwork practice. Hasty visits to pastoral stations were not conducive to sharing culturally sensitive knowledge, practices and objects. In his diary Brown acknowledged

¹²⁴ 'The Zoological Gardens', *Western Mail*, Friday 17 February 1899, 12.

¹²⁵ Mary Ann Jebb, 'Jack Wherra's Boab Nut Carving: A Cross Cultural History', *Journal of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, 12:6 (2006), 697–713 (p. 703).

¹²⁶ MAA, E 1914.70.68. MAA records state that this came from the 'Pinjima' cultural group, likely referring to the 'Panjima' group described by Brown in 'The Distribution of Native Tribes ...', also see A.R. Brown, 'Interim Report on Some Tribes of Western Australia' (undated), *MAA Archive*, OA5/1/43. Panyjima is spoken in the Hamersley Range in the Pilbara region. The decanter claim is questionable, as the glass piece is very narrow. If it was part of a decanter stopper, then most of the stopper is missing.

¹²⁷ Collector's note, 'E 1914.70.68', *Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, <<https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/objects/492309>> [accessed 3 March 2021].

that he had only had time to research kinship structures with any degree of depth.¹²⁸ The limited discussion of Aboriginal material culture in Brown's publications about the Cambridge Expedition may reflect both a recognition that accurate or in-depth information could not be obtained during short station visits, and discomfort with discussing the researchers' longer stay on Bernier and Dorre. The MAA collection includes several items like the boab nuts and pointing stick that overtly demonstrate Aboriginal makers' interest in changing environments. While Brown did not record his motives for acquiring these, their inclusion in his collection speaks to this wider ambivalence about what aspects of Aboriginal culture could be recorded and collected.

'What was not known about was not grieved over': taking Ancestral Remains



Figure 28: Historical photograph of graves on Dorre Island.

This photograph depicts grave markers on Dorre, where many Aboriginal women and some children were confined between 1908 and 1919. Between 1909 and 1918, a reported 169 people taken to Dorre and Bernier died there. The whereabouts of Dorre's graves has been generally forgotten, and this is the only photograph known to show some of them.

Unidentified photographer, image taken c. 1908. My thanks to Jade Pervan for her advice on the attribution to Dorre.

State Library of Western Australia, T.H. Lovegrove collection, 5021B/2/23.

¹²⁸ Brown, 'Handwritten Diary, 8/5/1911 to 10/7/1911', 4.

Thus far, this thesis has focused on how Europeans collected Aboriginal material culture. I now want to consider another form of collecting undertaken by many of the same individuals: the theft of Ancestral Remains. In analysing Australian and European archival sources, Paul Turnbull notes that most Ancestral Remains acquired by Australian museums and medical schools during the twentieth century 'were obtained after erosion or inadvertent human agency exposed burials'.¹²⁹ A significant proportion, however, were deliberately dug up, often in secrecy. Both Brown and Watson covertly acquired body parts during the Cambridge Expedition, and we know of at least two occasions when one or both of them attempted to break open graves and steal corpses. There is no evidence that Bates knew about or condoned their actions, although she was not averse to acquiring objects incorporating the bones of deceased Aboriginal people, and in 1902 she asked to be informed when a particular Aboriginal man suffering from tuberculosis died 'so that his skeleton might be secured for anthropological purposes'.¹³⁰ This section focuses on evidence of illicit grave-robbing and considers how the now-common trope of Aboriginal 'extinction' was used to justify such episodes as acceptable ways of collecting 'lost' knowledge. As will be seen, this justification was controversial even within contemporary settler communities.

Europeans long emphasised the perceived 'authenticity' and 'untouched' state of Aboriginal people in northern Western Australia; depicting those in more southerly areas as 'degraded' through colonial contact and thus less scientifically interesting. By 1911, Europeans commonly believed that the Aboriginal peoples of the south-west were almost or entirely extinct. This belief rested upon an idea that someone with any non-Aboriginal ancestry was not a 'true' Aboriginal person. The Western Australian authorities targeted these individuals through policies like the *Aborigines Act* 1905 (WA), hoping that by separating them from their families and controlling their marriage choices over successive generations, they could engineer a class of

¹²⁹ Turnbull, *Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead* ..., 351.

¹³⁰ Cited in Suzanne Falkner, *The Imago: E.L. Grant Watson and Australia* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2011), 144. Bates donated three items to the British Museum that potentially comprise human bone: a 'poison' bone from Western Australia (Oc1926,1004.2) and two pointing sticks from South Australia (Oc1933,1010.1 and Oc1933,1010.2). At the time of writing, they remain in the British Museum.

people who looked and acted 'white'. In contrast to the interference of officials like A.O. Neville, however, contemporary anthropologists were largely uninterested in Aboriginal people who had any non-Aboriginal ancestry. Bates herself wrote in 1921 that 'with some exceptions, the only good half-caste is a dead half-caste'.¹³¹ Others believed that they were not 'true' Aboriginal people, but still possessed some useful knowledge that could be mined.

Watson, as did Haddon in 1911, proclaimed that Aboriginal people no longer existed in the south-west.¹³² After leaving Brown in 1911, the younger man decided to 'find out what I could do about the now extinct tribes of the south-west'.¹³³ His later recollections make disturbing reading. According to Watson's 1968 memoir, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, he paid an Irish settler to take him one night to a cemetery near Guildford (in Wajuk Noongar Country, near Perth) where some 'last few survivors' were buried.¹³⁴ His accomplice grew too frightened to dig, thinking he saw 'the ghosts of the dead natives flitting about in the glimmer of our lanterns', so Watson performed the brutal work of ripping open graves and bodies:

the first thing I found was the head of the buried man. ... There was no flesh, for all had deliquesced in the dry soil, but hair and skin were intact, and the corpses formed natural mummies. I had to break through the outer skin, and each bone that I got free, I put into one of the sacks. It was a rough job, and I broke several of the ribs in getting them free of the soil. The little bones of wrists and ankles were also a trouble. At last I had one skeleton, more or less complete.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Daisy M. Bates, 'Aboriginal Reserves and Women Patrols', *Sunday Times*, Sunday 2 October 1921, 18.

¹³² Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 68; A.C. Haddon, 'The Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Western Australia' *Nature*, 87 (1911), 24–25.

¹³³ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 68.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 68. Watson's biographer Suzanne Falkiner thought this event likely occurred during Watson's second visit to Australia in early 1912, but given the content of Watson's November 1911 letter to Sir Arthur Keith, the early 1911 date is now more probable. Falkiner, 188.

¹³⁵ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 69.

He then turned to a woman's grave, noting that 'I was anxious to have the two of them. The [woman's] bones were more brittle, and I was tired; I did not make such good progress as at the first grave'.¹³⁶

After refilling the holes, Watson returned to his hotel, bathed, pushed the sacks of remains under his bed, and 'slept soundly, far too tired to let the stench of the bones keep me awake'.¹³⁷ He later went 'with my booty' to a friend's house in Perth, where he dipped the bones in glue to prevent further damage.¹³⁸ They were put in a case labelled 'Geological Specimens' and 'a young man, lately engaged as secretary to a Very Important Person' was persuaded or bribed to smuggle them to England in his employer's luggage.¹³⁹ Watson reflected that 'what was not known about was not grieved over'.¹⁴⁰ His accomplice was perhaps Cecil Treadgold, recently appointed secretary to the Premier of Western Australia, Frank Wilson. Wilson and 'young Treadgold' left Fremantle in March 1911 to attend George V's coronation in London.¹⁴¹ One of Watson's uncles reportedly agreed to store the Ancestral Remains in the cellar of his London home, overriding his aunt's discomfort with their presence.¹⁴² Watson later stopped by to collect them. His desire to 'have the two' indicates that he specifically wanted a man and woman's remains, perhaps because scientists would have seen a 'set' like this as more useful.

In November 1911 Watson wrote to Sir Arthur Keith of the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons of London about two Ancestral Remains from Western Australia that Watson was offering for sale.¹⁴³ Watson described these as the skeletons of an Aboriginal man and woman whom he called 'Noble' and 'Nancy'.¹⁴⁴ He indicated that both had some broken or missing rib bones, and that the woman's bones were generally in poorer condition compared to those of the man as well as fewer in number (126

¹³⁶ Ibid, 69.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 69.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 69–70.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 70.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 70.

¹⁴¹ 'Groperdom Gossip', *The Sun*, Sunday 19 February 1911, 5.

¹⁴² Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 70.

¹⁴³ Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson to Sir Arthur Keith, 30 November 1911. Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons of England, Museum Letters 1911, T-Z (RCS-MUS/5/3/013).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

compared to 152).¹⁴⁵ Significantly, these points match Watson's account of stealing the two Ancestral Remains near Guildford in *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, making it likely that he was referring to the same bodies. However, Watson told Keith that the deceased had been born, lived and died around Wonnerup and Capel in the south-west. Wonnerup and Capel are in Wardandi Noongar Country, and more than two hundred kilometres away from Guildford.¹⁴⁶ Watson's letter gave no indication that he was offering other Ancestral Remains for sale, suggesting that his later recollection of the cemetery being near Guildford was an error.¹⁴⁷ The Hunterian Museum purchased the two skeletons from Watson in 1912, but they are no longer there today. The man's remains were probably destroyed there on the night of 10 May 1941, when German incendiary bombs obliterated much of the museum's collection. The woman's remains may have been amongst others reportedly transferred to the Natural History Museum, whose staff are currently researching the provenance of Ancestral Remains from Australia still in the collection.¹⁴⁸ It will hopefully become possible in the future to identify what has happened to her remains.

Watson only publicly admitted the south-west grave-robberies in his 1968 memoir. Yet his apparent confidence in disinterring the bodies suggests that he had gained prior experience of such work. There is evidence that he and Brown had previously disinterred the corpses of Aboriginal women at Dorre. Neither man publicly acknowledged these actions, but in November 1910 Watson told his mother and stepfather that:

In a few nights Brown & I are going burking. Dead Mum over this. We go armed with shovels & dig up dead nigger women pack them in boxes and carry them off. No one is to be told of this Mrs. Bates knows nothing.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Wonnerup and Capel fall between Bunbury and Busselton, which Watson visited. E.L. Grant Watson, 'Caves Near Busselton', in *Descent of Spirit: Writings of E.L. Grant Watson*, ed. Dorothy Green (Sydney: Primavera Press, 1990), 176–83.

¹⁴⁷ After the Hunterian Museum purchased the Ancestral Remains in 1912 their provenance became further obscured when they were listed as having been 'excavated' at 'Woumevup', presumably a misspelling of Wonnerup. *Annual Report on the Museum by the Conservator*, 1912. Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons of England, Mus-8-2-3-1901-1920 32.

¹⁴⁸ Heather Bonney (personal communication, Thursday 20 May 2021).

¹⁴⁹ E.L. Grant Watson, 25 November 1910.

The whereabouts of the women's graves on Dorre was generally forgotten after the island was abandoned. One area resembles the landscape shown in a photograph of grave markers (Figure 28), although this location is inconsistent with contemporary written accounts.¹⁵⁰ Although I have found no further references in Watson's surviving correspondence, his later assuredness in the south-west suggests that this earlier venture was successful. If so, it is possible that inmates' bodies were smuggled to England alongside the two skeletons that Watson sold to the Hunterian Museum. The imprisonment and death of Aboriginal people on Bernier and Dorre was and remains a source of trauma to many. Malgana/Yawuru woman Kathleen Musulin, whose great-grandmother was taken there in the early twentieth century, recalled being told as a child:

Don't talk about it. You are not allowed to talk about the islands. Just cover your eyes and just point to the islands. The reason being was because it was so traumatic and having that hurt inside, you can't really let that go.¹⁵¹

In further desecrating the bodies of those buried in traumatic circumstances far from their own Country, Brown and Watson's illicit actions vividly illustrate how researchers could profit from a colonial regime.

Watson and Brown were not 'burking' in the usual sense of the term, which refers to murdering someone by the same means, or with the same motive, as Irish serial killers William Burke and William Hare.¹⁵² In 1828 Burke and Hare murdered a succession of people in Edinburgh in order to sell their bodies to an anatomist requiring fresh corpses for dissection in his lectures. At this time, anatomists' demands for corpses vastly outstripped the supply

¹⁵⁰ Stingemore, 'Surviving the "Cure"', 322.

¹⁵¹ Karen Michelmores, 'The ugly past of Australia's 'lock hospitals' on Bernier and Dorre Islands slowly revealed', *ABC News*, Wednesday 19 December 2018, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-19/indigenous-lock-hospitals-onbernier-and-dorre-islands/10634122>> [accessed 12 April 2021].

¹⁵² 'Burke, v.', *OED Online* (March 2021). Oxford University Press. <<https://www-oed-com.ezproxy01.rhul.ac.uk/view/Entry/24983?isAdvanced=false&result=2&rskey=XKUe5G&>> [accessed 15 April 2021]. Brown and Watson's actions are closer to those of the 'resurrection-men' who were Burke and Hare's contemporaries.

available through legal channels.¹⁵³ Burke and Hare turned the bodies of their vulnerable and impoverished victims into valuable scientific commodities. In alluding to these notorious anatomy murders, Watson implied that the bodies they obtained would be likewise sold. One wonders if the two men saw the women trapped on Dorre as holding greater scientific value in death than they had in life.

Brown spent most of his time and energies working with Aboriginal men held on Bernier. He was not uninterested in information relating to women: his publications concerning social structures often note the importance of maternal kinship relationships, and he wrote a short paper on beliefs concerning childbirth.¹⁵⁴ However, his comparatively limited contact with the women on Dorre made the bodies of their predecessors particularly vulnerable to theft. In November 1910 Watson and Brown were camped on Bernier when they targeted graves on the other island. Even if the women on Dorre suspected the desecration of graves, they would have had difficulty in making this known. Inmates had to rely on the good graces of lock hospital employees, or the researchers themselves, in order to communicate across the islands. The researchers may have targeted graves at Bernier too, but Brown's emphasis on fieldwork amongst the living men would have made this a greater risk. There were also, quite simply, fewer male Ancestral Remains available. Five of the men sent to the islands had died in 1909 and 1910, compared with 23 women.¹⁵⁵

By using the term 'burking', Watson indicated that his and Brown's plans to steal bodies were both illegal and likely to provoke public outrage. His public silence about the Dorre episode suggests a lingering unease with what happened. It was impossible to pretend that those buried there were long-deceased and without living relatives, for Aboriginal people only began being taken to the islands in 1908. Watson was more confident in justifying grave-robbery in the south-west via the trope of Aboriginal extinction, although his reluctance to publicly reveal that incident until 1968 suggests

¹⁵³ In Britain, public outrage at the illegal trade in corpses led to the passing of the 1832 Anatomy Act, which largely stopped the practice of anatomical murder and bodysnatching there.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Brown, 'The Social Organization of Australian Tribes' and 'Beliefs Concerning Childbirth ...'.

