REPRESENTATIONS OF HISTORY AND NATION IN MUSEUMS IN AUSTRALIA AND AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND – THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA AND THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA.

James Michael Gore

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

March 2002

Department of History
The University of Melbourne
This thesis examines museum development in the two post-colonial settler societies of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, investigating the evolution of new histories as museums seek to aid the construction of post-colonial national identities.

Drawing on a wide body of evidence on an under-researched topic, the thesis is arranged in two parts. The first presents a survey of how traditional images of national identity have been created, sustained and more recently challenged during the histories of Australia and New Zealand – illustrating that the question of non-indigenous national identity is a problematic one. It then provides a historical narrative of museums in both countries. Highlighting the differences and similarities between the two countries and focusing on the development of historical collections, it explores how museums have perpetuated traditional interpretations of nation, and how in recent decades various factors have combined to challenge conventional museum practice, making the role and function of museums at the beginning of the twenty-first century particularly complex.

The second part focuses on the new National Museum of Australia in Canberra and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington. It combines an examination of their history with an analysis of how they attempt to convey ideas of nation and national identity. Both museums have opened recently, at a time when national museums around the world are confronted with an increasingly prominent and challenging political and social role in society, and an especially difficult, perhaps impossible, task of representing all the different histories that constitute the ‘nation’. Primarily focused on non-indigenous history and identity, this thesis questions the relevance of traditional representations of national identity, and asks how museums, both in the past and today, have constructed identities for their non-indigenous populations.
I have been lucky in receiving tremendous support from many people and institutions whilst completing this work. I have acknowledged many of these debts of assistance in notes to the text. However, here I wish to ascribe special appreciation for this support.

I am beholden to my benefactors, without whose financial assistance this thesis would not have been possible. A significant part of my funding originated from the University of Melbourne, and particularly the Department of History, and it is to these I thus record my gratitude. I thank the University and Department for a Melbourne International Research Scholarship, and the History Department for a Lloyd Robson Memorial Award in 2000 to carry out inter-state research, as well as annual travel budget allocations. Finally, thanks to both the University for a Melbourne Abroad Postgraduate Travelling Scholarship and the Faculty of Arts for funding in 2000 – enabling me to carry out research in New Zealand.

I have benefited a great deal from the collections in the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne, the State Library of Victoria, the National Library of Australia, the National Archives of Australia, and the research libraries at the National Museum of Australia (NMA) and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). Thanks to all these institutions and their friendly and helpful staff, especially Julie Philips at the NMA, and Manuela Angelo and Eamonn Bolger at Te Papa.

Many people have discussed aspects of my work with me and offered helpful advice, as well as information on and access to sources. In this respect, it is difficult to make an exhaustive list, but I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to a number of those who were willing to spare some of their valuable time. At the NMA, particular thanks to the Director Dawn Casey, and curators Guy Hansen, Mike Smith and Sophie Jensen, as well as former curator Ian McShane. Also in Australia, I am grateful to Paul Walker at Melbourne University, fellow doctoral candidates Kirsten Wehner and Ben Dibley, and Gaye Sculthorpe, the Director of the Indigenous Cultures Program at Museum Victoria. In New Zealand, sincere thanks to Jock Phillips, the Government’s Chief Historian at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Rodney Wilson, the Director of Auckland Museum, Jenny Harper, the Head of Art History at Victoria University in Wellington, Wayne Marriott, General Manager of Museums Aotearoa, Michael Fitzgerald and Ian Wedde at Te Papa, and the Rt. Hon. Jonathon Hunt MP, Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives. Special thanks to David Butts and Susan Abasa at Massey University, for reading draft chapters of my work and clarifying some of the issues surrounding museums in New Zealand.

I am especially indebted to my fantastic supervisors, Kate Darian-Smith and David Goodman, for their invaluable knowledge, and constant support and guidance throughout the life of this thesis and my time in Australia. Even during my moments of greatest self-doubt, their encouragement and interest in the topic ensured I remained focused and determined to the end. As the principal supervisor, I must extend particular gratitude to Kate Darian-Smith, for her insight to the topic and penetrating feedback on drafts – challenging me to constantly reflect on and re-think my approach.

Thanks also to my long-suffering friends in Melbourne, especially Tania, who took on the task of proof-reading the thesis, and to Shaun, Dominique, Bob, Kate and Hideki, for putting up with my dark moments and taking an interest in my progress. Finally, to my parents back in Britain, for your unswerving support and faith in me – thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong> – Museums and Nation.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part One</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Identity in Museums.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – The Identity Question.</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – The Development of Museums in Australia &amp; New Zealand, 1800 – c.1975.</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – The Development of Museums in Australia &amp; New Zealand, since c.1975.</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Museums.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – Non-Indigenous History and Identity in the National Museum of Australia and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong> – A Challenging Future.</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Museums and Nation

We are celebrating the opening of a treasure house of material drawn from our national heritage. Material that is precious and irreplaceable. That records the development of our nation and provides us with an understanding of what makes us Australian.

– Peter McGauran, Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation, at the opening of the National Museum of Australia, 11th March 2001.1

Te Papa makes a significant contribution toward the key Government goal to Strengthen National Identity and Uphold the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi … Te Papa provides a national forum where New Zealanders can explore and reflect on their cultural identity and natural heritage through stories and objects.

– Dr Roderick S. Deane, Chairman of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2000.2

In recent years, museums around the world have undergone dramatic changes in terms of their composition, roles and interpretation: forced to adapt to new pressures and priorities, and to become more representative of the communities in which they exist, whether they be local, regional, national or global. In particular, diverse groups, including indigenous people, women and ethnic minorities, increasingly challenge traditional images of mainstream national identity. Changing historical scholarship has contributed to these debates and subsequently compelled museums to interpret and include new histories that have traditionally been excluded from their representations of the historical past. Alongside a growing recognition of the potential of museums as a positive social force,3 through being more actively involved with their publics and

more representative of them, this has created a museum environment markedly different from that which existed two decades ago.

This thesis is about national identity. It examines museum development in the former settler societies of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, investigating how major museums, especially those established in the nineteenth century, seek to aid the construction of post-colonial national identities. Focusing on non-indigenous national identity, which has become increasingly problematic, the thesis is approached in two parts. Firstly, it provides a detailed narrative tracing changing images of national identity, and the overall history of museums in both countries. In particular, it examines the development of collections relating to human history, and the links between these and national identity. The thesis then moves to an examination of the national museums of Australia and New Zealand, both of which have recently undergone massive developments, and the specific ways in which they attempt to explore notions of national identity.

There has been a growing recognition of the role of museums in interpreting the past in order to aid the formation of these identities. During the 1980s and 1990s, in particular, the emergence of a ‘new museology’ has forced the museum world to re-evaluate its missions, ethics, roles and responsibilities. This is illustrated in part by the expansion of literature on museology, which investigates museum philosophy and practice, such as those written or edited by Moira Simpson, Susan Pearce, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Gaynor Kavanagh, Robert Lumley, Michael Belcher, and Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine. Simpson’s *Making Representations*, for example, explores the way western museums have reacted to contentious issues such as repatriation and criticism that they misrepresent historical events and cultural practices. Susan Pearce’s *Museums, objects and collections* explores the nature of museums and their collections, and discusses

---

how museum objects operate as signs and symbols, while Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine’s *Museums and Communities* examines the interactions between museums and the communities they profess to serve. Various books, chapters and articles have also appeared addressing the emergence of the ‘new museology’. Authors such as Peter Vergo, Nick Merriman and Pierre Mayrand have specifically focused on it, while others, including Flora Kaplan, Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe, Kevin Walsh, and David Boswell and Jessica Evans, have attempted to address the role of museums in representing identity. Kaplan’s *Museums and the making of *ourselves*‘ is of particular interest, with case studies of ways that national heritage has been created and shaped in museums in various countries, including a chapter by Margaret Anderson and Andrew Reeves examining museums and the nation in Australia. There has also been an increase in literature concerned not directly with museums, but with the more general role of the past and material culture in the present. These include renowned academics such as David Lowenthal, Peter Gathercole, Raphael Samuel, Henry Cleere, Ian Hodder, and Eric Hobsbawm. Lowenthal in *The Past is a Foreign Country*, for example, states that an awareness of history ‘enhances communal and national identity, legitimating a people in their own eyes’. 

In terms of museology in Australia and New Zealand, however, the literature is limited, especially that of a comprehensive examination of the history of museums and their contribution to identity formation. One of the few texts addressing museums in both countries is the examination of colonial natural history museums by Susan Sheets-

---


9 Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p.44.
Pyenson. In Australia, Margaret Anderson has written on the role of history in museums, and academics such as Tony Bennett, Chris Healy, Kimberley Webber, Robin Trotter and Donna McAlear have addressed various aspects of museum history and development. General surveys of museums range from the 1933 report by Sydney Markham and Henry Richards, to a directory compiled by Museums Australia in 1998. Tony Bennett’s Birth of the Museum, for example, explores the way the modern public museum is viewed and understood, and includes a chapter critically reflecting on museum and heritage policy in Australia, while Chris Healy’s From the Ruins of Colonialism examines the history of memory in Australia. By focusing on key moments of historical imagination, such as the 1988 Bicentenary, museum exhibitions and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories, Healy explores the development of Australian history in films, books and museums. In New Zealand, museum literature is even more limited, with early reports by Francis Bather in 1894 and Markham and Walter Oliver in 1933 followed by that of Keith Thomson in 1981, providing some general discussion of the different types of museum that exist in New Zealand as well as various brief histories. There are also various unpublished theses that examine aspects of museums in New Zealand, mostly concerning Maori collections and representation, including those by Paul Tapsell, Greg McManus, Philippa Butler and Johannah Massey.

Individual museums in Australia and New Zealand have also been studied, though many of these publications were written in commemoration of the museums’ anniversaries, and tend to be somewhat celebratory in nature. Histories of museums in Australia, include that of the Australian Museum by Ronald Strahan, the Queensland Museum by Patricia Mather, the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney by Terence Measham, the old Science Museum of Victoria by Warren Perry, the National Museum of Victoria by Richard Pescott, and more recently Museum Victoria by Carolyn Rasmussen. In New Zealand, such histories include the Auckland Museum by Arthur Powell, the Dominion Museum by Richard Dell, the Otago Settlers Museum by Séan Brosnahan, and Hawke’s Bay Museum by Roxanne Fea and Elisabeth Pishief. This thesis, therefore, by providing an historical narrative of the development of museums in Australia and New Zealand, marks a significant and unique contribution to the history of museology on both sides of the Tasman, particularly in its emphasis on non-indigenous history and its questioning of traditional representations of the past and identity.

The ‘new museology’ that has emerged during the last few decades has sought to redefine not only museum practice, but also who should count as the museum audience. This is especially relevant in discussion of national museums. In the past, museums have collected and displayed objects and symbols of wealth and power to proclaim the glories of autocracies, kingdoms and empires, essentially being spaces through which elite and ruling groups express their ideas and views. The ‘new museology’, however, argues that museums should represent and be actively involved in their communities, accommodating diverse contents and ideas, and encouraging access and debate. In effect, there has been a global rejuvenation of the museum industry, emphasised by shifts from collections-centred museum philosophies to those that promote collaboration.


and are relationship-orientated. Greater significance is now placed on the nature of
collections and how they can be used to interpret and illuminate the past.

Existing alongside and influencing this ‘new museology’ is the broad question of
national identity, which around the world has become increasingly challenging and
problematic in response to the developing post-colonial world. In Australia and New
Zealand, this is illustrated by the growing number of texts produced during the last two
decades, which specifically explore the issue of national identity. Concern with identity
can be traced from the nineteenth century, but in 1981, Richard White initiated a new
set of discussions. In Inventing Australia, White laid unprecedented emphasis on the
idea that ‘Australia’ was ‘invented’ in many different ways: ‘Australia has long
supported a whole industry of image-makers to tell us what we are’. Inventing
Australia provided impetus, fuelled by the political climate and heightening historical
consciousness aroused by the Bicentenary, Centenary of Federation, and other political
events such as the 1992 Mabo decision, for much introspection and the subsequent
production of numerous texts looking at ‘national identity’. In New Zealand, similar
introspection has occurred, intensified by the official adoption of biculturalism, the

Some of this recent literature provides largely historical accounts, either chronological
or thematic, of the construction of national identity, examining what people have made
of Australia and New Zealand since European arrival and what it has meant, and might
mean, to be an ‘Australian’ or ‘New Zealander’. In Australia, for instance, John
Carroll’s volume Intruders in the Bush argues that it was discontented city intellectuals
in the late nineteenth century who romanticised the bushman and notions of mateship
and egalitarianism, while David Day’s Australian Identities looks at how and why
Australians have both historically and more recently constructed identities for
themselves. Others authors concerned with such issues include Russell Braddon,
Michael Page and Robert Ingpen. In New Zealand, comparable texts include Keith

---

17 For example, see C.E.W. Bean, On the Wool Track, London, 1910; R. Ward, The Australian Legend,
Melbourne, 1958; O. Duff, New Zealand Now, Wellington, 1941.
20 R. Braddon, Images of Australia, Sydney, 1988; M. Page & R. Ingpen, The Making of Australians,
Sinclair’s *A Destiny Apart*, which surveys chronologically the search for national identity, focusing on the period between 1880 and 1940 when New Zealand nationalism began to rise, as well as works by David Novitz and Bill Willmott, Alex Calder, Claudia Bell, and Chris Laidlaw.\(^{21}\) Other volumes take the discussion further to focus more specifically on supporting White’s notion of traditional myths having been ‘invented’, and in highlighting key factors of modernity, such as immigration, multiculturalism, citizenship and indigenous themes, that show not only that these ‘inventions’ are no longer credible today, but also that the search for national identity is a problematic one. Relating such factors to wider historical and cultural arguments in Australia and New Zealand, much of this literature illustrates that questions of identity are central to many current issues. For example, *The Politics of Identity in Australia*, a volume edited by Geoffrey Stokes, emphasises how issues of identity lie at the heart of Australian political thought and how identity is often manipulated for political ends, in an attempt ‘to examine the broader political dimensions of identity discourse in Australia’, while Andrew Theophanous and Stewart William Greif examine the specific problems created by immigration and subsequent multiculturalism in Australia and New Zealand respectively.\(^{22}\) Other examples include, Michael King’s *Pakeha: The Quest for Identity in New Zealand*, which presents a range of personal explorations into the current state of national identity, and books by Miriam Dixson and Charles Price in Australia.\(^{23}\)

As should be evident, most scholars have conventionally worked within their own specific national narratives. This is also generally the case with wider historical works, the one notable exception being Keith Sinclair’s volume *Tasman Relations* in 1987.\(^{24}\) In the last few years, however, a number of works have examined the situation in both Australia and New Zealand. One of the best examples is *Quicksands*, a volume edited

---


by Klaus Neumann, Nicholas Thomas and Hilary Ericksen, which explores how the founding of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand has been remembered and re-imagined over more than two centuries. It questions why there is such a preoccupation with national identity on both sides of the Tasman, and why history has become such an important part of contemporary political and cultural debate.\textsuperscript{25} While colonial nationalists in the 1890s were conscious of the affinities between their situations in Australia and New Zealand, identities became more nationally introverted after Australian Federation in 1901, and consequently the book is an attempt to reintroduce ‘a critical “Australasian” consciousness’.\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, Donald Denoon and Philippa Mein-Smith’s \textit{A History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific} focuses on the formation and interaction of identities within the Australasian region, while David Pearson’s \textit{The Politics of Ethnicity in Settler Societies} presents a comparative study of the particular situations of the settler societies of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, exploring issues such as multiculturalism, national identity, globalisation and citizenship.\textsuperscript{27}

This discussion of national identity is a product of the post-colonial era. Post-colonialism, a term used commonly only since the mid-1980s, can broadly be defined in terms of the legacies of European imperialism. More specifically, in terms of this thesis that discusses two former colonial societies, it can be seen as examining the impact of European colonisation on non-European societies and the inter-relations between colonised peoples and the colonisers. Initially influenced by Edward Said’s \textit{Orientalism}, a process where the West constructed different cultures as its dark ‘Other’, post-colonial theories have developed throughout the last two decades.\textsuperscript{28} This is illustrated in part by the burgeoning amount of literature examining the symptoms of post-colonial societies; including Homi Bhabha’s \textit{Nation and Narration}, which provides a number of essays exploring the concept of nation in the post-colonial world. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin’s \textit{The Post-Colonial Studies Reader}, introduces a number of key texts on post-colonial theory and criticism, and other

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{26} ibid., p.xx.
\end{thebibliography}
authors include Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, Madan Sarup, and Robert Young. In regards to this thesis, the most important point is that post-colonialism presents theoretical frameworks that provide new interpretations for understanding history, culture and nation both at the moment of contact and after. Bhabha, for example, collapses notions of a simple opposition between colonised and colonisers to look at the transformative nature of colonialism on both groups. Hybridity, for instance, recognises that in the articulation of every culture, it is not the negation of the ‘Other’ that is important, but the negotiation and renegotiation of spaces between ‘Others’. Nations and identity formation are crucial to post-colonialism, the discussion of which also emphasises the important position of debates about history and national identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

An ‘Obsession’

Discussing nationalism in the nineteenth century, Eric Hobsbawm has described how, in the context of national traditions, change disrupts national images; in that people seek to define new national traditions ‘more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which “old” traditions had been designed’. Changes associated with the social movements of the late twentieth-century, particularly those such as increased mobility, immigration, and issues of ethnicity, have consequently challenged what it means to be part of a specific nation, and subsequently people seek to redefine their national identity amidst the disorientation of modern life.