¹⁵⁵ Stingemore, 'Surviving the "Cure"', 30.

that he had thought the old extinction trope would only work so far against local settlers' 'prejudice against the opening of graves'.¹⁵⁶ He would not necessarily have been concerned about angering European readers, for Eric Mjöberg's 1915 account of the Swedish Scientific Expedition aroused no immediate outcry despite lengthy and gruesome details about the theft of Ancestral Remains.¹⁵⁷ Although Watson later described the south-west incident with apparent relish and a lack of shame, his decision to hide it for over fifty years thus calls out for further scrutiny.

Watson justified grave-robbery in the south-west by claiming that Aboriginal people no longer lived in the area:

The last survivor had been buried about fifteen years earlier. They had no relatives to grieve, and their souls had gone to their own happy hunting grounds.¹⁵⁸

This statement was untrue, as he probably knew. In 1907 Bates reported that an Aboriginal man called Joobythch was buried in Guildford Cemetery.¹⁵⁹ She called him 'a Ballarruk, and the last of his tribe', but acknowledged that he had living stepchildren (whom she considered 'half-castes').¹⁶⁰ Whilst the trope of Aboriginal extinction in the south-west was central to Watson's justification for his actions, he could only press it so far. Stating that the robberies had to be carried out secretly, he noted that they:

would have to be done in as quiet a way as possible for there was popular indignation caused by a story of a man who had shot a native because he wanted his skull. This was probably untrue, but it had created an atmosphere that would not be propitious to the digging up of skeletons.¹⁶¹

This alludes to a 1909 interview given by pastoralist and explorer Frank Hann where he had appeared to admit killing an Aboriginal man in the Goldfields-

¹⁵⁶ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 68.

¹⁵⁷ Hallgren, 'Eric Mjöberg and the Rhetorics of Human Remains', 136.

¹⁵⁸ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 68.

¹⁵⁹ 'A Southern Corroboree', *Western Mail*, Wednesday 25 December 1907, 67; 'Some Southern Aborigines', *Western Mail*, Saturday 7 March 1908, 14.

¹⁶⁰ 'Some Southern Aborigines'.

¹⁶¹ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 68.

Esperance region and sending his head to a collector.¹⁶² According to Watson, settler attitudes were changing, and collectors were now forced to be more circumspect in getting bodies. He claimed that 'although there was little to support this [the Hann incident], the conscience of the white community was waking to the fact that the natives had, in the past, been badly treated'.¹⁶³ Watson, who positioned himself as an enlightened sympathiser with Aboriginal people, thus pre-emptively addressed claims that settlers might find his own actions unconscionable. His relegation of atrocities to a comfortably distant past sits awkwardly with the fact (not necessarily known to Watson) that during the late nineteenth century Hann and one of his employees reportedly killed Waanyi people and nailed their victims' ears to the walls of Lawn Hill station in Queensland.¹⁶⁴

There is another explanation for Watson's long silence. When recollecting the south-west grave-robberies he portrayed himself as a rational man of science, but elsewhere he claimed to believe in the power of Aboriginal 'magic'. 'Coming from Europe where reason is supposed to rule, I thought lightly of magic,' he wrote, 'but not for long; for I have seen men die under magic spells'.¹⁶⁵ A death near Sandstone seems to have influenced his change of heart. Watson had read Spencer and Gillen's *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, which stated that someone wishing to kill a man could charge a stick or bone with evil 'magic' aimed against them.¹⁶⁶ Many white anthropologists were intrigued by pointing sticks or bones and the deadly power that they were thought to wield. They offered various explanations for how these items worked: as causing victims' death from psychological distress upon realising they had been targeted; as covers for clandestine

¹⁶² Public outrage led Western Australia's Commissioner of Police and Chief Protector of Aborigines to investigate Hann's remarks. Hann and the supposed recipient claimed that he had been misunderstood, and had collected the skull of a man who had been dead for some years. The skull in question appears to have been sent to the Royal Anthropological Institute in London. 'Exploring the Interior', *The West Australian*, Tuesday 6 April 1909, 6; 'Exploratory Work', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, Tuesday 6 April 1909, 2; 'Mr. Hann and the Natives', 'Mr F.S. Brockman's View' and 'Another Letter from Mr. Hann', *Western Mail*, Saturday 24 April 1909, 17; 'Mr. Hann and the Natives', *The West Australian*, Friday 9 July 1909, 3.

¹⁶³ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 70.

¹⁶⁴ G.C. Bolton, 'Hann, Frank Hugh (1846–1921)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography*, Australian National University <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hann-frank-hugh-3906/text38694>>, published first in hardcopy 1972 [accessed online 15 April 2021].

¹⁶⁵ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 31.

¹⁶⁶ Spencer and Gillen, 534–38.

physical attacks; and as possessors of an actual supernatural charge. Watson saw them as effective, however they worked. In 1968 he recalled the final days of an Aboriginal man called Gnulgoto who was working for the party as a handyman:

One morning we noticed that he was looking very dejected. 'What's the matter, Gnulgoto?' we asked. 'Me dead-fellow. Pointum bone, me dead-fellow.' ... And die he did, a mixture of depression, fear and his own strong belief in the powers of ill-wishing. Such are the powers of suggestion.¹⁶⁷

Watson's beliefs about 'magic' were more complex than this 'rational' explanation implied. He felt that his own beliefs had evolved, and that 'bush magic is not only suggestion':

When I first went into the bush I thought it was all nonsense and superstition, but by the time I had lived there a year I was sure that great powers were hidden in magic and would on no account have risked having magic made against me.¹⁶⁸

This pronouncement was more than a literary flourish, for some years later Watson became convinced that his lover's husband was casting evil magic against Watson's daughter.¹⁶⁹ Despite claiming to have kept the south-west grave-robberies secret because of the attitude of white settlers, Watson also likely feared supernatural vengeance directed by Aboriginal people. Such fear had, apparently, waned somewhat by 1968.

Aside from the two incidents that Watson referred to, further Ancestral Remains have come to light. The Duckworth Collections at the University of Cambridge contain two unmodified human skulls.¹⁷⁰ Institutional records indicate that the deceased were from the 'Baiong Tribe' (a term used for

¹⁶⁷ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 32. The researchers do not seem to have seen or collected this item, for they did not describe it and it is not in the MAA collection.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 32.

¹⁶⁹ Falkiner, 312.

¹⁷⁰ Trish Briers (personal communication, 11 March 2020).

Payungu people), and that Brown acquired their skulls in or before 1912.¹⁷¹ Brown recorded visiting 'Baiong' people living around the Minilya and Lyndon Rivers in the Gascoyne from March 1911 onwards.¹⁷² However, we should also acknowledge the possibility that these remains were acquired not on the mainland but at the lock hospitals, and that their provenance may have been deliberately obscured. In May 1911 the Australian Government forbade the overseas export of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander skeletal remains, unless the exporter had secured the approval of the Minister for Trade and Customs.¹⁷³ This Proclamation was 'largely ineffectual', and its existence largely unknown to scientists gathering at the 1913 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science.¹⁷⁴ Even if aware of such laws, however, some scientists were clearly prepared to break them. The two skulls acquired by Brown were probably exported from Australia after the 1911 Proclamation, given that his object consignments to the MAA arrived in Cambridge in 1914 and 1915. No evidence of his having secured export permission has to date been located.

The Cambridge Expedition's treatment of Ancestral Remains is overshadowed in European popular memory by that of the Swedish Scientific Expedition in the Kimberley. This is partly due to the small number in collections today: other than the two now in the Duckworth Collections, the whereabouts of other Ancestral Remains have not yet been conclusively identified. Watson's references to two grave-robbing incidents (the south-west thefts and the potential thefts at Dorre) suggest that acquiring Ancestral Remains was opportunistic and limited in scale, rather than a major expedition priority. In contrast, Swedish Scientific Expedition leader Eric Mjöberg took many Ancestral Remains in ways that were blatant enough to disturb Yngve Laurell, a fellow expedition member who also stole Ancestral Remains but preferred to do so discreetly.¹⁷⁵ Brown and Watson chose a clandestine approach, the former perhaps hoping to safeguard prospects for further fieldwork in Western Australia in years to come.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Brown, 'The Distribution of Native Tribes ...', 144.

¹⁷³ 'Proclamation', *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* (1911), 1448.

¹⁷⁴ Cressida Fforde, Amber Aranui, Gareth Knapman and Paul Turnbull, "'Inhuman and Very Mischievous Traffic': Early Measures to Cease the Export of Ancestral Remains from Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia", in *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation: Return, Reconcile, Renew*, ed. Cressida Fforde, C. Timothy McKeown, and Honor Keeler (London: Routledge, 2020), 381–99 (p. 389).

¹⁷⁵ Hallgren, 'Eric Mjöberg and the Rhetorics of Human Remains', 135.

The Duckworth Collections hold Ancestral Remains from a wide range of institutions and departments within the University of Cambridge, and it has not so far been possible to confirm where Brown had originally sent the two skulls.¹⁷⁶ Brown never referred to them in his publications, and evidence indicates that he never saw human remains as a collecting priority. In 1910 Brown gave a lecture called 'Primitive Man in Western Australia' at the Perth Museum and Art Gallery. In it, he emphasised the perceived similarities between the skulls of Aboriginal people and 'the Neanderthal men of Europe' (whom he portrayed as the ancestors of modern Europeans).¹⁷⁷ Although he claimed that studying Aboriginal skulls shed light upon human evolution, he flagged that their study was not his priority:

... it was the skulls which in an interesting subject interested him least. We could dig up skulls, but we could not dig up customs and beliefs, and it was accordingly the latter which were most in need of study.¹⁷⁸

As Watson's reference to targeting graves at Dorre indicates, Brown may have delayed or avoided acquiring material culture and Ancestral Remains on occasions when this risked jeopardising his primary goal of recording social observations.

The Cambridge Expedition researchers profited from colonial interventions, most obviously by choosing to work on Dorre and Bernier and interviewing inmates whose capture they had sometimes directly assisted in. Those they researched were trapped, far from family and home, and sometimes dying. Whether they were intimidated, lonely, ill or bored, it must have been hard to overtly reject the newcomers with their notebooks, camera and recording equipment. The researchers' white contemporaries did not criticise their exploitation of the living. Brown and Watson recognised that their use of the dead was less socially acceptable, so hid or tried to justify it. Whereas Watson used the trope of Aboriginal extinction to defend robberies in the south-west, he apparently recognised that this flawed logic was too

¹⁷⁶ Trish Briers (personal communication, 11 March 2020).

¹⁷⁷ 'Primitive Man in Western Australia', *The West Australian*, Monday 3 October 1910, 2.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

patently absurd to justify those on Dorre. The trope of Aboriginal extinction, therefore, could only be pushed so far.

Conclusions

This chapter sought to complicate conventional narratives about the Cambridge Expedition members' attitudes towards Aboriginal material culture. Brown himself was comparatively uninterested in Aboriginal material culture as a research subject in its own right, remarking in 1910 that:

We could not tell much about the customs and beliefs of primitive man in Europe because all we had left of him were certain relics of stone and bones and bits of wood. These did not tell us much about the ideas he possessed, though they told us something.¹⁷⁹

Bates and Brown also tried, however, to deploy some objects as tools to support their fieldwork. The researchers thought that they were generally using restricted items and message sticks in keeping with Aboriginal cultural contexts, although what their targets thought about this remains open to interpretation. These material engagements affected the researchers' subsequent fieldwork. Bates accessed new research subjects by delivering message sticks; Brown's possession of restricted material strengthened his research with Aboriginal men. Showing men's objects to women would have harmed relationships, whereas showing them to certain men helped to create the conditions necessary for successful fieldwork, whether because viewers were intrigued, impressed or intimidated.

The impact of colonial settlement and anti-Aboriginal government policies mean that at least some of the cultural knowledge sought by the Cambridge Expedition researchers may have been lost by 1910. However, the researchers also benefited from a widespread belief that traditional Aboriginal culture was being quickly lost. This helped to highlight the value of their research, and excused instances when they failed to obtain information. When Brown's informants 'could not find' places or 'did not know' things, he usually interpreted this as signs that the old ways had been, or were being,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

forgotten.¹⁸⁰ There are, of course, other reasons for such silences, as some of Warri's responses to David Carnegie (see Chapter Four) indicated. Brown did not dwell on the possibility that some informants deliberately withheld knowledge.

The limited documentation around the objects in the MAA collection stems, I argue, not just from Brown's limited interest in material culture but from a failure to establish close personal relationships at key points during the expedition. What different Aboriginal people in Western Australia really thought about Bates requires more investigation. Notwithstanding her attempts at self-aggrandisement, however, she was clearly more experienced than either Brown or Watson in working with Aboriginal communities. Her conflict with Brown dampened whatever initial enthusiasm she had for helping him to connect deeply with Aboriginal people. Many of those whom they worked with were also subject to extensive colonial interference and according to Bates' own accounts were suspicious of the two men being police officers, which would hardly have fostered close connections. Brown's mentor Haddon had named and quoted from many Torres Strait Islanders in his formal reports about his 1888 and 1898 visits to Torres Strait, a practice that was then unusual among his contemporaries.¹⁸¹ Haddon also sought to retain connections with his Torres Strait Islander informants, and although those friendships involved uneven power dynamics and helped him to extract private and sensitive information, there are indications of 'an element of playfulness on both sides, and expressions of affection which suspend for a moment the inequality'.¹⁸² Little equivalent is found in Brown's writings about the Cambridge Expedition, which hardly mention individual Aboriginal people. This should, I argue, be seen not merely as the result of academic convention or personal preference. The selection of fieldwork sites, the number of communities visited, collaboration with police raids and conflict within the expedition party all worked against the formation of longer-lasting intercultural engagements. The limited written references Brown made to Aboriginal

¹⁸⁰ Brown, 'Handwritten Diary, 8/5/1911 to 10/7/1911', 2–4.