These changes have created specific problems for post-colonial settler nations such as Australia and New Zealand. These are discussed in some detail in Chapter One, but it is important to recognise here that many of these problems revolve around the situation of the indigenous populations, particularly as those populations have gained an increasingly important political role and visibility in society. As historian Ann Curthoys

has highlighted in regard to Australia, ‘understanding of the past has now acquired immense political, social, and cultural importance … evident in the media coverage of disputes over massacres and the stolen generations’. The past is central to debates over Aboriginal policy, and issues such as the question of an apology and assimilation policies. The situation is similar in New Zealand, largely revolving around conflict over the existence of the Treaty of Waitangi, which Chris Saines has described as a ‘founding instrument of reconciliation between colonised and coloniser’, and the Waitangi Tribunal, that asserts the treaty, and rules on land and natural resource claims.

One of the most difficult issues that has arisen from the assertion of indigenous rights has been for the non-indigenous populations, especially for those descended from the early white settlers. As the editors of *Quicksands* acknowledge, concern over national distinctiveness and its content is not a recent phenomenon, as such issues ‘have been evoked regularly since the colonial nationalist movements of the 1890s’, especially in societies of the former British Empire. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, these non-indigenous populations are forced to reconcile themselves with a past, and construct an identity from that past, in which they were largely agents of a colonising process that destroyed the lives and cultures of many indigenous peoples. Typically, non-indigenous Australians and New Zealanders have constructed a national identity based on an image and mythology that to be Australian and New Zealander was to be white, British and egalitarian. This image was both perpetuated and analysed by writers such as Russel Ward and Donald Horne in Australia, and Oliver Duff and Aldwyn Abberley in New Zealand. Such images were never accurate or realistic, not least because of the presence of important indigenous populations, as well as diverse ethnic groups, throughout the European history of both countries. The use of such narrow representations has become especially problematic, however, compounded by the large-scale immigration that has occurred to both countries and the resulting cultural difference and diversity that has developed. In particular, Australians and New Zealanders now have to find their place within modern societies that are politically positioned as respectively multicultural and bicultural.

---

33 Neumann et al (eds.), *Quicksands*, p.xvi.
The move to construct new interpretations of national identity has been to such an extent that, in Australia at least, some historians have labelled the search for identity a ‘national obsession’, evidenced in part by the steady flow of literature that has been identified. This ‘obsession’ is also clearly illustrated by the establishment of new national museums in both Australia and New Zealand, which are also reflective of the ‘new museology’ and developing role of the national museum that has been identified. The examination of these museums is therefore timely; museums in general, being one of the principal means through which people come into contact with the past, play an important part in contributing to the formation of identities. The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, in their role of being ‘national’, clearly have a particular function. Therefore, in first focusing on the major museums that were established in the nineteenth century as colonial institutions, and highlighting changing historical consciousness in both countries and the subsequent development of historical representation in the museums, this thesis explores how museums have traditionally represented their peoples and nations. It then moves to investigate the two new national museums, and their particular attempts in helping to construct new identities for non-indigenous Australians and New Zealanders. Broadly, it questions the relevance of traditional representations of national identity, particularly those based on single, distinct notions of identity, and seeks to ask how museums have used history, and especially ‘social histories’, to construct identities for the non-indigenous populations, both in the past and today.

For the purposes of this thesis, social history is broadly defined as the history of the interaction of peoples within society, generally excluding scientific or technological history. It encompasses those histories of groups that were generally excluded from historical representation, both in literature and museums, such as women, ethnic minorities and the working-class, and focuses on ‘everyday’ histories, rather than just those associated with ‘major’ historical events or persons. Underlying the entire discussion is the premise that the past, and specifically social history, plays a vital role in the construction of national identities. If the past plays an important role in the formation of identity, then a significant function of museums, as one of the primary institutions which collect, preserve and present the past, is to respond to history and
subsequently interpret the past and also contribute to identity. The significance of this role should not be understated.

The Use of the Past

In 1968, the XVth Convention of the UNESCO General Conference emphasised, ‘that cultural treasures are the result and manifestation of various cultural traditions and that they therefore represent one of the fundamental factors which determine the specific identity of a given people’. The past plays an integral role in providing a sense of identity, however individualistic or collective that identity might be. As David Lowenthal says, ‘the ability to recall and identify with the past gives existence meaning, purpose and value’.

Identity is often founded on the basis that one individual associates another individual’s experience, emotional responses and so forth, with corresponding parts of their own experience and responses. One individual identifies with another. Identity, of course, can be categorised in different ways. For example, people can see themselves as members of a locality, ethnic group or nationality. In this way, we are all multi-faceted and multi-layered. So too can heritage and the past be categorised in this manner, as there are private pasts, cultural pasts, community pasts and national pasts. These different categories can be seized upon and fitted together with our different identities, and so we relate them to various histories. For instance: I belong to this family, thus its history is my history; I am part of this locality, hence its history is related to mine; I am located in this nation, thus its history is mine; and so on.

Any item from the past can lend itself to the construction of identity at a particular moment. As Susan Pearce has described, even ordinary flints can become interesting if you know they came from the place where your house was built. Hence, the past is a strong power in the present, as it creates a common identity and solidarity built around

36 Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, p.41.
38 ibid., p.37.
specific shared values, and creates fixed points that can be used to find our bearings. By creating a community, whichever kind, that includes some and excludes others, the past gives reassurance to those who are within it.40

In the context of this thesis, the role of the past and history is particularly significant in the formation of national identity and nationalism. In 1849, the Danish archaeologist J.J.A. Worsaae emphasised the connection:

A nation which respects itself and its independence cannot possibly rest satisfied with the consideration of its present situation alone. It must of necessity direct its attention to bygone times. … For it is not until these facts are thoroughly understood, that the people acquire a clear perception of their own character, that they are in a situation to defend their independence with energy, and to labour with success at the progressive development, and thus to promote the honour and well-being of their country.41

This can be illustrated in an historical context. In a general sense, for example, this can be seen through the imperialism of the nineteenth century, as people in England and France conceived of themselves as ‘the heirs of the classical civilisations’ and sought to outdo each other in carrying home and displaying treasures from the Orient, Greece, and Italy.42 During the 1850s, Napoleon III ordered the excavation of the fortresses at Mont Auxois and Mont Réa, as they illustrated Celtic life in France at the time of the Roman conquest.43 In Eastern Europe, representatives of suppressed nationalities, such as the Czechs, turned to archaeology as a means of glorifying their national past and encouraging resistance to Habsburg and Russian domination.44 In Israel too, archaeological remains play an important part in affirming the links between the population and its ancient past and by doing so assert the right of that population to the land. In particular, the mountain fortress of Masada in the Judaean Desert, the site of the last Zealot resistance to the Romans in AD 73, possesses great symbolic value for the Israeli people.45

42 Kristiansen, ‘The strength...’, p.15.
45 ibid.
Nationalism and the past can also be seen to have been manipulated and exploited in many parts of the world for political expediency.\textsuperscript{46} The destructive possibilities of this were demonstrated in Europe under Nazism, when history and archaeology were manipulated in support of racist ideals about a master race, and to support the claim for new territories.\textsuperscript{47} In Mexico, since the 1910 Revolution, it has been government policy to promote national unity by glorifying Mexico’s past.\textsuperscript{48} Another example is that of Peter Garlake, the Inspector of Rhodesia’s monuments, who in 1971 resigned because he refused to yield to the white government’s insistence that Zimbabwe had been built by white Phoenician or Portuguese colonialists, rather than black civilisation as the archaeologists had determined.\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{Museums and National Identity}

If the past is a resource that underpins present-day identity, then museums as one of the principal means through which the public encounters the past, play a key role in providing an understanding of identity. Museums, as the custodians of real objects, can provide a potent and tangible link with the past.\textsuperscript{50} As Ivan Karp has described:

\begin{quote}
Museums can be seen as crucibles for forging citizens who see themselves as part of civil society, as important members of a valid social order. … Museums can play this role because they are spaces for the play of identities, and the multiple nature of those identities can be made part of museums’ exhibitions and programs.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Museums have been seen as instruments of national identity since their early existence as private collections.\textsuperscript{52} In England, it is possible to see this connection as early as 1656, when the specialist gardener John Tradescant wrote, in the introduction to the catalogue

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{46} This can be linked to discussions concerning ‘invented’ identities – discussed later.
\textsuperscript{48} Trigger, ‘Alternative…’, p.359.
\textsuperscript{49} Kristiansen, ‘The strength…’, p.16.
\textsuperscript{51} I. Karp, ‘Civil Society and Social Identity,’ in Karp et al (eds.), \textit{Museums and Communities}, p.25.
\end{footnotesize}
of his celebrated collection, that ‘the enumeration of these Rarities … would be an honour for our Nation’.\(^{53}\) In France in 1765, the notion that a collection could honour the nation was expressed in the entry on museums in the *Encyclopédie*.\(^{54}\)

It was after the French Revolution, and particularly towards the middle of the nineteenth century, that museums in Europe, as they started to significantly build and flourish from private collections, began to be seen more widely as tools of nationalism. They were public institutions of the nation: discussed as being representative of the wealth of the country, of the authority of the dynastic order, and an example of imperial power. As Chris Healy argues, the museum ‘installed the nation-state as the object of collective identification’,\(^{55}\) while George Brown Goode described the importance of the museum in 1895:

\[
\text{The degree of civilisation to which any nation, city or province has attained is best shown by the character of its public museums and the liberality with which they are maintained.}^{56}\]

An example of this connection between national identity and museums was the decision, in 1853, to found the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg to emphasise a connection with the glory and importance of the first German Empire.\(^{57}\) It is a connection, however, that is most clearly evident in post-colonial societies. In other words, in those countries formerly colonised which have succeeded in reclaiming their sovereignty from former colonial powers. Patrick Boylan has pointed to the problems faced by the hundred or more nations which have gained their independence since the Second World War, in creating a sense of nationhood and community between very different groups of people. Boylan is convinced that many of the new leaders decided that the four most vital instruments for social cohesion and nation formation, were a national defence force, a national broadcasting service, a national museum, and a


\(^{54}\) M. Prösler, ‘Museums and Globalisation,’ in Macdonald & Fyfe (eds.), *Theorising Museums*, p.32.


\(^{57}\) Prösler, ‘Museums…’, p.32.
national university.\textsuperscript{58} This establishment of institutions for the distinct purpose of proclaiming a unified nation and identity can be linked to the notion of the ‘invention’ of identities – discussed later.

National museums were established and presented to both the population and the wider world as one of the basic symbols of nationhood and independence. For the Nigerians, who gained their independence from Britain in 1960, the museum became an important means through which their heritage could be preserved and national unity promoted, and for which a network of museums was created. A ‘museum of unity’ was established in each state, the objective being, as Flora Kaplan describes, ‘to unite the various ethnic groups in a state, create mutual respect, and present a coherent picture of the local, state and national political entity to others’.\textsuperscript{59} In Zambia, which gained its independence from Britain in 1964, one of the purposes of the national museum was ‘to represent the nation of Zambia as a whole’.\textsuperscript{60} One of the objectives for a new pre-history gallery in the Livingstone National Museum of Zambia in 1998 was to promote and educate the nation’s heritage to Zambians, so they could be aware of a common history and could work together towards building a united and strong nation.\textsuperscript{61}

It is important to emphasise that it is not just museums in under-developed or former colonial countries which play this kind of role. Museums serve the purpose of contributing to national identity throughout the world, as they have the capacity to accommodate and represent diverse contents and ideas. Indeed, Soroi Marepo Eoe has gone as far to say museums should be ‘most proud’ of their contribution to the issue of national identity.\textsuperscript{62}

Through the museum the nation is implicitly and explicitly articulated, as by displaying objects and so forth the museum implies a shared history. The museum relates the past to the present, and, by linking the past to both the present and the future by ‘stating who we used to be, tells us about who we are now’.63

The Importance of Recognition

The focus on the twentieth century emergence of social history in this discussion is largely founded on the concept that recognition can be very important in identity formation, as to understand and relate to something helps enable a feeling of shared history and identity. Social history can be described as everyday history, in the sense that it tells the story of how people live. As a result, it is also familiar history, as people can recognise, relate, and therefore understand and find meaning in the history that is being told. The symbols of everyday experience may be unseen or not understood by outsiders, but for those who live there they are things that give a place its meaning and relevance, whether the ‘place’ be a family, local community, city or nation. This can be illustrated not only in museums but also in landscapes and buildings. For example, a building may not have any architectural or historical importance, but people have affection for it and desire to protect it, as it is an ingredient of their lives.64 People are increasingly concerned with preserving things not because they are special but because they are ordinary and identifiable. Familiar scenes are not always especially endearing, but they are often essential memories: ‘places need not be magnificent to be memorable’.65 This is illustrated by the fact that ‘bygones’ and ‘memorabilia’ have emerged in recent years as leaders in the auction room.66

Places, lifestyles and objects that make up our everyday lives, and are part of social history, stand ‘as living symbols to our continuing survival and feeling response to the world’.67 Through recognition, they can provide a sense of meaning and belonging to a place which other histories and objects, of little direct relevance, might not. It seems only natural that people should value most what they are in contact with each day. Yet,

63 Bell, Inventing New Zealand, pp.80-81.
65 Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, p.42.
66 Samuel, Theatres of Memory, p.209.
the opposite has often been the case in museums, with a greater value and emphasis being put on objects and histories which may have little relevance to the majority of visitors.

In this sense, recent history is also important. Recent history is defined here as including both twentieth-century history and contemporary history, but it is important to note that they are not the same. While twentieth-century history refers to a hundred years of history, contemporary essentially refers to the history of the present. As Arminta Neal asked in 1980: ‘What, actually, is history? History is five minutes ago. History is this morning’s newspaper. History is yesterday’s Hula Hoop and Frisbee, and today’s skateboard.’68 The collection of objects of contemporary history is especially important, particularly as it is an area that museums frequently continue to ignore. As Steven Miller has stated, preserving the present ‘could be the only way of guaranteeing the future a past’.69 In terms of this discussion, more recent history is significant, in the same way that recognisable places and objects might have special meaning and relevance for some people, as people are likely to gain greater understanding from histories they can recognise, relate to, identify with, or have lived through.

‘Invented’ Identities

This thesis, therefore, is structured around the idea that the use of history in museums can significantly contribute to the construction and exploration of identity. With any discussion of identity, it is important to acknowledge that identities are both ‘imagined’ and ‘invented’, a concept explored by noted theorists including Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, Richard White, and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.70 As Benedict Anderson has described, the nation can be seen as an ‘imagined community’.

---


It is imagined because people belonging to even the smallest nation will never know most of the other people there, ‘yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’. In this sense, identities are ‘invented’ through the construction and use of official symbols such as national flags, through manipulating the past and by putting particular emphasis on specific aspects of the past. Museums too, contribute to the ‘invention’ of identities and in some cases, as Boylan identified earlier, have been established for this distinct purpose.

For much of their histories since European settlement, therefore, national identity in Australia and New Zealand has been based on invented notions of the nation, which on investigation are seen to be, to a degree, unrepresentative of society. Consequently, Chapter One begins with a brief historical exploration of the imagery that both countries have constructed for themselves since the nineteenth century, in order to put into context the subsequent discussion of the role museums play in these constructions. It focuses on specific myths and images that the non-indigenous settlers of both countries have identified with, such as being white and British, and the tradition of the bush, the pioneers, and the soldiers. The chapter continues to examine some of the factors that have challenged these traditional constructions of national identity in the latter parts of the twentieth century. Focusing on a number of specific factors that are endemic in post-colonial societies, and which are later shown to have had particular effects upon the development of museums – indigenous rights and immigration, for example – it reveals how these have contributed to a general widening of historical consciousness, which in turn illustrates the problems involved with talking about a single Australian identity or a single New Zealand identity.

The Role of Museums

The thesis then turns towards the role museums take in contributing to the ‘invention’ of identities. For much of their existence, museums in Australia and New Zealand largely ignored the human histories of their own countries, and in doing so perpetuated myths of national identity that were based upon being ‘British’ and ‘white’. Traditionally they were museums of natural history and later, with the advent of the International and Colonial Exhibitions, of industry, technology and ethnography. Where human history

71 Anderson, Imagined Communities, p.15.
was portrayed and collected it was in no sense with the aim of representing the human development of their respective colonies, and museums were certainly not representative of the diverse societies in which they existed. Indigenous culture and artefacts were appropriated by non-indigenous curators and classified as part of the natural history of the country, while other rare collections of historical material were either concerned with prominent members of society, or designed to illustrate the wealth and progress of the Empire.

Chapter Two traces the history and development of museums in Australia and New Zealand, from their foundation to the 1970s, focusing on the motives behind what was and was not collected. It argues that there was a distinct lack of non-indigenous historical collections, defined as material collected for the purpose of relating it to the human history of the colony or country, that can be explained to large degree by the general absence, or at least a narrow sense, of national and historical consciousness in both countries. This is illustrated in part by the fact that many of the non-indigenous museum curators turned towards their roots in Europe for continuity. While it is acknowledged that there were smaller museums and state historical societies that did begin to have some interest in the human history of their regions, the focus of this thesis is on the major colonial and state museums; those that are visited by the greater majority of people and that were established in the nineteenth century primarily as symbols of the individual colonies’ status. Highlighting the general, though not total, absence of historical collections in museums in Australia and New Zealand, the chapter provides insight into how and why they developed with little interest in, or at the very most a narrow focus on, the non-indigenous history of their own countries, and also why these attitudes began to change in the latter parts of the twentieth century.

The ‘New Museology’

Continuing this history of museums, Chapter Three moves to examine developments during the last few decades, as the same challenges that were identified in Chapter One, which confronted traditional images of national identity, also put pressure on museums to reassess their roles and methodology. It shows that a growth and widening

---

72 For example, many museums displayed copies of objects and plaster casts of sculptures in Europe, contributing to the common identification of both societies with the Empire.
of historical consciousness has created a new place for history in museums, and has challenged conventional museum practice to such an extent that the museum sectors in both countries over the last two decades have been characterised by professional development, government involvement, and attempts to become more representative of their communities.