¹⁸¹ Herle and Rouse, 15.

¹⁸² Jeremy Beckett, 'Haddon Attends a Funeral: Fieldwork in Torres Strait, 1888, 1898' in *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, ed. Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 23–49 (p. 45).

makers, users and owners of objects therefore reflects a broader failure in communication during the expedition.

Brown, Bates and Watson conducted much of their fieldwork amongst people who were facing high levels of colonial control and interference. They nonetheless emphasised their goal to record cultural knowledge and practices that they saw as 'traditional', and sometimes attempted to reconcile these positions. Brown used one servant, an unnamed Thalanyji man, to argue that Aboriginal men saw each other only as relatives or as enemies to be killed:

This represents the real feelings of the natives on the matter. ... This, before the white man came, was the aboriginal view of one's duty towards one's neighbour, and it still remains at the back of his mind at the present day in spite of the new conditions brought about by the coming of the white man.¹⁸³

Brown suggested that even Aboriginal men in contact with white settlers did not change at heart, so possessed traits that anthropologists could scrutinise even in these 'degenerate days'.¹⁸⁴ An incident near Sandstone suggested additional possibilities. Brown, Watson, and three Aboriginal intermediaries (likely including Mindooloo and Perrepierremara) visited a white station manager living nearby. Initially hostile, the man was somewhat mollified when the intermediaries spoke with Aboriginal people at the station, 'to make clear our neutral attitude'.¹⁸⁵ He apparently relaxed further that evening, after seeing Brown and Watson treat their Aboriginal colleagues in a friendly way.¹⁸⁶ According to Watson's 1968 memoir, the subsequent conversation challenged typical portrayals of white settler masculinity. The man professed a strong affinity with Aboriginal people and culture, praised their religion and showed apparent initiation scars that he said showed 'I have chosen their way of life ... I am one of them'.¹⁸⁷ Watson had sympathy for the manager but suggested his lifestyle could not last: 'we [he and Brown] wondered how long the simplicity and adaptability of the native girls would satisfy the restless ego

¹⁸³ Brown, 'Three Tribes of Western Australia', 151.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 151.

¹⁸⁵ Grant Watson, *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, 42.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 42.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 42–43.

of a European'.¹⁸⁸ Whilst Watson did not condemn Aboriginal influences he saw the white manager, like Brown's Thalanyji servant, as unable to escape his inherent racial character. These incidents suggest how the researchers reconciled their goal of recording pre-contact knowledge with collecting items that obviously incorporated materials, motifs and techniques of non-Aboriginal origin. They saw such items as nonetheless relevant, perhaps because they thought makers' minds had not (yet) come under the full sway of settlers. Jeremy Beckett notes that like most anthropologists in the early twentieth century, Haddon's students 'looked for societies that were untouched, writing whatever colonial present there was out of the account'.¹⁸⁹ In both the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits and the Cambridge Expedition to Western Australia, collecting inherently contradicted such attempts.

The researchers' collections complicate their public statements about how Aboriginal culture in Western Australia was dying out. This narrative of extinction helped them to find professional prestige and public interest in their work, and justify unethical practices. When Bates publicly discussed one message stick in her possession, she made a point of noting that its sender and intended recipients were dead.¹⁹⁰ This helped to justify her possession: no Aboriginal person, she implied, was any longer entitled to its message. Watson admitted stealing bodies in the south-west on the basis that Aboriginal people there were supposedly 'extinct'. In contrast, he and Brown did not publicly discuss grave-robbing at Dorre, probably in part because the deceased there were clearly recently buried.

This expedition has often been discussed in terms of the personalities involved; its impact upon Brown's theorising of kinship structures; and Watson's literary evocations of Australia. Until now, the researchers' treatment of material culture and Ancestral Remains have not been scrutinised collectively. However, these two strands of collecting together demonstrate the pervasive impact of Aboriginal extinction narratives and the internal incoherence involved in trying to justify collecting decisions on this basis. Julie Adams has elsewhere highlighted 'the contradictions and casual

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 43.

¹⁸⁹ Beckett, 49.

¹⁹⁰ Bates, 'Native Decorative Art', 14.

cruelty inherent in many anthropological acquisitions' of the early twentieth century, 'where violence, coercion and collecting went hand in hand'.¹⁹¹ Tracing the histories of collections formed through ventures like the Cambridge Expedition thus highlights researchers' ability to benefit from, despite remaining ambivalent about, colonial regimes.

¹⁹¹ Julie Adams, *Museum, Magic, Memory: Curating Paul Denys Montague* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2021), 22.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

In 1907 Australian historian and poet Ida Lee wrote an article about the British Museum's holdings linked to Western Australia. Lee devoted most of her piece, published in a Western Australian weekly newspaper, to European written and paper records: 'The principal portion of Western Australia's past history', she proclaimed, 'is to be found in the Department of Maps'.¹ Lee highlighted other objects that in her words, 'illustrate[d] ... more or less, the wild life of the aborigines those first dwellers in the land, who were called Australians'.² A case in the museum's Ethnological Gallery caught her eye:

A Number of Spear Heads of finished workmanship, cut in stone, chalcedony, and glass, lie by the side of several native axes of rude construction, some of which still bear stains of blood upon their wooden handles. The heads are merely a large lump of blackboy gum, into which a piece of flint is fastened. These probably were the kind used by the blacks before white men had taught them how to make better ones. There are others, with a piece of hoop-iron in place of the flint, which recall the tales of Magellan's voyage to the Ladrões and of how the natives of those islands besieged his ship with cries of 'Hiero. Hiero,' bartering their best weapons for odd bits of the much-prized metal which soon were fixed into the heads of their axes.³

Lee inserted these points ('spear heads') and axes into a racialised narrative about technological progress. The *kodj* ('native axes') of 'rude construction', she wrote, had now been supplanted by 'better' materials and forms. They were now bygone relics from when Aboriginal people had not yet benefited from white influence. Lee framed the metal axe-heads as historically significant too, comparing them with the material impact of Ferdinand Magellan's 1521 visit to the Mariana Islands in Micronesia. That the axes were made with metal obtained from Europeans, she implied, gave them historical value. Although Lee characterised *kodj* as primitive pre-colonial creations, and metal axe-heads as witnesses to colonial influence, she had

¹ Ida Lee, 'Early Western Australia', *Western Mail*, Wednesday 25 December 1907, 11–15 (p. 11). The British Library was part of the British Museum until 1973.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

little to say about the spear points beyond the material that they were made from. Having acknowledged their 'finished workmanship', the historian may have found these harder to integrate into her narrative.

Lee's description is unintentionally revealing in other ways. She stated that certain *kodj* were stained with 'blood'. Although some examples held by the British Museum carry traces of resin, pigment, and other substances like ash, the museum's records do not identify any bloodstains. *Kodj* were multipurpose tools often used to cut trees, so it is by no means certain that those Lee saw were used to kill or butcher animals.⁴ They were furthermore at least some years, and likely several decades, old.⁵ For blood to withstand years of handling and display to remain visible to visitors in 1907, whilst passing entirely unremarked upon by curators and conservators, is improbable. Rather, a lack of knowledge about how they were constructed (indicated by Lee's simplistic description of the process) may have led her to interpret other kinds of discolouration as bloody remnants. In fixing upon blood as the logical source of the discolouration, she positioned *kodj* as primitive objects far removed from European ideas about the appropriate cleansing of tools and weapons. Like Lee, collectors' prior beliefs and experiences profoundly affected how they interpreted what they collected. This thesis set out to explore these intersections between colonial ideologies and personal experience.

The formation of an ethnographic collection, I argue, is an inherently political act. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, non-Aboriginal people engaged with their societies' ideas about how Aboriginal people lived, what they were capable of, and how they should be treated. Some commentators explicitly highlighted the ways in which objects spoke to these entwined concepts; investigations into collectors' lives and beliefs enable further connections to be drawn out. The Aboriginal objects discussed in this study have accrued (and continue to accrue) many meanings across different times, places, and people. I considered them alongside a range of

⁴ For example, Nind, 27.

⁵ At the time of Lee's visit the British Museum had not accessioned any *kodj* since the late nineteenth century. Many entered the collection during the mid-nineteenth century, and even those arriving later were probably older than their formal accession date implies. For example, in 1895 Gertrude Ellen Meinertzhagen sold the museum a *kodj* (Oc1950,+3) previously owned by her father, who probably acquired it in Albany between 1866 and 1881.

cultural, zoological, botanical and geological material acquired by the same collectors. Studying these wider material engagements helps us to understand how collectors approached Aboriginal objects. For example, the creation of ceramic points found in many British and Irish ethnographic collections share affinities with some jewellery worn by settler women. Non-Aboriginal commentators associated the points with attacks upon the telegraph line, whereas settler officials simultaneously condoned the creation of Mary Barker's telegraph wire bracelet (see Chapter Four). Through exploring these objects' histories, however, we see how both were linked to narratives concerning colonial technologies and regional expansion. My other reason for considering diverse material stems from the fact that contemporary European discourse frequently contrasted Aboriginal people from Western Australia with other indigenous groups across the world, as the opening quotes in my introductory chapter showed. These comparisons range from Alexander Collie's prediction that attempts to 'civilise' Minang people around King George Sound would be 'less problematical' than 'similar laudable attempts in other places', to Elliot Watson's contrast of Fijians' 'latent cruelty' to his 'simple human relationship' with Aboriginal Australians.⁶ Many collectors discussed Aboriginal peoples' supposed similarities or differences to other indigenous peoples, so exploring their connections with other places, people and objects also sheds light on why they responded as they did in Western Australia.

In Chapter Two I discussed broad patterns in terms of what, when, and how material from Western Australia entered British and Irish ethnographic collections. Some general trends involving collecting activity in Western Australia can be traced. For example, only three Aboriginal objects from Western Australia are clearly known to have entered the British Museum throughout the 1840s and 1850s, decades that saw the creation of alternative collecting institutions like the Swan River Mechanics' Institute in Perth (established 1851), a temporary slowdown in British civilian immigrants, settlers' increasing interest in using penal labour (Western Australia was formally designated a penal colony in 1849), and greater British interest in

⁶ Collie, 'Copy of a Report ...', 32; Grant Watson, *But to What Purpose*, 133.

colonies like Canada and India.⁷ Beyond broad patterns like these, however, chronological phases do not seem to offer a helpful lens through which to study motives for ethnographic collecting in Western Australia. Collection case studies indicate that framing this according to defined chronological phases (as suggested by Peterson et al, see Chapter One) does not support the evidence uncovered in my research. The ‘frontier’ in Western Australia occurred at widely varying dates across an extensive geographic region. Edward Hardman’s collecting in the Kimberley during the 1880s, for example, shares important affinities with Alexander Collie and Samuel Talbot’s collections made further south during the 1830s. The collecting of Hardman’s own contemporary Frederick Broome speaks to substantially different motivations, although understanding the state of ethnographic discourse during the 1880s and ongoing political and demographic changes in the north-west offers us some insights into both their collections.

As Daisy Bates’ and Alfred Brown’s cases demonstrate (see Chapter Seven), even collectors visiting the same places at the same time, and often meeting the same people, might build, experience and represent their collections very differently. However, it is possible to trace some affinities across many of the diverse collections now in British and Irish museums, and these raise important questions. Why, for example, do stone tools and objects often characterised as weapons (like boomerangs, spear points and spears) recur so frequently? Does this stem only from their physical hardness and the ease with which they might be transported? The presence of so many spears, widely used in Western Australia but not the easiest of weapons for collectors to transport, suggests that physical factors alone do not explain why certain objects so frequently entered museum collections. And even setting aside the intensity of Emile Clement’s collecting activity, why did so many objects from northern Western Australia (see, for example, Appendix Three) arrive in museums over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? To what extent did factors like public exhibitions, the developing discipline of anthropology and the work of auction houses drive this influx?⁸

⁷ A spear-thrower (Oc1846,0809.13) donated by Lieutenant J.M.R. Ince in 1846, and a *kodj* (Oc1856,0510.1) and *taap* (Oc1856,0510.2) donated by William Willoughby Cole, Third Earl of Enniskillen in 1856.

⁸ See Jones, ‘Australian Ethnographica ...’.

Whilst this thesis focused on collectors' actions and perspectives, it also highlighted the profound influence of Aboriginal makers, users and owners on the formation of collections. Choices over objects' visual appearance, materials, weight and durability all affected what was made, collected and preserved. Collectors sometimes recognised that their level of access to objects and information was contingent upon Aboriginal decisions. Edward Hardman understood that his inability to see or obtain restricted material in the Kimberley came not because these items did not exist, but because their owners refused him access (see Chapter Three). Acknowledging Aboriginal agency in collecting processes by no means implies that all decisions were freely made. The owners of bark containers stolen by David Carnegie (see Chapter Four) were forced to abandon their belongings in order to escape their hunters. The process of collecting information and objects during the Cambridge Expedition (see Chapter Seven) was also marked by exploitation and violence. From the Aboriginal owner of the glass-tipped pointing stick who made Alfred Brown negotiate for it, to the defiance of the senior woman kidnapped by Carnegie, Aboriginal people nonetheless found ways to assert agency even when they had to operate within unequal power dynamics.

As I indicated, the contents of ethnographic collections have been informed by a range of decisions taken by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Analysis of objects and research into how field-collectors represented them and their makers, users and owners, has helped to reveal how contemporary social attitudes intersected with collecting. Whether in private correspondence or more public accounts, collectors often expressed ideas about the supposed inherent characteristics of Aboriginal people. These perceptions were informed by contemporary ideologies about race, culture and gender, and by individual collectors' social status, education, and personal ambitions. In Chapter Three, I explored collections acquired from several localities when the settler-colonist invasion was still relatively new. Whilst they acquired material at different times and in different places, Alexander Collie, Samuel Talbot and Edward Hardman each sought to acknowledge Aboriginal people and social structures as visible, healthy and dynamic parts of the neighbourhoods in which they lived. They did not present Aboriginal objects as the last gasps of societies doomed to extinction, and avoided portraying those bearing recognisable signs of syncretism as evidence of cultural degradation. Their interpretations, like those of other

collectors discussed, had important implications for how they thought the colonial regime should treat Aboriginal peoples. Most of the people I discussed did not see themselves as 'professional collectors' and were not primarily collecting for profit (Clement being a notable exception), but their collecting decisions frequently helped to support their professional ambitions. For collectors ranging from Frederick Broome and Gerard Trower to Daisy Bates, Aboriginal items worked to signal their expertise and authority across a wide range of professional fields.