In general terms, this growth of historical consciousness can be seen to have developed since the Second World War, as public interest in the past began to quicken around the world in both new and established nations. The rapid pace of modernisation that followed the war, for example, seemed to encourage a feeling of instability and change, and people became aware that a large part of the world that they were used to was being destroyed. Suddenly there was a new interest in the past, in the sense that attitudes to it became nostalgic and sentimental, and it began to be seen as reassuring and secure. More recently, concern over globalisation, and in Australia and New Zealand specific events such as the Bicentenary and the Sesquicentenary, have fuelled this attention to the past that can be illustrated in part by the massive interest in genealogy, and by the growing number of different museums around the world.

Chapter Three focuses specifically on the effects this growing historical consciousness has had in providing the impetus for the emergence of ‘new’ social histories, which have challenged traditional interpretation in museums. Especially from the 1960s, new social movements saw different groups that had previously been excluded from the historical past in both museums and historiography, call for greater representation. As indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and women, sought to challenge traditional images of Australia and New Zealand, the study of history also changed. Different histories, challenging the perceptions people had of society, began to be researched, published and taught in schools and universities. Gradually, museums also responded to these histories, and Chapter Three looks at this evolution, and its reflection in changing policies, new methodologies, and the professional development of the industry. This demonstrates that there is now a recognition that museums should be more totally involved in, and representative of, the communities in which they exist, and that their resources should accordingly be better utilised in serving the needs of those communities.
However, problems have also arisen with these developments. For example, as this chapter indicates, the moves to include histories previously excluded in museums have often provoked public condemnation. This has notably been the case in efforts to represent contesting views of the past and aspects of ‘black-armband’ history, in other words aspects of history that are neither particularly pleasant nor celebratory, especially politically sensitive issues such as those of the indigenous stolen children and deaths in custody in Australia. Alongside this, tension has also been created over the adoption of new interpretative techniques by many museums. In response to audience demands and technological developments, many museums have modified their methods to make their visitors more involved with the collections, and to increase their understanding of them. The emergence of ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions and the increasingly widespread use of interactive methodologies within displays, best illustrate this. These have contributed to a growing debate, however, over the balance between education and entertainment in museums, a theme that is prevalent throughout this thesis.

The National Museums of Australia and New Zealand

The second part of this thesis turns towards the examination of two case studies, the National Museum of Australia (NMA) and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). Both museums opened recently, the NMA in 2001 and Te Papa in 1998, as major building projects worth millions of dollars. They are both indicative of the clear desire to somehow reflect the nation’s identity. An examination of their development and opening exhibitions illustrates the problems involved with this, especially in the interpretation of non-indigenous identities. The two museums are also characteristic of the growing significance of national museums around the world. Particularly since the late 1960s, new national museums have opened all over the world, while others have been re-developed. For example, the Israel National Museum was opened in 1965, and in 1968 a National Museum of History was opened in Bucharest. These were followed by the national museums in Brunei (1970), Monaco (1972), Qatar (1975), Sakura in Japan (1981), Brazil (1990), the Canadian Museum of Civilisation opened in 1989, while the existing museum in Barbados became the National Museum in 1984.\(^7\)

\(^7\) Regarding Barbados, see *AGMANZ News*, vol. 13, no. 4, December 1982.
Despite their recent openings, both Te Papa and the National Museum of Australia have foundations stretching back many years, and an examination of their history is essential in order to put their recent developments in context. In regards to New Zealand, a national museum had existed since the early days of European settlement. Originally named the Colonial Museum in 1865, it became the Dominion Museum in 1907 before officially becoming the National Museum in 1973. For much of this time, however, it was a museum of natural history and anthropology. Historical material began to be introduced early in the twentieth century, but this was largely in the form of documents relating to prominent early settlers and, at any rate, was soon transferred to the collections of various libraries. It was not until 1969, when the public interest in history was beginning to be increasingly recognised, that a colonial history gallery was first opened. Following that, the museum gradually began to respond to the wider social and cultural developments around them, by beginning to collect in more diverse areas, and most significantly eschewing their traditional representations of Maori history and culture, in response to a widespread change in perceptions towards the Maori people instigated by the ‘Te Maori’ exhibition in the mid-1980s. The culmination of all this was the establishment, by an act of parliament in 1992, of the bicultural Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Unlike Te Papa, the National Museum of Australia is without a predecessor. It was conceived by a national inquiry into museums and national collections in 1975 and formally established by the Museum of Australia Act in 1980. The idea of a national museum however, had been around long before 1975. Since the late nineteenth century, as the movement towards federation began to gain momentum, there had been a number of different proposals put forward, and on the whole not acted upon, for the establishment of an Australian national museum. Designs for an Australian national museum moved from national museums of natural history, to ethnology, and finally to that of history, illustrating the general history of museums in Australia and the growing importance of history as a tool in the construction of the ‘nation’. The museum’s eventual establishment in 1980 and its history since, as it was constantly delayed and almost shelved completely due to political manoeuvring, the economic climate and fierce debate over its site and ultimate form, is indicative too of the increasingly important position the national museum is seen to hold in representations of the nation.
The first part of the examination of these two museums therefore, in Chapters Four and Five, looks individually at their early histories and development up to the time when both recent projects were authorised, portraying both the broad evolution of museum theory and methodology in Australia and New Zealand, and the early concepts which shaped the museums’ later developments. They show that the two new museums are both a culmination of, and a monument to, their diverse and evolving histories, as well as illuminating the purpose and function of museums in Australia and New Zealand as a whole.

The history and development of neither museum has been critically studied in depth before. Detailed studies of the National Museum of Australia, for example, are largely limited to papers by Margaret Anderson and Andrew Reeves in 1994 and Ian McShane in 1998, both of which focus on aspects of the early proposals for a national museum. A paper by John Gardiner-Garden also highlights the main political developments between 1980 and 1996, while Kirsten Wehner at New York University is undertaking doctoral research looking, from an ethnographic perspective, at the cultural production of history during the planning and development process. A number of articles in recent issues of *Meanjin* and *Humanities Research* discuss the new museum, while a conference in Canberra in 1999 also produced various papers addressing the changing role of national museums, including several focused on the NMA and Te Papa. However, the only detailed study of the history of New Zealand’s national museum, is that undertaken and unpublished by its then Director Richard Dell in 1965, though theses by Ben Dibley in 1996 and Paul Tapsell in 1998 also look at aspects of Te Papa’s more recent history, especially its development as a bicultural institution. Another thesis by Rosanne Livingstone in 1996 examines the development of foreign ethnology collections in the museum, while a recent book edited by Jock Phillips and Bronwyn

---


Dalley includes an interview with Bronwyn La brum, one of the history curators at Te Papa’s opening in 1998.78

Chapter Six then progresses to examine together the recent physical and intellectual development of both the NMA and Te Papa, as well as the response to their recent openings. Since their projects were given official authorisation to proceed, both museums have been besieged by political turmoil as well as public controversy over their architecture, sites, cost, and planned content. An analysis of such controversy, and the opening response, provides a good indication of the perception of governments, curators and the general public, of the perceived role of the national museum. Te Papa, for example, is a good example of the ‘new museology’, in terms of the use of interactives and post-modern interpretation, through its inclusion of theme-park rides, and by juxtaposing acknowledged works of art with everyday objects. These endeavours to become popular and more entertaining for the public, however, have brought into question both the intellectual integrity of Te Papa and the effectiveness of post-modern methodologies, alienating many museum patrons and leading to the museum being accused of ‘dumbing-down’ history and existing more as a theme-park than a museum. In contrast, the NMA can be regarded as a more ‘balanced’ museum, combining interactive elements with more traditional and extensive displays of objects and interpretative text.

Equally important, especially in terms of the subsequent discussion in Chapter Seven of the non-indigenous galleries, is the development of the museums’ intellectual framework. As Chapter Six discusses, both the NMA and Te Papa reflect a growing trend of interpreting national history and identity by the integration of different disciplines through their exhibitions and scholarship. Both museums, for example, are fundamentally based on the inter-relation of indigenous histories and cultures, non-indigenous history and society since European settlement, and people’s interaction with the environment. As the discussion in Chapter’s Six and Seven illustrates, both Te Papa and the National Museum of Australia attempt to emphasise and represent these themes throughout their permanent exhibitions.

Chapter Seven then addresses the permanent galleries of the museums that focus specifically on non-indigenous history. It examines their respective efforts to represent non-indigenous history and identity by investigating the concepts behind the exhibitions, the different interpretative techniques that are used, and the incorporation of the everyday and other histories that were traditionally excluded from museum representation. It shows that museums no longer portray a narrow view of the past but attempt to be inclusive of all the many diverse histories and versions of the past that exist, and also that this is by no means a straightforward task. For example, in their roles of national museums, both Te Papa and the NMA are celebratory of the nations they represent. In the NMA in particular, however, there are clear efforts to directly confront contested and sensitive aspects of the past, through the portrayal of stories such as the ‘stolen generations’ of Aboriginal children and the death of Azaria Chamberlain. Interpretation such as this though, and especially the presentation of more ‘unpleasant’ aspects of history, has provoked considerable controversy and open condemnation from many who feel a national museum should be a celebration of the nation.

A further problem that will be evident in both Chapter Six and Seven, are the problems associated with representing non-indigenous cultures alongside those of the indigenous populations. Both museums, for instance, in their desire to position themselves as bicultural and multicultural, and as agents of reconciliation, have been accused in different degrees of emphasising indigenous cultures to the neglect of the non-indigenous populations who represent the majority of the population. It is important to note, however, that in the ever-widening historical and political climate, and with the inevitable developing professionalism of museums and the subsequent adoption of new technologies and methodology, museums can never return to telling the narrow and simpler stories of the past. Consequently, controversy will continue. At any rate, such debates should be welcomed, as they reflect the prominent role of the museum, and highlight an important argument of the entire thesis: that the issue of national identity in the twenty-first century is highly contested.
Aron Mazel and Gary Ritchie have argued that history is ‘not simply a “set of facts” about the past but rather a set of ideas about the past held in the present’. In this sense museums, especially those with history displays, can not be seen to be neutral institutions, as they reflect the dominant values, beliefs and ideas of the societies in which they exist. Hence, they are institutions through which dominant interpretations and versions of the past are popularised and presented. This is, and will always be an inevitable theme of museums and is illustrated throughout the examination of the history of museums in both Australia and New Zealand.

The type of narrow imagery that was used in the nineteenth century, such as the digger legend, continues to appeal and proliferate everywhere. This is especially the case in popular culture, tourist promotion and advertising, but museums are also culpable of continuing to perpetuate similar myths and images. The use of such imagery, however, is often offensive and exclusionary. Put simply, the representation of a single distinct national identity is problematic in today’s modern society. Implicit throughout this thesis is the growing role and importance of social history and all the different histories that it comprises, and the way museums have used these histories and the tensions this has caused, as groups previously excluded from traditional depictions of history have gained greater control of their own pasts and demanded their inclusion with representations of the nation. This thesis represents a unique and detailed study that highlights the increasing importance of history, especially in post-colonial settler societies, where it is no longer possible for museums to ignore the realities of the past, however unpleasant they might at times appear. The controversy that is aroused in presenting contested views of the past should be welcome, as only by exploring and debating the many diverse pasts that constitute a nation’s history can a coherent and comprehensive discourse on national identity begin.

---

PART ONE

History and Identity in Museums
CHAPTER ONE

The Identity Question

During the last few decades, questions concerning cultural identity have become of considerable importance everywhere. Changes around the world have included the movement of peoples on an unprecedented scale, the break-up of European empires, the creation of new power blocs such as the New Europe,1 the collapse of old nations and the re-formation of new ones. These changes are profoundly destabilising, and have led to the audible articulation of questions such as ‘Who are we?’ ‘Where do we come from?’ and ‘Who am I?’. Identity has become a key word in society. This is illustrated by the large number of conferences, books and articles on every aspect of identity that one can imagine. Identity does not, however, solely belong to the domain of scholars. Identity exists on many levels: novels often represent people struggling to define and fulfil themselves; characters in films frequently comment about not knowing who they are; and almost everyone is familiar with common expressions such as ‘identity crisis’ or ‘finding yourself’.2

This chapter is concerned with national identity. It should be noted, however, that all identities are inter-connected, so that while people talk about the factors affecting one type of identity, these are also the factors affecting other types.3 For example, it is not possible for a nation or a community to exist if there are no individuals to form it, while similarly, an individual’s personal identity is inextricably bound up with its relationship with a collectivity: ‘Where there is an “I”, there is also a “we” and a “they”’.4 This idea of identities being connected can also be viewed in an historical context. As Martin

---

Prösler has described, the formation of the concept of the ‘nation’ and of the ‘nation state as a special form of social association’, went together ‘with the creation of a specific conception of the human being, of the individual as citizen’.5

People around the world now actively seek to define themselves and the communities and nations they exist within. This chapter reviews the issue of national identity in Australia and New Zealand, and shows how new approaches to, and recognition of, history have overturned established ideas of identity during the latter parts of the twentieth century. Nation-building and national identity are inherently based on history, and specifically upon shared historical experiences and a notion of collective memory. In this regard, to talk about a national identity or nation in the modern world is to consider, in Benedict Anderson’s words, an ‘imagined community’.6 Traditionally, a sense of community has been possible only for groups of people small enough to know each of the others and be known by them, and in this sense a nation has conventionally been defined in terms of shared culture or language. Yet because of modern technology, such as print and communications, it is possible for a national sense of community and shared culture to be experienced and ‘imagined’.7 Alongside this, identities are often ‘invented’, or at least constructed, by putting particular emphasis on aspects of the past.8 Eric Hobsbawm agrees with both Ernest Gellner and Richard White as he discusses this ‘invention of tradition’:

It is clear that plenty of political institutions, ideological movements and groups - not least in nationalism – were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented, for example by creating an ancient past beyond effective historic continuity, either by semi-fiction (Boadicea, Vercingetorix, Arminium the Cheruscan) or by forgery (Ossian, the Czech manuscripts).9

---

If national identity is based upon a shared sense of history, then the situation is particularly complex in settler societies such as Australia and New Zealand with, as Ann Curthoys describes, their ‘double-edged histories’, which look both to their countries of origin and at their struggles with indigenous peoples. The legacy of colonialism means that history and identity hold a particularly prominent political and cultural role. As Catherine Hall has highlighted in regards to Australia, debates about cultural identity and history have become publicly focused by particular moments. For example, this could be seen in the Australian Bicentenary in 1988, when two hundred years of settlement were celebrated by some in the face of Aboriginal outrage, and more recently in the centenary of Australian Federation in 2001. At play in such debates are questions about history, nation, citizenship and community. Similarly, events in New Zealand such as the Sesquicentenary in 1990, have also aroused public debate over identity from both non-indigenous and indigenous New Zealanders, while ground-breaking High Court cases in Australia such as *Mabo* (1992), and the influence of the Waitangi Tribunal in New Zealand, also signal a willingness by politicians and the judiciary to consider the claims of history.

Graeme Davison, in speculating on the eminent place some historians such as Manning Clark, Geoffrey Blainey and Henry Reynolds now have in Australian public life, considers it to be a reflection ‘of the renewed salience of history in Australian public affairs’. Davison highlights the developing political nature of history, reflecting on the way Paul Keating, the Australian Prime Minister between 1991 and 1996, kissed the ground on which Australian diggers died at Kokoda in Papua New Guinea, and uttered an historically based speech at Redfern in December 1992. This prominent role of history in both Australian and New Zealand society can also be seen in the furore surrounding the development of national museums in both nations in the 1990s.

As discussed in the Introduction, post-colonialism has created an environment that allows for new interpretations of history and identity, meanwhile collapsing traditional national identities and bases of nationalism. While Australian nationalism at the time of

---

11 Hall, ‘Histories…’, p.68.
13 ibid., pp.2-3.
Federation can be seen to have been based on the unity of ‘race’, in other words the exclusion of others and especially Aboriginal people, one frame upon which the post-colonial nation could now be based is one predicated on difference, on inclusion, in other words as a multicultural society, and on Aboriginal sovereignty over land.\textsuperscript{14}

Broadly, for much of their European histories, national identity in both Australia and New Zealand has been based around narrow definitions such as that to be an ‘Australian’ or ‘New Zealander’ was to be white, British, and egalitarian.\textsuperscript{15} Since the Second World War, however, these single nationalist concepts have been increasingly challenged by various factors endemic to post-colonial settler nations, such as the assertion of indigenous rights and immigration, and a corresponding re-writing of history which is both fuel for, and a product of, such common factors. These new approaches to history are clear to see. ‘Australian history’ was not established in university curricula until the 1930s, with W.K. Hancock in Adelaide and Brian Fitzpatrick and Max Crawford in Melbourne. As Donald Denoon and Philippa Mein-Smith have highlighted, however, for both Hancock and Fitzpatrick, Australian history and identity was ‘intimately wrapped up in a British context’, and it was not until the 1950s, when Manning Clark began to publish his multi-volume \textit{A History of Australia}, that the British context was less prominent.\textsuperscript{16} Since then many histories have been produced that have explored the ethnocentric, sexist and racist nature of the traditional Australian and New Zealand identity. From the 1970s, historians, including Humphrey McQueen, increasingly challenged the image of the typical Australian working in the bush as being exclusionary and racist, while in the 1970s and 1980s new feminist historians and critics such as Marilyn Lake, began to attack the masculinism inherent in all these traditional notions of national identity.\textsuperscript{17} Meanwhile, new Aboriginal and Maori histories, and the assertion of indigenous rights and sovereignty, have questioned the very idea of a shared history and identity.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{14} Hall, ‘Histories…’, p.68.
\textsuperscript{15} National images were also primarily male – though not always. See M. Anderson (ed.) \textit{When Australia was a Woman: Images of a Nation}, Perth, 1998.
\end{flushleft}
This chapter does not provide a detailed review of the development of these new histories, as they are discussed more fully in Chapter Three in relation to their influence on museums. Nor does it seek to create simple answers to the question of national identity. Rather it highlights the key factors that have helped shape historical consciousness, that have subsequently challenged narrow definitions of national identity, and that have made identity increasingly contested and layered during the last few decades. As discussed in subsequent chapters, such factors can also be seen to have had a significant impact on the development of history in museums in Australia and New Zealand. The indigenous position in both countries, for example, has seen Aboriginal and Maori peoples re-claim control of their cultural heritage that for so long had been interpreted solely by European anthropologists, leading to historical representations as well as an integration of indigenous and non-indigenous history that would have been inconceivable thirty years ago. This chapter, therefore, first reviews the construction of traditional images and myths of national identity, and then highlights some of the important post-colonial factors that have eroded these established ideas of identity and contributed to a widening historical consciousness. In this way it provides an introduction to the discussion of museums, while also showing that the new National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa are products of the historical climate that both Australia and New Zealand find themselves within at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

**Images of Australia and New Zealand**

In 1958, Russel Ward, building on and reformulating a radical Australian nationalist tradition, described the myth of the ‘typical Australian’ as being:

> A practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others … he believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but … probably a good deal better, and so he is a great ‘knocker’ of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess.