My investigations reveal a common concern in how many collectors thought about their ethnographic acquisitions: Aboriginal peoples' supposed capabilities, 'usefulness' and ability to fit into settler-led power structures. Some individuals engaged explicitly with these issues; others did so less overtly. Many collectors discussed in this thesis portrayed Aboriginal people as resources who could potentially benefit settlers or white people more generally. These ideas could be bound up with perceptions about the land's non-human resources. In Chapter Four, for example, I discussed how Trower sent his former colleague material from his diocese that alluded not only to the people whom Anglican missionaries were seeking to convert, but the region's geological and marine riches. Collectors' opinions varied, however, as to how they perceived Aboriginal peoples' value. Some explicitly discussed their potential utility as sources of labour, including Collie, Hardman and Carnegie. Others indicated a desire for their collections and associated knowledge to be used for educating others. Their targets were often not the wider public, but scientists or other colonial agents: when Collie's comprehensive notes from the *Blossom* expedition went to Haslar Hospital Museum he desired that these not be 'exposed to the public more than is necessary for the good of the Museum'.⁹ A few, like Collie, Trower and Bates also presented settlers' acquisition of Aboriginal objects as potentially enabling settlers to fulfil their moral obligations towards the first peoples of Western Australia. And although the idea of Aboriginal racial inferiority became a cornerstone of European race science, we find that some individuals presented Aboriginal people as sources of moral or spiritual insights for discerning white men and women. Watson came to reject some elements of Enlightenment science and acknowledge the potential validity of

⁹ Cited in Simpson, 'For Science ...', 31.

'bush magic'. Less dramatically, Hardman's praise of Kimberley points fashioned from bottle-glass implicitly contrasted Aboriginal skill and ingenuity against the less-than-flattering figure of the colonist with their 'deadly' brandy-bottle.¹⁰ Common across these accounts is the sense that Aboriginal people possessed qualities that settlers might, with sufficient knowledge and effort, exploit.

The collectors shared no single belief about what would happen to Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Daisy Bates thought their fate as a 'dying race' was inevitable; others believed that some would survive with varying degrees of support, influence and control by missionaries, pastoralists and other settlers. Most of the collectors whom I studied appreciated the appearance of some Aboriginal objects and the skill with which they were made and used. Many seem to have held a comparatively favourable view of Aboriginal peoples' future survival. Further research should uncover whether collectors' views were indeed substantially different from those of other travellers and settlers; but at any rate they show that engagements with Aboriginal material culture was tightly bound up with evolutionary discourse and ideas about the future.

Like other commentators during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, collectors often presented contemporaneous Aboriginal objects as more-or-less archaic remnants of Western Australia's pre-colonial period, linking 'authentic' Aboriginality with humanity's past. Yet many were also attracted to objects bearing overt signs of engagement with settlers, including the visible use of European techniques, designs or materials. As we have seen, these ranged from pointing and message sticks to carved boab nuts and points. Weapons (or tools that collectors generally interpreted as weapons) and especially glass and ceramic points appear frequently amongst these syncretic objects, even more than one would expect given the general popularity of Aboriginal 'weapons' of all kinds in collections. Collectors' acquisition of these objects sometimes stemmed from a 'simple' lack of other alternatives. Yet the fact that so many overtly syncretic objects were 'weapons', and specifically points, seems meaningful. Collectors' accounts almost always portrayed points as weapons, rather than as objects with multi-

¹⁰ Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection', 61.

functional uses. A case in point is the glass knife acquired by Trower and classed as a 'lance head'. This tendency to frame points as 'lance heads' and 'spear points' (even when there was no evidence that they had ever been attached to a spear) probably stemmed from how collectors generally heard about or saw them used. I suggest that it also enabled writers to emphasise their use in hunter-gatherer contexts and perhaps implicitly contrast them with European firearm technologies despite still praising Aboriginal makers' technological skills and aesthetic sensibility. Discussing syncretic or 'entangled' Aboriginal objects that entered Queensland Museum during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Gemmia Burden points out that curators and collectors framed these as 'tainted and reflective of cultural disintegration', being more interested in Aboriginal objects that they saw as traditional and pre-colonial in nature.¹¹ This tendency is indeed evident through many of my chapters. However, this narrative was also complicated by the number of collectors in Western Australia who chose to describe syncretic or 'entangled' objects, most notably glass and ceramic Kimberley points. Further analysis of collecting in Western Australia promises to enrich our understandings of colonial perceptions of authenticity, and how these played out in different parts of Australia in complex ways.

Although there is little evidence that very distinctive chronological phases of collecting played out in Western Australia, the collections do speak to changes in how European and settler discourse constructed Aboriginal culture. As the nineteenth century progressed, notions that 'authentic' Aboriginal people would inevitably become extinct due to the advance of 'civilisation' gained ground across Australia.¹² This helped to motivate some collectors like Radcliffe-Brown, who wanted to salvage genealogical structures and word-lists before they were lost. Other objects acquired by field collectors were incorporated into secondary exhibitions directed towards state ends. At international events like the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 and the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901, Aboriginal weapons were used selectively as 'local colour'. Their curation in the exhibition spaces neutralised their disruptive potential, so that other embodiments of settler industry, power and 'progress' could be highlighted. The Western Australian displays at Paris

¹¹ Gemmia Burden, 'The Adherent Taints of Civilisation': Entangled Artefacts and the Queensland Museum, c.1880–1920', *History Australia*, 16:4 (2019), 733–749 (p. 748).

¹² McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, 48–49.

1900 and Glasgow 1901 shared the tendency of ethnographic collections to obscure Aboriginal involvement in settler-led industries. With some important exceptions, the Aboriginal material that came to Britain and Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century seems to have been increasingly framed as artefacts of hunter-gatherer peoples whose time was nearly over.

My investigations suggest that through scrutinising how individual collectors engaged with colonial narratives, we gain wider insights into how ideology informed the movement of objects into museum collections. This may help us to understand why so many objects in collections formed over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are linked to northern Western Australia, a proportion that cannot simply be explained by changing regional demographics or the personal drive of Emile Clement. This thesis focused on how objects moved to collectors and museums, and many of the collections I have discussed made this movement in the late nineteenth century, a time when the museum sector underwent substantial growth. The desire of many museum curators to add to, exchange and develop their collections for certain purposes also needs to be brought into the discussion. So, too, do collections formed in other colonial contexts around the world. This study contributes to this global research by pointing out the myriad ways in which indigenous objects incorporating 'settler' materials have been interpreted, and the importance of ideas about the 'remote' in influencing the formation of collections.

Collectors' characterisations of Western Australia frequently demonstrate an interest in areas 'remote' from colonial settlements and, by the late nineteenth century, particularly those in the north. This likely stems in part from the practical fact that more settlers now lived in the north, and collectively had more opportunities to obtain material than their predecessors had. The 1880s, 1890s and 1900s were also decades when material from Western Australia was attracting a good deal of interest amongst European museums, dealers and auction houses. This development should also be seen in light of contemporary discourse about Aboriginal culture. In this discourse, Aboriginal cultures (and often Aboriginal peoples) were frequently portrayed as doomed to die out if and when they experienced lasting contact with white culture. By the late nineteenth century, various communities in the south and south-west had experienced contact with settlers for many

decades. European commentators often characterised these communities as inferior to earlier generations, and no longer 'truly' Aboriginal. They might blame this 'degradation' upon specific actions carried out by settlers, particularly those involving socially unacceptable uses of alcohol, sex or violence; or to an inherent Aboriginal inability to thrive in 'modern' society regardless of white behaviour. For many anthropologists and collectors, Aboriginal peoples of the south and south-west thus held a highly ambiguous position in relation to anthropological knowledge.

Wayne Modest has argued that white commentators historically saw the black population of the Caribbean as an anomaly: they 'were neither ancient enough nor modern enough as a people whose history and culture could be collected and celebrated by museums'.¹³ Modest was specifically discussing the Caribbean context, but during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a sense developed that Aboriginal peoples of south-west Western Australia had *become* 'not cultural enough' and now fell outside of anthropological (and museological) interest.¹⁴ As anthropologist Marcia Langton pointed out in 1981, the effects of this ongoing discourse around Aboriginal 'authenticity' was pervasive, with many authors 'consider[ing] that Aborigines on the white side of the "rolling frontier" lack culture, have no distinctive culture, have only some truncated version of European culture, or have only a "culture of poverty"'.¹⁵

Colonial ideals about 'authentic' Aboriginality instead fixed upon regions where colonial expansion was slower. Aboriginal people in northern Western Australia therefore became a particular topic of popular and academic interest in the late-nineteenth century. In the 'remote' north, many writers claimed, one might still find 'original' and 'authentic' customs practised. Scholars remained particularly interested in the north well into the twentieth century, and its inhabitants were frequently held out as a 'remnant' of Aboriginal culture: living repositories of ethnographic information that had to be gleaned before it was lost forever. The specific ideological importance of northern Western Australia to European ethnographic discourse is a topic that

¹³ Wayne Modest, 'We Have Always Been Modern: Museums, Collections, and Modernity in the Caribbean', *Museum Anthropology*, 35:1 (2012), 85–96 (p. 93).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁵ Marcia Langton, 'Urbanizing Aborigines: The Social Scientists' Great Deception', *Social Alternatives*, 2:2 (1981), 16–22 (p. 17).

deserves greater scholarly attention. Like Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and Cape York in Queensland, its remoteness from colonial settlements also helped to ensure the survival of languages and traditions that interested anthropologists like Charles Mountford, Donald Thomson and Ursula McConnel.

My research shows that a wide range of social discourse relating to ideas around race, gender and morality influenced collectors' attitudes towards Aboriginal objects. Some collectors had an overt professional rationale for collecting them; in many cases, the boundaries between professional and personal motivations were more blurred. Several travellers were evidently attracted by Western Australia's supposed 'remoteness'. This attitude was shared by individuals who otherwise had conflicting attitudes towards Aboriginal people. Such disparate characters as Talbot, Carnegie and Watson had experienced painful rejection from relatives or potential romantic partners before coming to Western Australia. Reading their letters and memoirs, we find that each depicted Western Australia as a place where a young man might move beyond the comforts of 'civilisation' and demonstrate his fortitude. Aboriginal peoples' perceived remoteness, primitivity and 'authenticity' offered these men potential opportunities to gain in self-knowledge and to demonstrate their supposedly greater discernment, strength and character. Carnegie was largely dismissive of Aboriginal people, but by acknowledging their presence he could try to fashion himself as a powerful yet benevolent dictator. Throughout this thesis I have argued that to understand how collections have developed, we must consider how collectors thought about themselves as well as how they tried to meet the desires of museums. When the trustees of the British Museum issued their 1837 plea for objects Talbot answered the call, acquiring and documenting an unusually diverse range of material available in the south-west. In contrast, Carnegie collected material opportunistically. When his prospecting and pastoral ambitions for his 1896–1897 expedition in the Western Australian desert failed, he responded by using what he had collected to connect with prestigious institutions and scholars like archaeologist and British Museum curator Charles Hercules Read. In unpacking these dynamics between collectors and museum workers, some of whom were collectors themselves, we gain a better understanding of why non-professional collectors made the effort they did to acquire and interpret Aboriginal objects.

Collectors frequently read Aboriginal actions involving objects in ways that upheld notions of settler superiority and dominance. Of course, Aboriginal people could and did act in ways that collectors failed to anticipate or comprehend. When Carnegie kidnapped a man and stole ('confiscated') his axe, the man reworked an overlooked meat-tin into a cutting tool and means of escape.¹⁶ In recounting the incident, Carnegie sought to reassert his own authority by portraying 'Sir John's' actions as foolishly premature. Sifting his words, however, we find a story of ingenuity and resistance. Other incidents involving objects were less dramatic. In December 1821 Phillip Parker King noticed the behaviour of Noongar intermediary 'Jack' whilst the ship's crew were engaged in trade at King George Sound. King was somewhat surprised, for he noted down that Jack 'laughed heartily whenever a bad and carelessly-made spear was offered to us for sale'.¹⁷ King interpreted this laughter as contempt for the poor quality of Aboriginal weapons being traded with the crew. Perhaps this interpretation was accurate, perhaps not. More significantly for this study, it represents a rare acknowledgement that individual Aboriginal people had their own perspectives about transactions. Many collectors' accounts downplay the individuality of Aboriginal participants, yet closer reading has the potential to uncover agency and complicate authors' assessments of how objects moved between hands.¹⁸

Some case studies indicate that Aboriginal people involved in the 'friendly' transfer of information and objects grappled with difficult decisions over what they would release. Servants and intermediaries like Warri must have trod a fine line in terms of what information and material they would offer to their expectant white associates. From the late nineteenth century onwards, collectors' notions that Aboriginal cultural knowledge was being quickly forgotten may have helped some Aboriginal informants to profess ignorance of matters that they wished to keep private. In some cases, collectors recognised resistance to their efforts. When William Campbell (see Chapter Five) negotiated for men to perform dances supposedly associated with men's ceremonial objects, he realised that none would do so when wearing their own ornaments, and that some continued to refuse even after

¹⁶ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 273.

¹⁷ King, *Narrative of a Survey*, II, 67.

¹⁸ See Collard and Palmer; Shellam. *Shaking Hands on the Fringe, Meeting the Waylo*.

he provided substitutes. It is unclear whether the dances eventually performed bore much relation to actual ceremonial activities, and the men very likely withheld highly sensitive content. Campbell was surely aware that some things were probably being withheld, but if so he avoided drawing attention to it and damaging his relationship with the performers.