---

18 This integration of histories is best highlighted in regard to the national museums of both Australia and New Zealand, which are discussed later in this thesis.

In a general sense, national identity in Australia and New Zealand has been constructed around narrow images such as these for most of their histories since European settlement, highlighted through works such as Ward’s *The Australian Legend* and by Oliver Duff and Aldwyn Abberley in New Zealand. Before exploring a number of these images though, various important points should be noted. Firstly, the contribution of indigenous peoples to settler national identity formation is not discussed in this section, as it is examined in more detail later. However, the indigenous populations of both countries are fundamental to any contemporary understanding of colonial, and especially post-colonial, settler identity. In the nineteenth century, for example, the indigenous populations were generally regarded as having no role to play in settler society. Consequently, they were not perceived as contributing to non-indigenous identity except to provide some measure of the progress of Western civilisation – explored in more detail in the next chapter – and in this sense they contributed to a prevailing imperial and colonial identity.

A number of differences between Australia and New Zealand will be seen to be influential in the later examination of the museums of both countries. Such differences have affected the way national identity has been constructed as well as the varying degrees to which these identities have been challenged. Perhaps the most important of these is the difference in the situations of the indigenous peoples. The absence of a treaty in Australia, such as that of Waitangi in New Zealand, has been a crucial factor in relations between European settlers and Aborigines since 1788. Other differences include the contrasts in the physical environment of the two countries, differences in their ethnic composition, and the actual motives behind European settlement. For example, the climate and landscape of New Zealand was far more like that of northern Europe than Australia’s was, and this may have helped settlers in New Zealand to feel ‘more at home’. In addition, New Zealand was not made up of separate colonies like Australia, so there was none of the colonial rivalry that threatened Australia’s colonial nationalism in the late nineteenth century. While European settlement in Australia first came about through forced migration, by way of a convict system, people initially came to New Zealand to escape the turmoil of the Industrial Revolution and the aftermath of

---

the Napoleonic Wars, to gain land and to trade with the Maori.\textsuperscript{21} All this may explain to a degree the more vocal nationalist calls in Australia, compounded too by the relative numerical strength of people of Scottish descent in New Zealand and those of Irish and Catholic in Australia.\textsuperscript{22} Considering the events between Britain and Ireland during the last two centuries, the prominence of the Irish might also have contributed to the desire in Australia to construct an identity distinct from Britain.

In this regard, some reference needs to be made to the relationship between New Zealand and Australia.\textsuperscript{23} The two countries have shared a similar history since European settlement and, as will be evident, have constructed a similar series of images of themselves. Yet, for much of its European history, New Zealand – as the smaller nation – has defined its national identity against Australia, as illustrated at the time of Australian Federation.\textsuperscript{24} This may also explain in part why New Zealand has clung more to Britain than Australia has for much of the twentieth century, though this can be attributed to other factors such as New Zealand’s shorter European history and lesser immigration from Asia. Since the Second World War, however, increased trade, tourism and migration, and foreign policy ties such as the 1951 ANZUS Pact, have broken down this psychological barrier between the two countries. New Zealand has had to realise that Australia is very important to its future. This is illustrated by a 1984 McNair survey commissioned by the Australia - New Zealand Foundation, which showed that 79 per cent of New Zealanders felt that as a country they had most in common with Australia. In contrast only 37 per cent of Australians named New Zealand.\textsuperscript{25}

In Australia, debate over national identity and nationalism can be traced back to the early colonial period. In 1819, for example, William Charles Wentworth, Australian-

\textsuperscript{24} One reason for this was because of a white New Zealander belief, a largely mistaken belief, that they were distinctive because of their superior racial tolerance and racial homogeneity.
born, published *A Statistical, Historical, and Political Description of New South Wales and its Dependent Settlements in Van Diemen’s Land*, which advocated radical changes in government and moves towards a free government. Soon afterwards in Britain, in 1823, Wentworth entered a poem into the Cambridge University Prize Poem Contest, which referred to Britain as a ‘foreign strand’ and hinted that Britannia’s glories might one day be replaced by Australia’s.26

It was from the late nineteenth century, that national distinctiveness from the Empire began to be evoked regularly in both Australia and New Zealand, and various images and myths began to be constructed to reflect this. This was due to factors such as the decline of the immigrant component, second and third generation Australians and New Zealanders infiltrating power, colonial development, and the extension of European imperialism into the Pacific raising the issue of defence. Before this, both Australians and New Zealanders largely identified with Britain and, as James Jupp describes, were happy to be called ‘South Britons’.27

The 1890s represented the first real challenge to the dominance of the idea that to be an Australian or a New Zealander was to be British. In New Zealand, the shift from colonial to national policy under the Seddon Liberal Government between 1893 and 1906 marked the beginning of a new era, while in Australia, strikes and depression planted the seeds of Federation. Nationalist sentiment was evident on both sides of the Tasman. For example, the magazine *Zealandia, A Monthly Magazine of New Zealand Literature, by New Zealand Authors*, was launched in New Zealand in 1889 as a nationalist manifesto. The first editorial announced:

> Colony though it may be, New Zealand is a nation – not yet beyond its embryonic form, but still a nation; and to the realisation of this truth is due the fact that *Zealandia* has been established as a distinctively national literary magazine. Its contributors will be all New Zealanders, and no subject will be dwelt upon in its pages that is not of interest … primarily to New Zealanders.28

27 J. Jupp, ‘Does Australia need a National Identity?’, in D. Day (ed.), *Australian Identities*, Melbourne, 1998, p.224. Such identification with the Empire was also reflected in the practice of museums, discussed in Chapter Two, as they sought to collect and display objects and works of art that emphasised the glories of the Mother Country.
At this time, the nationalism in New Zealand was largely directed against Australia, particularly concerning the suggestion that New Zealand become the seventh state of Australia, and its subsequent refusal in 1901. In Australia, nationalism was focused more towards Federation and the desire to break free from British control of colonial affairs. An example of this is associated with the European imperialism of the late nineteenth century. For some time Australians had been fearful of expanding European nations, who were engaged in the nineteenth-century grab for colonial possessions. When the new German Empire occupied the north coast of eastern New Guinea in 1884, despite many earlier Australian pleas to Britain to occupy the area, there was suddenly a foreign force planted within invasion distance of Australia. While any threat was minimal, the situation fuelled calls for federation by pointing out that had Australia been able to act independently, it could have taken over the area itself without British approval. Yet, many Australians were still unwilling to break from the motherland, and in many quarters there was also intense rivalry between the different colonies, including suggestions that they should evolve into six separate sovereign nations.

Generally however, both Australians and New Zealanders were beginning to see Britain and being British as separate. On the one hand they continued to have a strong sense of imperial identity; they were proud of their British heritage of free speech, impartial justice and of a powerful homeland in terms of commerce, industry and imperial possessions. Yet, they derided other British features such as class distinction. In many respects, they regarded themselves as being better than the British: in class, in manners, in sport, and particularly at war. As the former Labor Prime Minister W.M. Hughes described in 1924, the Australian type was ‘bred from the hardy, the enterprising and the resolute’, while the ‘weaklings’ stayed in Britain. In New Zealand, David Ausubel described this dual identity and national self-image that still existed in 1960:

The New Zealander feels that he resembles his British forebears in being reserved, unsentimental, respectful of authority, mindful of discipline, and given to understatement; but he vigorously disavows British snobbishness, self-conceit, arrogance, haughty condescension and patronising airs.

---

Nevertheless, for much of the twentieth century, many continued to identify with Britain. The majority of institutions remained British, and while antipodeans resented British influence on their affairs, there was little suggestion that they give up their heritage or their family link with British power, pomp and prestige, of which many were so proud.