The collections explored in this thesis speak to the complexities of cultural relationships, real and imagined, in Western Australia and the British Isles over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In tracking how different people collected and used objects, we find a wide spectrum in how collectors perceived and presented Aboriginal peoples. I argued that these collections were marked by contemporary ideological discourse and individual motivations and experiences; and that studying these intersections helps us to understand why collections were formed and how they speak to relationships across time and place. The personal and political intersected in myriad ways. My focus has been on how these were experienced by European field-collectors, for whom narratives about Aboriginal peoples being geographically and temporally 'remote' from Europeans brushed up against closer personal experiences. The roles and perspectives of others involved in these processes also deserve greater scrutiny, bringing in makers, users, other owners, intermediaries, interpreters, guides, servants, policemen, auctioneers and museum workers. To neglect these other voices falsely implies that a single field collector was the key mover of an object whereas, as the case studies show, object journeys were more complex. Furthermore, this study stopped at the points when Aboriginal objects entered a British or Irish museum. There is much to learn about their lives after this point. What stories did museums in Britain and Ireland tell about them? And how have their memories lived on within communities in Western Australia?

In her 2015 opening address at the British Museum's iteration of the exhibition *Encounters: Revealing Stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Objects from the British Museum*, Bunuba activist June Oscar reflected that:

There are materials from my people at the British Museum. White men took these from our land and brought it to a foreign place; these materials have names in our language. The trees, stones, grasses still

grow and still stand on our lands. These materials sit in a bigger story. They sit at the centre of that story forever. We will never forget this story.¹⁹

The journeys of the items discussed in this thesis still impact people in powerful ways. The 2017 return to Country of objects collected by Alexander Collie has been credited with sparking a project to officially rename sites around Albany with their dual English and Minang names.²⁰ A key challenge for historians today is to write histories of collecting that acknowledge the role and influence of field-collectors, whilst also recognising the many other people who have engaged and who continue to engage deeply and insightfully with objects through their journeys.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate the vital contribution that material culture can make to understandings of intercultural interactions over time. Although my arguments have been grounded in specific collections and a small number of collectors, they also raise broader questions about the relationship between collecting and ideology. They explore how and why Europeans and Australians used Aboriginal bodies and material culture to construct ideas about the past, present and future of the human race. Ethnographic collections in museums are inherently marked by absence, as a group of objects can never fully represent a living culture. In the case of historic assemblages from Western Australia, we must acknowledge how objects' journeys into museums were informed by colonial ideologies concerning Aboriginal peoples. By focusing on intersections between the personal and political, this thesis has suggested some ways in which the treatment of objects has both upheld and complicated unequal power relations. This aspect of their histories has vital importance for how we should treat and talk about precious heritage in museums today.

¹⁹ June Oscar, 'Encountering Truth: The Real Life Stories of Objects from Empire's Frontier and Beyond', in *Encounters: Revealing Stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Objects from the British Museum* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2015), 22.

²⁰ John Dobson, 'Albany, WA's oldest colonial settlement, to officially adopt joint Noongar names', *ABC News*, Friday 3 July 2020 <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-03/albany-to-officially-adopt-joint-noongar-name-kinjarling/12415184>> [accessed 2 April 2021].

Appendix 1: Selective chronology

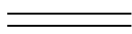
This summarises some significant events occurring during the period covered by this thesis. Entries in boldface refer to political, military and legal events of state-wide significance. Italicised entries show when case study collections entered British or Irish museums, and those in plain font refer to other events pertinent to issues and collections being discussed.

The central column indicates which chapters extensively discuss these periods.

40,000-60,000 BCE		Aboriginal peoples living in Western Australia ('WA')
30,000 BCE		Ochre mining at Wilgie Mia begins
1680s CE		1688: William Dampier visits northern coast of WA ('New Holland')
1820s	Three	<p>1821: Phillip Parker King visits Hanover Bay and King George Sound</p> <p>1826: Colonial settlement established at King George Sound (later 'Albany')</p> <p>1829: Britain officially declares sovereignty over Swan River Colony; Colonial settlements established at Perth, Fremantle and Guildford; Alexander Collie and Samuel Talbot arrive in WA</p>
1830s	Three	<p>1831: Mokare dies in Collie's house at Albany</p> <p>1832: <i>Talbot donation (now lost) to British Museum</i></p> <p>1834: Pinjarra Massacre</p> <p>1835: Collie dies at Albany</p> <p>1839: <i>Talbot donation to British Museum</i></p>

1840s		1849: WA formally constituted as a penal colony
1850s		1855: <i>British Museum acquires objects collected by Collie from Haslar Hospital Museum</i>
1860s		1868: Britain ceases penal transportation to WA
1870s		1870: Britain grants WA the right of representative governance
1880s	Three, Four	<p>1883: Frederick Broome made Governor of WA, arrives with Mary Barker</p> <p>1883: Edward Hardman arrives in WA</p> <p>1885: <i>Broome donation to British Museum; Hardman leaves WA</i></p> <p>1886: John Gribble publishes <i>Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land</i></p> <p>1887: Hardman dies, <i>sale to Museum of Science and Art, Dublin (National Museum of Ireland)</i></p> <p>1889: Broome and Barker leave WA</p>
1890s	Four, Five,	<p>1890: Britain grants WA the right of self-governance (except in foreign policy, defence, and 'native affairs')</p> <p>1891: Geological Museum (from 1892, the Perth Museum) established in Perth</p> <p>1892: David Carnegie first arrives in WA; <i>Edmund Dowley donation to National Museum of Ireland</i></p> <p>1894: Punuba man Jandamarra embarks on resistance campaign in the Kimberley (1894–97)</p> <p>1896: Carnegie leads expedition into interior with Warri, Breaden, Massie and Stansmore; leaves WA in 1897. <i>Emile Clement sale/donation to Royal Museum of Scotland; Kerr sale to the City Industrial Museum, Glasgow</i></p> <p>1896: <i>Clement sale to British Museum</i></p> <p>1897: <i>Charles Butler donation to Pitt Rivers Museum; William Foggin donation to Hancock Museum</i></p>

1890s (Cont.)	Four, Five,	<p>1898: <i>Carnegie and William Mansbridge donations to British Museum; Clement donation to British Museum; Clement sales to Pitt Rivers Museum, Kew Economic Botany Museum and National Museum of Ireland</i></p> <p>1899: WA unilaterally passes Constitution Amendment Act, seizing control of Aboriginal Affairs from Britain; Daisy Bates arrives in WA</p>
1900s	Five, Six	<p>1900: Paris Exposition Universelle</p> <p>1901: Establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia; Glasgow International Exhibition; <i>Henry Venn donation to Glasgow Corporation Museum; John Christie donation to Paisley Museum; Thomas Birch and William Campbell donations to British Museum; Clement donation to Pitt Rivers Museum and sale to Bristol Museum</i></p> <p>1905: Creation of Aborigines Act 1905 (WA) (commenced 1906; repealed 1964)</p>
1910s	Four, Five, Seven	<p>1910: Gerard Trower first arrives in WA</p> <p>1913: Forrest River Mission re-established</p> <p>1910: Alfred Brown and Elliot Watson arrive in WA, meet Bates</p> <p>1911: Watson leaves WA</p> <p>1912: Brown leaves WA</p> <p>1914: United Kingdom and Australia enter World War I (1914–18); <i>Brown sends material to Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology in Cambridge (1914–15)</i></p> <p>1919: Irish Republic declares independence from UK; Irish War of Independence starts (1919–21)</p>
1920s		<p>1922: Irish Free State established; Irish Civil War starts (1922–3)</p> <p>1927: Trower leaves WA</p>
1930s		<p>1932: <i>Edmund Hooper donation to British Museum</i></p>



Appendix 2: Extant Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in British and Irish institutions

This appendix identifies the currently known numbers of Aboriginal objects with clear Western Australian provenance held in UK and Irish museums.²¹ Rather than representing an exhaustive list of collections holding Western Australian material, it offers researchers a starting point for further study into where Aboriginal material heritage from Western Australia can be found in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It draws upon and extends the important survey work done by Carol Cooper in the 1980s and Gaye Sculthorpe in the 2010s.²²

Between 2017 and 2021 I sent collections enquiries to a wide range of national, county, university and private museums, asking what material they currently held from Western Australia. I contacted institutions previously identified by Cooper and Sculthorpe as holding Aboriginal material; and also other museums that I believed were likely to possess such material. A minority of museums contacted did not respond to my enquiries. In these cases, I have where possible included the number of Aboriginal objects from Western Australia that I was able to identify from their public online collections databases. Such publicly accessible databases, where they even exist, often cover a fraction of a museum's total holdings. The true number of Western Australian items will undoubtedly be higher in many cases.

When responding to my enquiries, museums frequently sent me data about all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander objects that they held, including those not specifically linked to Western Australia. It was occasionally possible for me to identify 'Australian' items as very probably being from Western Australia, on the basis of photographs or site visits, and I shared my findings in this regard with the relevant museums. A great deal of work remains to be done, however, to identify the origins of the many Aboriginal items still

²¹ Ancestral Remains are not included in these figures.

²² See Cooper, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections in Overseas Museums*; *Ancestors, artefacts, empire: Indigenous Australia in British and Irish Museums*, ed. Gaye Sculthorpe, Maria Nugent and Howard Morphy.

currently described in museum records simply as being from 'Australia'. With further research, more institutions and objects are expected to come to light.

England

889	British Museum, London
395	Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford
232	Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge
123	Horniman Museum, London
80	Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
80	National Museums Liverpool
66	Tyne and Wear Museums
61	Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter
50	Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery
49	Brighton Museums
46	Middlesbrough Museums
31	Nuneaton Museum and Gallery
28	Reading Museum
25	Colchester + Ipswich Museums
24	Nottingham City Museums and Galleries
22	Manchester Museum
22	Science Museum, London
20	Birmingham Museum
19	Powell-Cotton Museum, Birchington-on-Sea
19	Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
18	Saffron Walden Museum
17	Bath Royal Literary and Scientific institution
14	Warrington Museum
13	Bankfield Museum, Halifax (Calderdale Museums)
13	Leeds Museums and Galleries
12	Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery
10	Derby Museum & Art Gallery
6	Canterbury Museums and Galleries
5	Hastings Museum
4	Torquay Museum
3	The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford
3	Hull Museums
3	Norfolk Museums
3	Royal Collections Trust
1	Bolton Museum
1	Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth
1	Museums Sheffield
1	National Maritime Museum
1	Salisbury Museum
1	Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Scotland

215	National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh
125	Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow
116	Glasgow Museums

39	University of Aberdeen Museums
12	Paisley Museum
9	Perth Museum and Art Gallery
5	University of St. Andrews
2	Dumfries Museum
2	The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery and Museums
1	McLean Museum, Greenock

Republic of Ireland

245	National Museum of Ireland, Dublin
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Northern Ireland

64	National Museums Northern Ireland
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British crown dependencies

12	Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery
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Total items identified: 3,258

Appendix 3: Extant Aboriginal objects from Western Australia in the British Museum

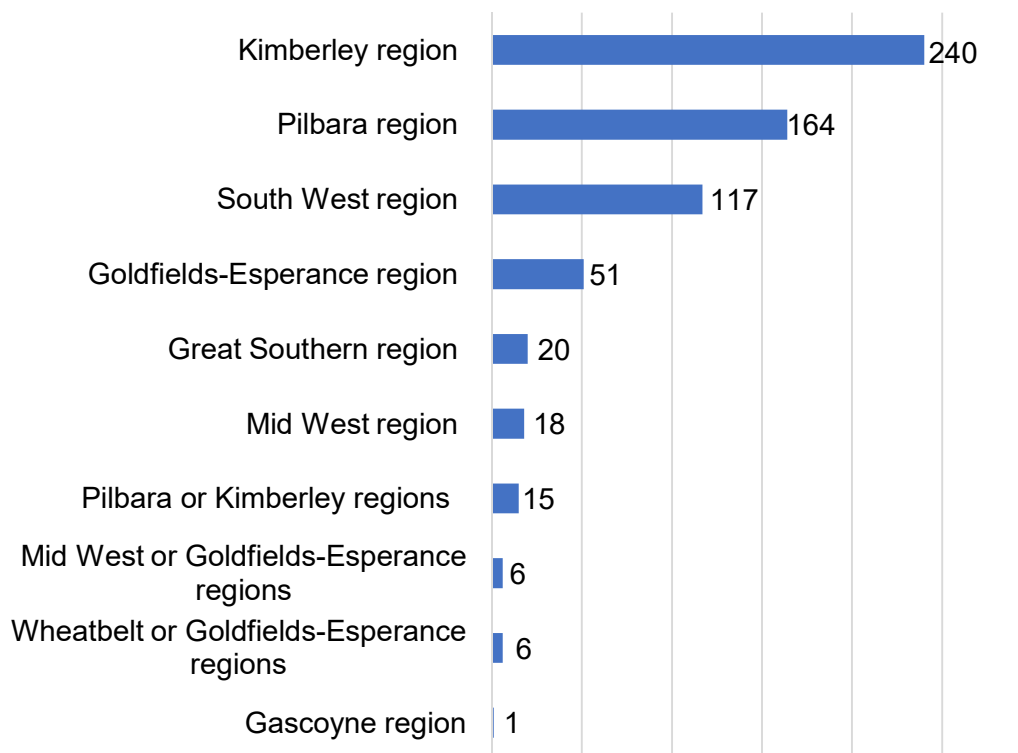
The museum holds 899 extant Aboriginal objects so far identified as originating from Western Australia. In presenting these items, this appendix uses raw data sourced from MuseumIndex+, the British Museum's Spectrum compliant collection management system, on 24 February 2021. MuseumIndex+ includes information recorded in the museum's original donation registers, as well as updates entered by a range of curatorial and collections management staff over time.

The British Museum's records use a wide range of terms to describe its Aboriginal holdings from Western Australia. I list here the full range of associated locations that have been recorded against objects in MuseumIndex+. MuseumIndex+ does not show where the associated locations fall within Western Australia, so I also present this raw data under regional subheadings (e.g. 'Kimberley region') in order to help readers understand the broad geography of the collection.

The museum's records deploy a wide range of object categories. I have grouped some objects under broad subheadings of my own choosing, to provide a broad sense of the nature of objects in the collection. For example, I use the subcategory 'ornament' to cover items categorised on MuseumIndex+ as 'dance-ornaments', 'pubic-covers', 'buttock-ornaments', 'necklaces', 'nose-ornaments', 'nose-pins', 'head-ornaments', 'ornaments (?)', 'head-pads', 'stick "ornament"' and 'armlets'. These subcategories by no means reflect individual objects' function and significance in their originating communities.

Number of items by region

638 items can currently be linked with a particular place or region within Western Australia:



Associated locations:

Kimberley: Broome, 'neighbourhood of Broome', Derby, Hanover Bay, Kimberley, Kimberley (west), Kimberley (north-west), King Sound (near Broome), Kunmunya Mission, Oombulgurri, Pender Bay, Roebuck Bay, Sale River, Sunday Island.

Pilbara: Cossack, Hamersley Range, 'Between Cossack and foot of the Hamersley Range', De Grey River, Fortescue River District, Millstream Creek, Mount Edgar, Newman (also known as Pampajinya), Nicol Bay, Nullagine ('Beyond Nullagine'), Pilbara region, Sherlock, Sherlock District, Sherlock River, Sherlock River (Upper), 'Tableland Sherlock River', Touranna Plains.

South West region:¹ Albany King George Sound, Carrolup, Dinninup, Blackwood River (Upper), King George Sound, Murray River, Perth, '25 miles from Perth', Perth region, Rottnest Island, south-west, Swan River.

¹ This category is not synonymous with the South West region defined in the *Regional Development Commissions Act 1993* (WA). That act divided south-west Western Australia into four distinct regions (one of which was called the South West region) and its definition is therefore not helpful for the purposes of this appendix.

Goldfields-Esperance region: Boundary Dam, Esperance, Esperance Bay, Recherche Archipelago, Kalgoorlie, Laverton, Leonora, Munderry, Tjukurla, Tjuntjuntjara Community, Warburton Range.

Mid West region: Geraldton, Champion Bay, Lake Nabberu, Lake Nabberu district, Murchison, Northampton, Wilga Mia caves, Cue, Golden Gully.

Pilbara or Kimberley regions: north, north-west.

Wheatbelt or Goldfields-Esperance regions: Malcolm, Yilgarn.

Mid West or Goldfields-Esperance regions: Lawlers, East Murchison goldfields.

Gascoyne region: Minnie Creek.

Nature of items

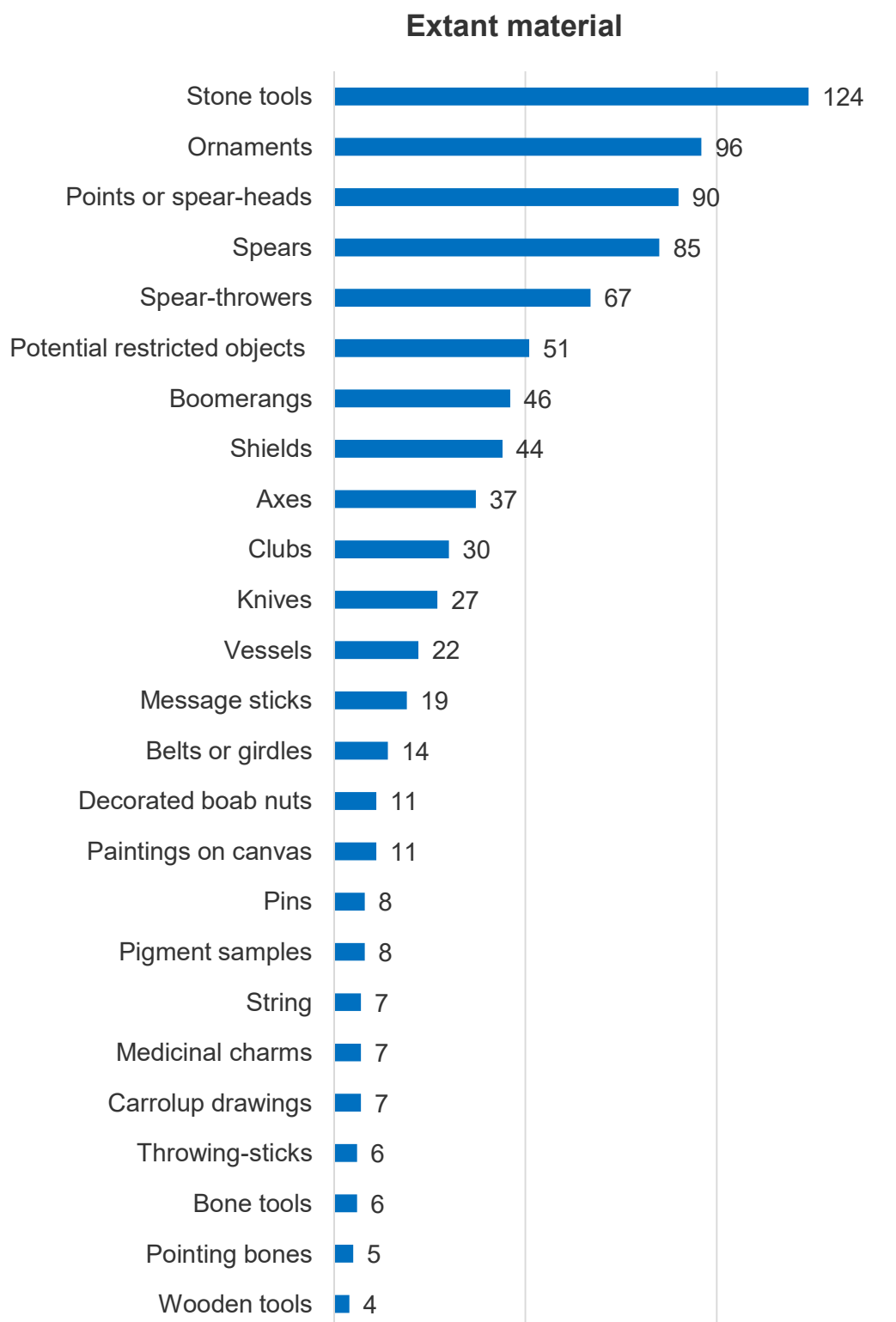
Possibly culturally restricted items were not examined as part of this thesis. They include carved boards, bullroarers or other ritual artefacts (51), pointing bones (5), ceremonial shoes (3), a biting or spirit bag (1, originally attributed to Western Australia but likely made in Arnhem Land), and a 'poison' bone (1). Other items may potentially be restricted, but if so this has not yet been identified.

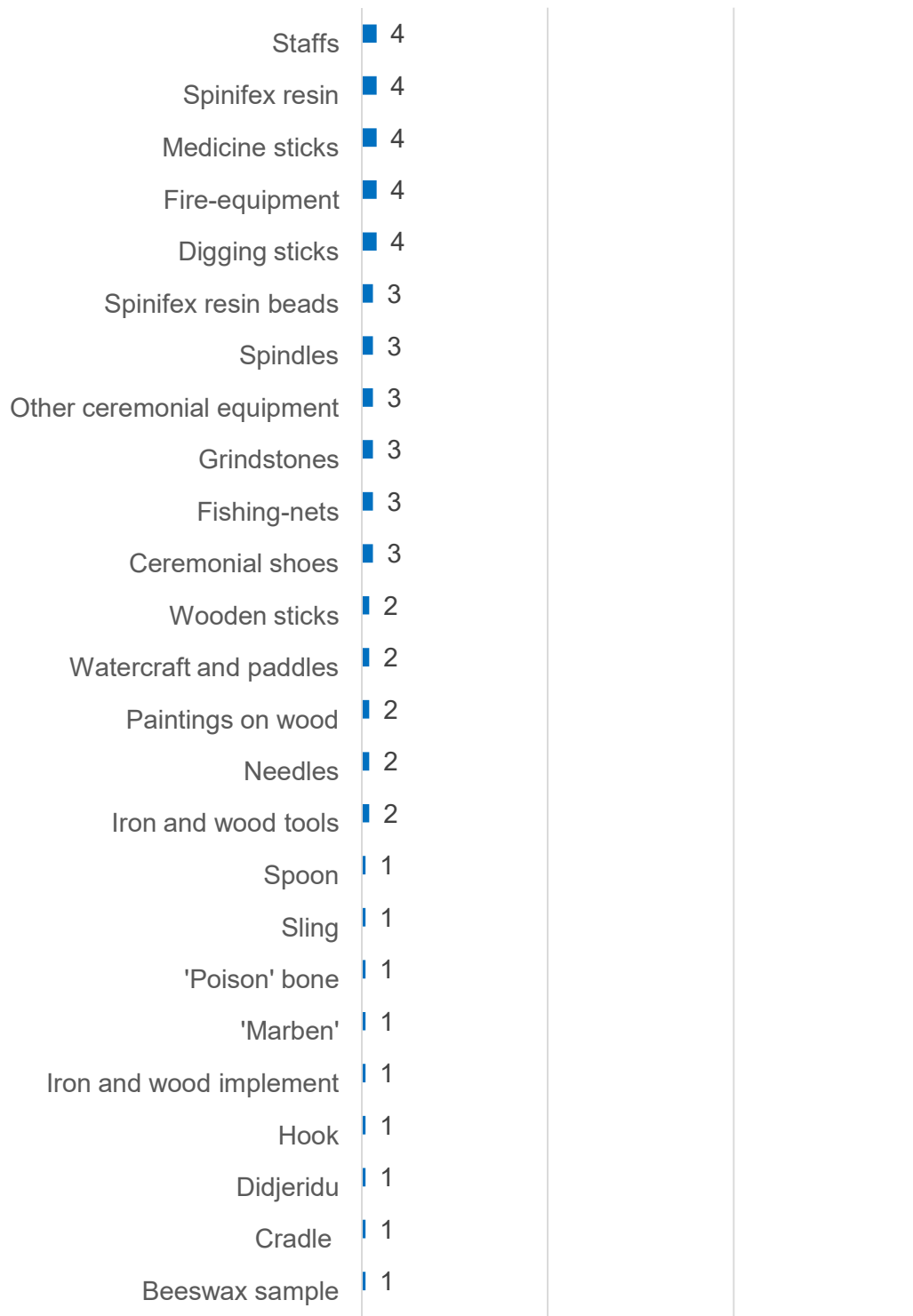
Ancestral Remains may potentially include a shaped and polished 'poison' bone (Oc1926,1004.2), which may be human.² However, this has not been scientifically confirmed, and 'pointing' bones can be made of human or nonhuman bones.

Human hair string is present as a collected item in its own right, and as a component in several ornaments and belts. Three shoes (Oc1999,03.1.a-b and Oc1926,1004.22.a-b) may incorporate human hair and blood.

² This was acquired by Daisy Bates between 1899 and 1926, possibly close to the South Australian border. A repatriation claim was made for this item in 2001, some years before the UK's *Human Tissue Act* 2004 gave the Trustees of the British Museum the power to deaccession Ancestral Remains from the registered collection. It currently remains with the British Museum.

Numbers of items



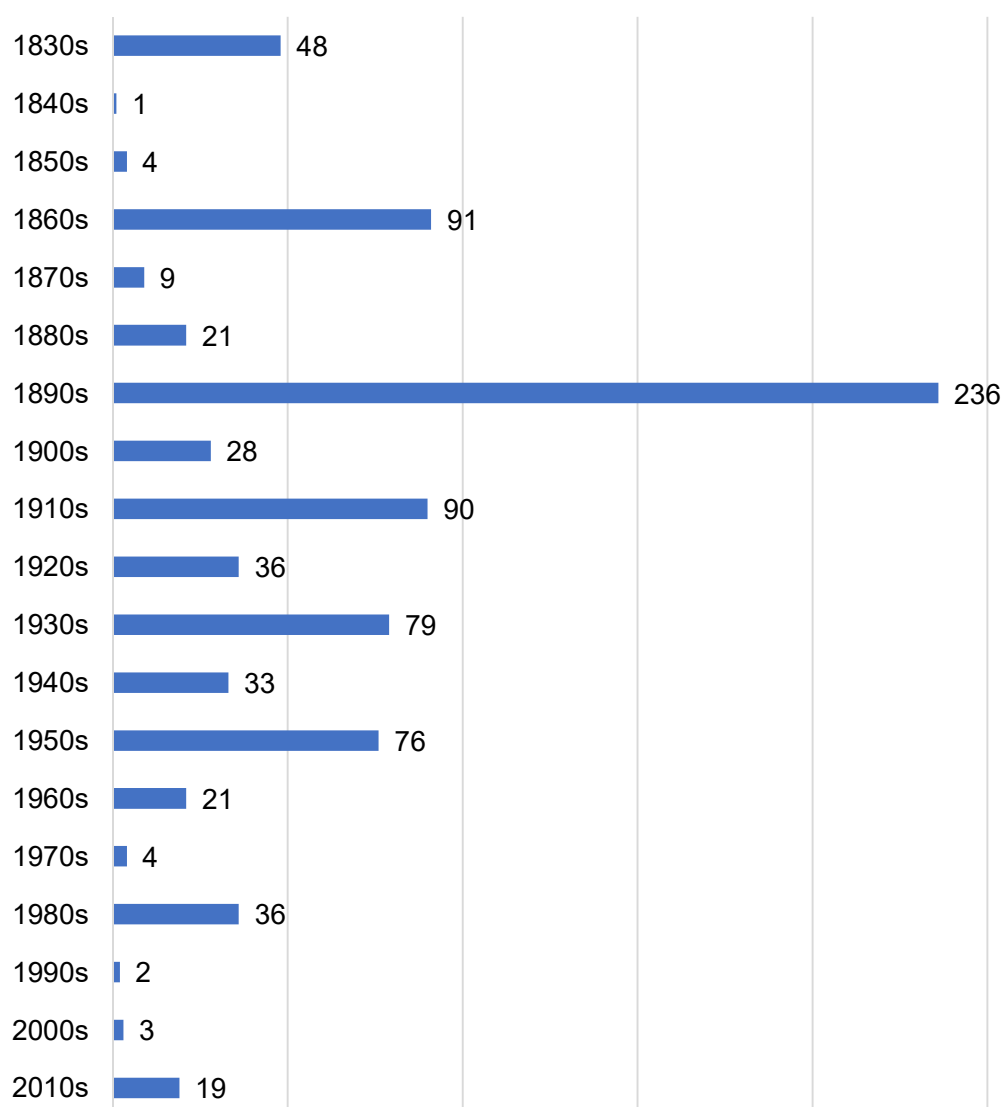


These 899 objects have been identified as coming from Western Australia through associated documentation or stylistic characteristics. They include a small number of items (notably the biting bag and didjeridu) that possibly came from outside of Western Australia, but whose associated documentation states that they were collected there.

Other accessioned items identified as originating in Western Australia include photographic prints of people, landscapes or objects (150), paper rubbings of rock engravings in the Pilbara (8), and books and booklets (6). Some non-accessioned material is also held in the archives of the Africa, Oceania and the Americas department, including 3 photographs taken at Kunmunya Mission (in Eth.Doc 935).

Dates of entry into British Museum

837 objects have known or probable dates of acquisition by the museum:



Major acquisition sources:

Museum acquisition	Acquisition source
1839	Samuel Neil Talbot (donation, 49 surviving items)
1865–1870	Henry Christy (donation, approximately 85 surviving items) ³
1890s	Augustus Wollaston Franks (donation, approximately 50 items)
1896–1898	Emile Clement (purchase, 50 items; donation, 21 surviving items)
1899	Craven Henry Ord (donation, 92 surviving items)
1912	Robert Stirling Newall (donation, 81 items)
1936	James Robert Beattie Love (donation, 43 surviving items)

Most prolific known 'field' collectors:

Date items collected	'Field' collector
1830s	Samuel Neil Talbot, active in the south-west (49 surviving items)
1890s	Craven Henry Ord, active in the Kimberley (92 items)
1890s	Emile Clement and network, active in the Pilbara and Kimberley (71 items)
1912	Robert Stirling Newall, active in the Pilbara (81 items)
1930s	James Robert Beattie Love, active in the Kimberley (43 items)

Earliest and latest acquisitions:

The first accessioned objects were donated by Samuel Talbot in 1839, but they are not the earliest extant items from Western Australia now in the museum. In the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s the museum acquired at least 8

³ Henry Christy (1810–1865) bequeathed an extensive ethnographic collection to the British Museum, alongside money (the Christy Fund) for the museum to purchase further material. Limited surviving documentation causes difficulties in confirming whether items now in the museum were originally bequeathed by Christy, acquired by curator Augustus Wollaston Franks (1826–1897) using money from the Christy Fund, or acquired by Franks with his own money. J.C.H. King, 'Franks and Ethnography', in *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 136–59 (pp. 139–40).

items collected by Phillip Parker King or members of his crew in 1821: Worora spears, spear-heads and a spear-thrower thought to have been stolen at Hanover Bay; and Minang spears and a spear-thrower from King George Sound.⁴

Artworks by Pitjantjatjara painter Carlene West (2015,2029.1–2) and Gooniyandi painter Mervyn Street (2015,2027.1) are the museum's most recent acquisitions, in 2015.

⁴ The Worrora items are Oc.959, Oc.982, Oc.+3927, Oc.6224 and Oc.8767; the Minang items are Oc.958, Oc.960, Oc.961 and Oc.980.

Appendix 4: Key material discussed in chapters

Chapter Three

Table 2: Collections associated with Alexander Collie

Aboriginal objects acquired in Western Australia	<p>The British Museum holds seven objects that Collie collected between 1829–1835 in the south-west:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Taaps</i> (knives) (3), <i>kodj</i> (axe) (1), spear (1), spear-thrower (1) and spearhead (1).¹ <p>The museum acquired these from Haslar Hospital Museum in 1885.</p>
Key associated documentation	<p>Collie's surviving correspondence does not describe the British Museum material. He referred more generally to Noongar material culture in a series of articles written for the <i>Perth Gazette</i>.²</p>
Other known acquisitions	<p>Collie also acquired:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous artefacts from Hawaii, Tahiti and North America (now at the British Museum).³ • Three Ancestral Remains of two Indigenous Americans and one Pacific Islander (current location unknown).⁴ • Spears and chinchilla (rodent) skins sent to George Collie (current location unknown).⁵ • Plants and fossils, some of which are now in the Natural History Museum, London; the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; and sites in Switzerland, America, Belgium and Sweden.⁶

¹ BM, Oc.4758-74; Oc1980,Q.740.

² Alexander Collie, 'Anecdotes and Remarks Relative to the Aborigines of King George's Sound (From an Original Manuscript by a Resident at King George's Sound)', *Perth Gazette* (Saturdays 5, 12, 26 July and 2, 9, 16 August 1834). The author is not explicitly named in the articles, but Collie's authorship is widely accepted.

³ British Museum: 9 objects believed to have been collected by Collie during the HMS *Blossom* voyage: 3 adze (axe-shaped cutting tools), 3 harpoons, 1 knife, 1 harpoon line and 1 whistle.

⁴ Joseph Barnard Davis, *Thesaurus Craniorum. Catalogue of the Skulls of the Various Races of Man, in the Collection of Joseph Barnard Davis* (London: Printed for the Subscribers, 1867), 223, 343–44. In 1880 the Royal College of Surgeons of England purchased Davis's collection of skulls; many were destroyed during bombing in 1941 and most of the remainder transferred to the Natural History Museum.

⁵ Collie to George Collie, 22 November 1828, 'Letters 1828–35', 2.

⁶ Chessell, 189–90.

Table 3: Collections associated with Samuel Talbot

Aboriginal objects acquired in Western Australia	<p>(i) The British Museum holds 49 objects collected by Talbot in 1838 from 'the Neighbourhood of the Swan River':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spears (19), dance-ornaments (4), <i>kodj</i> (axes) (3), spear-throwers (3), boomerangs (3), digging sticks (3), red ochre samples (3), grindstones (2), nose-pins (2), possible personal ornaments (2), <i>kalga</i> (Banksia-flower gathering hook) (1), <i>taap</i> (knife) (1), shield (1), spindle (1), ornament possibly incorporating human hair (1).⁷ <p>Talbot donated these to the museum in 1839. This donation included another 33 items from the region that can no longer be located:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spears (26), axes (2), <i>taaps</i> (knife) (1), paddle (1), bag (1), belt (1), cloak (1). <p>(ii) Aboriginal objects donated to the British Museum in 1832 but no longer identifiable in the collection: Spears (8), 'paddles' (5), axe (1).⁸</p> <p>(iii) '1 Case Curios', mentioned in 1838 (contents and current location unknown).⁹</p>
Key associated documentation	The 1839 British Museum donation was accompanied by a letter written by Talbot, and undated notes describing individual items (written in Talbot's hand). ¹⁰
Other known acquisitions	Grasses from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), presented to the Council of the Royal Agricultural Society of England. ¹¹

Table 4: Collections associated with Edward Hardman

Aboriginal objects acquired in Western Australia	<p>The National Museum of Ireland holds 106 objects that Hardman collected in Western Australia (mainly the Kimberley) between 1883 and 1885:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> points (26), spears/spear shafts (22), boomerangs (17), tools (11), shields (7), digging sticks (3), axes/axe heads (3), spear-throwers (3), throwing sticks/bullroarers (3), clubs (2), knives (2), grass basket (1), fire equipment (1), letter stick (1), ornament (1), grass tree stem (1), kangaroo bone (1), unknown item
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⁷ BM, Oc1839,0620.1–70; Oc1999,Q.154–162.

⁸ BM, Oc1832,0114.1–14; P110, *British Museum Book of Presents, 1832*, BM Central Archives.

⁹ 'Launceston Shipping List'.

¹⁰ Samuel Neil Talbot to the Secretary of the British Museum, 7 January 1839; Samuel Neil Talbot, undated descriptive notes accompanying 1839 donation. P62–67, *Acquisitions Ethnographical 1835–1839*, Franks papers, BM AOA Archives.

¹¹ *The Farmers Magazine*, 4 (July to December 1841) (London: Joseph Rogerson, 1841), 219.

	(1) His widow Louisa Hardman sold these to the museum in 1887.
Key associated documentation	Hardman described some of the items now in the NMI collection in two articles published posthumously. ¹²
Other acquisitions from Western Australia	Hardman also acquired: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Ancestral Remains from northern Western Australia (current location unknown).¹³ • Geological specimens presented to the Geological Museum in Perth and the Swan River Mechanics' Institute (now the Western Australian Museum).¹⁴ • Fossils and geological specimens from Western Australia presented to the British Museum's Departments of Geology and Minerals.¹⁵ Other geological specimens were found in Hardman's office at the Irish Survey after his death.¹⁶
Other known acquisitions	Geological specimens and human remains acquired during work in Ireland. ¹⁷

Chapter Four

Table 5: Collections associated with Frederick Broome and Mary Barker

Objects acquired in Western Australia	(i) Given to the British Museum by Broome in 1885: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 items collected between 1883 and 1885 recorded as being from north-west Australia: spears (6), shields (3), spear-throwers (2), message sticks (2), bowl (1), boomerang (1).¹⁸ The museum holds historic curatorial sketches.¹⁹
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¹² Hardman, 'Notes on a Collection'; 'Habits and Customs'.

¹³ Hardman, 'Habits and Customs', 70.

¹⁴ McNamara and Dodds, 33; Ludwig Glauert, 'Determination of the Exact Localities Where Cambrian Fossils were Collected by E. T. Hardman in 1884', *Records of the Western Australian Museum and Art Gallery*, 1:2 (1912), 66–74 (p. 66).

¹⁵ *The History of the Collections Contained in the Natural History Departments of the British Museum*, I (London: printed by order of the trustees of the British Museum, 1904), 240, 397.

¹⁶ Henry Woodward, 'Notes on the Palaeontology of Western Australia', *Geological Magazine*, 7:3 (March 1890), 6–106 (p. 7).

¹⁷ Hardman, 'On Two New Deposits ...'.

¹⁸ BM, Oc,+2412–26.

¹⁹ 'Sketches of items acquired from Sir F Napier Broome 27 April 1885'. Fourteen items are recorded as from 'extreme N. W. Australia, although one spear (Oc,+2414)

	<p>(ii) Items described by Barker in her book <i>Letters to Guy</i>, including a telegraph wire bracelet (current location unknown).²⁰</p> <p>(iii) Bottle 'prized very much' by Broome, given to him by George Leake and donated by Barker to the Western Australian Museum in 1897.²¹</p>
Other Known Acquisitions	Broome acquired solitaire bones in Rodrigues (current location unknown). ²²

Chapter Five

Table 6: Collections associated with David Carnegie and Warri

Objects acquired in Western Australia	<p>(i) Given to the British Museum by Carnegie in 1898:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 29 items collected in 1896 and 1897 'from the centre of the W.A. desert' and 'various camps in the desert': flint flakes (14), 'girdles' (8), 'wooden pins' (5), bone nose-pin (1), paperbark container (1), emu feather ornament (1).²³ The museum holds some relevant correspondence with Carnegie.²⁴ <p>(ii) Other items described by Carnegie in his publications (in most cases, current location unknown).²⁵</p> <p>(iii) 'Small parcel of native curios' from the Australian desert, given to a friend as a wedding present (current location unknown).²⁶</p> <p>(iv) Plant specimens, at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.²⁷</p> <p>(v) Australian geological specimens, at Kinnaird Castle.²⁸</p>
Other Known	(i) African items described by Carnegie in <i>Letters from</i>

is not characteristic of spears from that region. Another spear (Oc,+2417) is recorded as from 'N. W. Australia'.

²⁰ Barker, *Letters to Guy*.

²¹ M.A. Broome, 14 July 1897. State Record Office of Western Australia, AU WA S1558- cons1061 1.

²² Parish, 251.

²³ BM, Oc1898,-56 to Oc1898,-67. Several items can no longer be located. See entries in the British Museum's donation register: *Christy Collection 1898-1909.160*, BM AOA Archives, 5–6.

²⁴ Correspondence between David Wynford Carnegie and Charles Hercules Read, 10 March to 12 September 1898. Correspondence file, BM AOA Archives.

²⁵ See Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*; David W. Carnegie, 'Explorations in the Interior of Western Australia', *The Geographical Journal*, 11:3 (1898), 258–86; David W. Carnegie, 'On a Bark-Bundle of Native Objects from Western Australia', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 28:1/2 (1899), 20–21.

²⁶ David Wynford Carnegie to G.S. Streeter, 7 September 1898, University of Birmingham Special Collections, LAdd/6443.

²⁷ RBG, K000846846 and K000975245.

²⁸ Office of the Duke of Fife (personal communication, 9 August 2018). Additional objects may have been lost in 1921, during a major fire at Kinnaird Castle (the Carnegie family seat).

Acquisitions	<i>Nigeria</i> (current location unknown). ²⁹ (ii) Polynesian clubs and a Nigerian spearhead, at Kinnaird Castle. ³⁰
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Table 7: Collections associated with Gerard Trower

Objects acquired in Western Australia	Bequeathed to the Pitt Rivers Museum by William Coleman Piercy in 1935: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9 items collected between 1910 and 1935 from 'Forrest River', 'Marbel Bar re' and Perth: points (7), ornamental pearl shell knife (1), polished block of asbestos (1).³¹ The museum holds notes by Piercy about the bequest.³²
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Chapter Five

Table 8: Collections discussed in Chapter Five

Thomas Birch (active 1896–1901)	Known Aboriginal material collected: 1 message stick donated to the British Museum (1901); 3 message sticks donated to the Perth Museum (WA). ³³ Other known collections: natural history specimen also donated to Perth Museum. ³⁴
Charles Butler (active 1889–1897)	Known Aboriginal material collected: 3 objects donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum (1897): shield (1), club (1), spear-thrower (1). ³⁵
William Campbell (c. 1841–1938)	Known Aboriginal material collected: 7 obsidian 'medicinal charms' donated to the British Museum (1901). ³⁶ Other known collections: extensive private collection of 426 Aboriginal items; plants from Boulder and six 'native ornaments' from Kalgoorlie, donated to the Western Australian Museum. ³⁷

²⁹ Carnegie, *Letters from Nigeria*.

³⁰ Office of the Duke of Fife (personal communication, 9 August 2018). Additional objects may have been lost in the 1921 fire.

³¹ PRM, 1935.37.1–2; and 1939.3.208–214. The Aboriginal items were assigned object numbers; the pearl shell knife and block of asbestos were not.

³² Piercy, 'Chinyansa specimens ...'.

³³ BM, Oc1901,1016.1; 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, Tuesday 9 May 1899, 5.

³⁴ Ibid. Alexander Morton also thanked Birch and other mine managers for supplying him with 'numerous rich and interesting specimens' during his 1897 collecting visit to the colony. See 'Mr. Alexander Morton's Researches in Western Australia', *The Mercury*, Saturday 13 November 1897, 2.

³⁵ PRM, 1897.51.1–3.

³⁶ BM, Oc1901,–.127–132.

³⁷ 'Catalogue of 2 collections of Aboriginal weapons, etc. of Western Australia collected by W. D. Campbell, Surveyor', 191–', State Library of New South Wales,

David Carnegie (1871–1900)	See data for Chapter Four, above.
John Christie (c.1847–1919)	Known Aboriginal material collected: 8 objects donated to Paisley Museum (by 1900): spears (5), shields (2), spear-thrower (1). ³⁸
Emile Clement (1844–1928) ³⁹	Known Aboriginal material collected during period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 objects sold (1896), 24 donated (1898) to the British Museum: ornaments (17), spear-throwers (6), hairpins or bullroarers (6), boomerangs (5), message sticks (5), ceremonial sticks (7), medicine sticks (4), bullroarers (4), shields (3), carved boab nuts (3), red ochre (2), yellow ochre (2), spinifex gum (2), fire equipment (2), club (1), girdle (1), bowl (1), beads (1), ritual object (1).⁴⁰ • 117 items sold (1898), 12 donated (1900), 22 sold (1901) to the Pitt Rivers Museum: ornaments (43), medical instruments (16), spearheads (13), bullroarers (11), boomerangs (7), 'passports'/'marbens' (6), stone tools (5), processed spinifex gum (4), spear-throwers (4), knives (4), clubs (4), yellow ochre (3), spears (3), shields (3), plant fibres (3), fire equipment (2), nets (3), needles (2), vessels (2), red ochre (2), belts (2), bags (2), wooden tool (1), spindle and string (1), kangaroo sinew (1), corroboree 'accessory' (1), child's toy (1), bone tool (1), axe (1).⁴¹ • 38 objects sold (1896), 1 object given (1896), 85 items sold (1898) to the Royal Museum of Scotland (now National Museums Scotland), of which 125 are: ornaments (37), spearheads (14), clubs (7), fire equipment (7), spears (6), spear-throwers (6), 'doctor's implements' (5), knives (5), medical sticks (5), boomerangs (4), yellow ochre (3), bags (2), spindles with cord (2), carving implements (2), vessels (2), netting needles (2), shields (2), 'marben' (1), stone pounder (1), grinding slab (1), red ochre

191- DLMSQ 544; 'The Perth Museum', *The West Australian*, Monday 7 January 1901, 2.

³⁸ Paisley Museum, TEMP.2018.781; TEMP.2018.720; TEMP.2018.4193 and TEMP.2018.547.

³⁹ The following breakdowns unless specified otherwise are from Coates, 'Lists and Letters', 123–24.

⁴⁰ 22 donated objects survive. This breakdown does not include Aboriginal objects sold or given by Clement to other institutions and later transferred to the British Museum: nine items were transferred from Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in 1960 (see below); and the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine donated a spindle in 1954.

⁴¹ PRM, 1898.75.1–117; 1900.20.1–11 and 1900.55.297; and 1901.58.2–23. The 1898 and 1901 sales included two Ancestral Remains (1898.75.112 and 1901.58.1) that were repatriated to Australia in 1990. Earlier in the twentieth century the University of Oxford appears to have transferred some other Ancestral Remains linked with Clement to the Natural History Museum.

	<p>(1), pouch for carrying red ochre (1), black mineral (1), nalgoo seeds (1), cyperus rotundus tubers (1), potential restricted item (1), bullroarer (1), sinews (1), implement (1), fishing net (1), hatchet-head (1).⁴²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 objects sold (1898) to Kew Economic Botany Museum (now Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew): ornaments (6), spinifex resin (3), fishing nets (2), needles (2), carving tool (1), fire equipment (1), boomerang (1), spinifex fibre and cordage (1), 'corroboree stick' (1), 'marben' (1).⁴³ 9 were transferred to the British Museum in 1960. • 25 objects sold to Bristol Museum (1901): ornaments (8), spears (3), bullroarers (2), medical sticks (2), throwing stick (1), boomerang (1), 'invitation stick' (1), 'passport' (1), medical instrument (1), 'water trough' (1), belt (1), carved boab nut (1), rope (1), net bag (1).⁴⁴ • c.72 'ethnographic' objects sold to the Museum of Science and Art, Dublin (now National Museum of Ireland) (1898), of which 66 are: ornaments (27), restricted objects (4), clubs (3), fire equipment (3), grinding stones (3), knives (3), belts (2), dancing sticks (2), spear-throwers (2), spindles (2), spinifex gum (2), scoops or vessels (2), stooks for making nets (2), children's toys (2), adze (1), awl (1), boomerang (1), ceremonial object (1), medicine stick (1), magic stick (1), 'passport' (1).⁴⁵ <p>Clement was also likely linked to items acquired by Bankfield Museum Halifax c. 1901 and later transferred to Manchester Museum.⁴⁶</p> <p>Other known collections: 'economic botany' objects from Western Australia sold to the Museum of Science and Art, Dublin (1898); natural history specimens from Western Australia and Bronze Age archaeological</p>
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⁴² NMS, A.1896.346.1–A.1896.347; A.1898.372.1–74; and A.1925.894–96.

⁴³ RBG, 33243, 45028, 50375, 55334–55335, 55362, 55366, 56700, 61570, 63062; BM, Oc1960,11.58–67.

⁴⁴ 'List of Australian Specimens' (undated handwritten list of Clement collection), Bristol Museum.

⁴⁵ Coates refers to Clement selling 72 'ethnographic' objects to the Museum of Science and Art, Dublin in 1898; I have been unable to locate six of these objects. My breakdown is compiled from references in the 1898 specimens register and in a 1979 list prepared by museum staff. Neither document explicitly identifies the seller of this 'collection of Ethno. specimens from north western Australia', but their descriptions of the objects, and the existence of direct correspondence between Clement and the museum over such a sale, show Clement to be the source. See *Art and Industry Pre 1948 Object Register*, National Museum of Ireland Archives; also David R. Moore, 'Holdings of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Artifacts in the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin' (October 1979), inserted in the *Art and Industry Pre 1948 Object Register*, at the position 1898.393.

⁴⁶ Six Nyamal men's ceremonial items were repatriated to Country in 2019. See Johnston et al, *Return of Nyamal Artefacts to Country*.

	objects from Germany, sold or donated to various institutions. ⁴⁷
Edmund Dowley (1854–1934)	Known Aboriginal material collected: c.30 objects donated to the Museum of Science and Art, Dublin (now National Museum of Ireland) (1892): waistbands/belts/pubic covers (14), ornaments (7), glass spearheads (4), red ochre (1), yellow ochre (1), fire equipment (1), ceramic spearhead (1), stone or quartz spearhead (1).
William Foggin (1850–1898)	Known Aboriginal material collected: ‘native arrows’ (presumably spears) and ‘womera’ (spear-thrower) from Western Australia, presented to the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham, and Newcastle-on-Tyne. ⁴⁸ These are believed to be the same 14 objects now at Great North Museum: Hancock (1897): spears (12), spear-throwers (2). ⁴⁹ Other known collections: natural history specimen from Western Australia, included in donation to the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham, and Newcastle-on-Tyne (current location not identified).
Edward Hardman (1845–1887)	See data for Chapter Three, above.
Edward Hooper (1861–1955)	Known Aboriginal material collected: 3 objects donated to British Museum (1932): stone axe-heads (2), glass point (1). ⁵⁰
James Kerr (active 1890s)	Known Aboriginal material collected: 23 objects sold to the City Industrial Museum, Glasgow (now Glasgow Museums) (1896): clubs (7), glass spear-points (6), spear-throwers (3), restricted objects (2), boomerangs (2), message stick (1), shield (1), medicine stick (1). ⁵¹ Other known collections: Ancestral Remains and geological specimens from North Queensland, sold to the City Industrial Museum, Glasgow. ⁵²

⁴⁷ These include institutional transactions in 1896 (50 objects to the British Museum; and 39 objects to the Royal Museum of Scotland), 1898 (18 objects to Kew Economic Botany Museum; 24 objects to the British Museum; 85 objects to the Royal Museum of Scotland). See Coates, ‘Lists and Letters’, 123–24.

⁴⁸ *Natural History Transactions of Northumberland, Durham, and Newcastle-on-Tyne, Being Papers Read at the Meetings of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham, and Newcastle-on-Tyne, and the Tyneside Naturalists’ Field Club*, 14 (London and Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate, 1903), 26–28.

⁴⁹ My thanks to Joanne Anderson at Great North Museum: Hancock for raising this possibility.

⁵⁰ BM, Oc1932,1114.1–3.

⁵¹ Some objects are no longer identifiable in the collection. One boomerang was later given to Brest Museum. Patricia Allen (personal communication, 28 August 2019).

⁵² Glasgow Museums later concluded that the two Ancestral Remains ‘had almost certainly been removed without permission and taken more out of acquisitive curiosity than for scientific investigation’, and recommended their repatriation. *Select*

William Mansbridge (1872–1958)	<p>Known Aboriginal material collected: 6 objects donated to the British Museum (1898): spear points made from chalcedony (quartz) (2), glass (2), and telegraph insulators (2).⁵³</p> <p>Other known collections: spears (4), shields (4), 'kilerp' (4), spear-throwers (4) and various natural history specimens donated to the Perth Museum (WA).⁵⁴</p>
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Chapter Six

Table 9: Aboriginal items associated with Paris 1900 and Glasgow 1901

	Exposition Universelle of 1900 (ran 14 April to 12 November 1900)	Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901 (ran 2 May to 4 November 1901)
Location	<p>Multiple locations in and around Paris.</p> <p>Western Australia was the only Australian colony formally represented.</p>	<p>Kelvingrove Park in Glasgow.</p> <p>Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia all formally participated.</p>
Exhibited Aboriginal material	<p>'Collection of aboriginal native weapons – exhibited by the committee of the Perth Museum. Collection of aboriginal native weapons ... collected from various sources ... Collection of glass spear heads, manufactured by aborigines from bottles and telegraph insulators – by J.E. Clarke, Fremantle.'⁵⁵</p>	<p>'Boomerangs and other aborigines' weapons' from Committee of Perth Museum; 'forty-two spear heads, made by the aborigines from glass bottles and telegraph insulators' from 'Jas. Clarke, Fremantle'; and 'Boomerangs and other aborigines' weapons' from 'Sergt. James Smythe. Marble Bar'.⁵⁷</p>

Committee on Culture, Media and Sport Seventh Report, II, 18 May 2000 (London: House of Commons, 2000). In 1990 the skull of an Aboriginal woman was therefore repatriated, followed in 2010 by the skull of an Aboriginal man that was determined on balance of proof to have been the other skull sold by Kerr. Patricia Allan (personal communication, 28 August 2019).

⁵³ BM, Oc1898,0519.1–6.

⁵⁴ 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, Thursday 13 January 1898 and Saturday 7 January 1899, 4; 'Donations to the Museum', *The West Australian*, Friday 7 April 1899, 6; 'The Museum', *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, Friday 14 September 1900, 9; 'The Perth Museum', *The West Australian*, Tuesday 4 December 1900, 3; 'The Museum', *The West Australian*, Wednesday 13 March 1901, 5; 'The Museum', *The West Australian*, Wednesday 7 August 1901, 3; 'Western Australian Museum', *The West Australian*, Monday 4 November 1901, 3.

⁵⁵ 'Paris Exhibition', *The Daily News*, Wednesday 7 February 1900, 4.

	<p>'Two chairs constructed of aboriginal weapons – exhibited by the Western Australian Royal Commission.'⁵⁶</p>	<p>'Two chairs, constructed of Boomerangs and other aborigines' weapons.'⁵⁸</p> <p>Henry Venn donated some exhibits to Glasgow Corporation Museum: 52 known items: spears, spear-shafts and spear-points (27), boomerangs (11), spear-throwers (4), shields (6), bullroarers (2), bowl (1), and stone pounder (1).</p>
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Chapter Seven

Table 10: Collections associated with the Cambridge Expedition

Aboriginal material culture	<p>(i) 118 items at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, donated by Brown in 1914 and 1915:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stone tools (35), possible restricted objects (20), boomerangs (13), message sticks (11), ornaments (10), spears (4), spearheads/points (4), samples of food seeds and nuts (4), pointing sticks (3), knives 'for circumcision' (2), obsidianites (2), carved boab nuts (2), clubs (2), shields (2), bowl (1), fishing net (1), opossum fur (1), spear-thrower (1). <p>(ii) Message sticks acquired by Bates.⁵⁹</p>
Ancestral Remains	<p>(i) Ancestral Remains of a man and woman, sold by Watson to the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1912. Watson claimed that they were from the Wonnerup and Capel area of the south-west. Their current whereabouts is not known.</p> <p>(ii) Two Ancestral Remains acquired by Brown, who claimed that they were of 'baiong' (Baiyungu) people of the Gascoyne region. Both arrived in Cambridge around 1914 and are now at the Duckworth Collections in Cambridge.</p> <p>Watson also wrote about two grave-robbing incidents linked to these or to other Ancestral Remains:</p> <p>(i) the planned (and possibly successful) theft of Ancestral Remains buried on Dorre in late 1910.</p> <p>(ii) the successful theft of Ancestral Remains supposedly</p>

⁵⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission, Glasgow International Exhibition, 1901*, 42.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁵⁹ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"?', 62.

	near Guildford in the south-west, in early 1911.
Other collecting activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some lantern-slides, now at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.⁶⁰ • Watson's other photographs from the expedition have not to date been located.⁶¹ • Wax cylinder sound recordings, at the British Library in London.⁶² • Zoological specimens collected by Watson in 1910 and 1911 and sold to private collectors.

⁶⁰ Joanna Sassoon, 'Becoming Anthropological: A Cultural Biography of EL Mitchell's Photographs of Aboriginal People', *Aboriginal History*, 28 (2004), 59–86 (p. 71).

⁶¹ Barrington, 'Who Was "Big George"', 44.

⁶² Martin Clayton, 'Ethnographic Wax Cylinders at the British Library National Sound Archive: A Brief History and Description of the Collection', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 5 (1996), 67–92 (p. 75).

Abbreviations

AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
BM	British Museum
MAA	Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge
NHM	Natural History Museum
NMI	National Museum of Ireland
PRM	Pitt Rivers Museum
RBG	Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
SLWA	State Library of Western Australia
SRO	State Records Office of Western Australia
TNA	The National Archives

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