The nationalist sentiment released during the 1890s, however, did give rise to a number of images that were constructed to emphasise the distinctiveness and hardiness of the common Australian and New Zealander. One of the most enduring and popular of these images is that of the ‘bush’. In Australia, the bush tradition is said to have originated among the early convicts, many of whom became outback employees who developed a high degree of cohesion. The ‘bush ethos’, in that the harshness of the environment was regarded as character forming, began to be spread by semi-nomadic stock-drovers and shearers. In Russel Ward’s words: ‘in life, as in folklore, the man from “up the country” was usually regarded as a romantic and admirable figure’.32 One of the earliest writings concerning this, from a British perspective, was Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1850), where Mr. Micawber went into ‘The Bush’ and became a respected colonist.33 Dickens did not explain how the bush could help change a man’s destiny, but it fed a growing myth. This was then popularised and romanticised by writers including Henry Lawson and Andrew ‘Banjo’ Paterson, in the *Bulletin* in the 1880s, and by books such as Rolf Boldrewood’s *Robbery Under Arms*, C.E.W. Bean’s *On the Wool Track* and Alfred Buchanan’s *The Real Australia*.34 From around the 1920s, as the rigidity of the Victorian era began to disappear, beaches began to become extremely popular.35 Consequently, the bush tradition began to be accompanied by the beach and the bushman by the lifesaver.36

35 This was also to do with the urbanisation of society in general. By the 1960s, almost three-quarters of Australians lived in cities and towns: C. McGregor, ‘The beach, the coast, the signifier, the feral transcendence and ‘pumpin’ at Byron Bay’, in D. Headon, J. Hooton & D. Horne (eds.), *The Abundant Culture: Meaning and significance in everyday Australia*, St. Leonards, 1994, p.51
In New Zealand, the bush tradition was also in evidence. Here it was the work of clearing the bush that was seen as central to the process of building a nation; popularised in works such as the handbook *Rural New Zealand. The Britain of the South* (1893). As Keith Sinclair explains, it was the pioneers who were the founding fathers and mothers, as equivalent to the Australian stock-drover, ‘who appeared to people in the late nineteenth century as cast in a heroic mould’. The environment plays an integral role in many of the images constructed by Australians and New Zealanders. In both countries, people looked to the land and environment, as the pursuits of goldminers and bushmen were seen to reflect the strength of the nation. Farming was also considered in this sense, particularly as farming, especially that of sheep, was crucial to the economic position of both countries.

The bush tradition is also reflected in another of the most popular images constructed by Australians and New Zealanders. The First World War, and specifically Gallipoli, is widely seen as the time both Australia and New Zealand came of age in terms of their national identity. On Anzac Day in New Zealand in 1920, for example, the *Press* in Christchurch announced that it was on this day that New Zealand had ‘achieved nationhood, in the eyes of the world’. The sustained period of conflict on the Gallipoli peninsula in the First World War was the subject of detailed observations and perceptions by war correspondents, officers and soldiers. War correspondent and fiercely patriotic Australian Charles Bean, though he was British-born, is famous for fuelling the Anzac myth, a mythology that had emerged out of the Boer War but which came to the fore during the First World War. In *On the Wool Track* (1910), Bean had idealised and romanticised the bush. Through his wartime correspondence, he then charged his subject, the Australian digger, with the inherent virtues of the environment, such as resourcefulness, egalitarianism, loyalty and mateship: ‘The Australian soldier differed very little from the Australian who at home rides the station boundaries every week-day and sits of a Sunday round the stockyard fence.’

---

The digger spirit was seen as representing an affirmation of the bush on both sides of the Tasman. There was also a more literal connection between the digger, the pioneer and the bushman. The use of the expression ‘digger’ was common on the Australian goldfields, and as Jock Phillips describes, the ‘word ‘digger’ suggested not only the Anzac ability to dig trenches but their heritage as goldminers’.41 Thereafter when war could not be found, during much of the twentieth century, it was sport, and especially rugby, that was seen as perpetuating the nobler attributes of pioneer manliness.42

The experience of war also seemingly justified the belief of Australians and New Zealanders that they were better than the British, especially better soldiers, and many of the accounts of the First World War described the courage of Australian and New Zealand soldiers. Again, this was often ascribed to a frontier life that was lived under conditions that made men harder than the British. Yet, the war also reaffirmed the connection with Britain. Both Australians and New Zealanders still felt themselves to be part of Britain, and many signed up to prove themselves worthy of their British heritage, while trade and commerce still depended on the ‘mother country’.

For much of their histories since European settlement, therefore, Australians and New Zealanders have identified with a series of similar images that describe their way of life. The traditional Australian was that first popularised by the Bulletin, and then continued by others: British, white, a pioneer who came from the bush and had been to war. In New Zealand too, the national self-image constituted a distinctive blend of British and pioneering traits. However, as the latter parts of the twentieth century approached, this confidence in the typical Australian and New Zealand type began to falter.

**Modern Pressures on Identity**

Wide-scale and rapid changes to society invariably leads to concern over identity. In a general sense after the Second World War, industrialisation, the rapid pace of technological development, globalisation, the spread of capitalist economies, the media and the pervasive nature of modern communications, have all disrupted and now

determine the everyday economic and material lives of people all over the world. Such changes have certainly confronted Australia and New Zealand, and the challenges they have created for traditional representations of the nation are clearly illustrated by the plethora of books exploring the question of national identity in both countries. Especially since the 1970s, there is hardly an institution or convention of life which has not been exposed to either serious challenge or significant change. The landmarks which have traditionally been used in defining the way of life, whether they be social, cultural or economic, have either disappeared or been altered. This chapter now moves to examine the specific problems that face both countries as they seek to define themselves at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Remembering that identities are ‘invented’, it is important to note that the images that were constructed and used to represent the nation and to describe the Australian and New Zealand way of life have never been accurate or ‘true’. Different ethnic and cultural communities have always been present in both countries, and sectarian divisions, most notably the Irish in Australia, have also existed to complicate and refute the wholly ‘British’ image. In recent decades, however, various factors have increasingly challenged such imagery, to the extent that the situation now is one in which the search for a new national identity is a constant theme in both societies. The women’s and gay movements have attacked the masculine nature of the Australian identity, anti-war movements have attacked the militarism inherent in the digger legend, indigenous peoples and others have decried racism and demanded an identity with which they can identify, and post-war immigrants have sought an identity which is representative of the diversity in Australian and New Zealand society. This discussion focuses on immigration and the position of indigenous people, both seen to have influenced most the erosion of narrow expressions of nationality and nation. It highlights not only the challenges they have created for post-colonial societies trying to define their national identity, but also a widening historical consciousness and an awareness of the role of diverse histories within representations of the nation.

Another factor that has contributed to the confusion of identities is the economic and cultural shift towards the United States, alongside developing globalisation.

---

44 Examples of these have been identified in the Introduction to this thesis.
'Americanisation', for instance, directly undermined the British image of Australia and New Zealand. The shift from Britain towards the United States had begun during the reliance of both countries on the United States in the Second World War, and was consolidated by the subsequent signing of the ANZUS Pact in 1951. Then, as Britain started to turn its attention to Europe, traditional trade and investment links began to wither. The United States began to take over much of Britain’s position, while Asia gradually became Australia’s most important export market and the source of many of its imports. In both New Zealand and Australia, the degree of this association with the United States can be seen, for example, through increased trade, the adoption of a decimal currency based on the dollar, and both providing military support for America’s action in Vietnam (though New Zealand’s support was minimal).^45^ David Pearson has described recent nationalism in Australia and New Zealand as growing out of a colonial and post-colonial history that initially ‘sought an intimacy of British relations but over time veered closer to the American path’.^46^ While this shift towards the United States immediately threatened the British image, it also accelerated the phenomenon of globalisation and the problems associated with it.

Globalisation can be seen to be creating an increasingly homogeneous world, where little seems to remain unique to a country except perhaps the climate and topography.\(^47\) This, at least in part, explains why the issue of national identity is of great importance today: people desire to preserve and enjoy their own distinctive way of life. This is evident in all levels of communities, from the local to the national. As Chris Laidlaw has summarised, the greatest challenge now is ‘to hold communities and the essence of their identity together in the face of huge pressures to submit to the forces of globalisation and cultural homogenisation’.\(^48\)

---


Factors contributing to the evolution of identity can often be seen as characteristic of the effects of the modern era and globalisation. Rising levels of unemployment and changing patterns of employment opportunities, for example, cause a re-think about the importance we attach to work. The invention of credit and invisible money has changed the way we shop, and while it makes life simpler in some ways, can equally lead to insecurity and instability due to its indiscernible nature. Since the 1970s, with the redefinition of gender roles, women have a new view of their role and status in society, while men are faced with uncertainty as to how to respond to this revolution. Finally, redistribution of household income has created a growing gap between the rich and poor. In the past, both Australia and New Zealand have portrayed themselves as relatively classless societies or at least working or middle-class societies, where work, wealth and power could be achieved by anyone. In Australia this was seen as the ‘embodiment of the egalitarian dream’. As Hugh Mackay has highlighted, however, estimates show that between 1976 and 1992, the proportion of Australian households with an income of more than $72,000 rose from 15 per cent to 30 per cent, while those with an income of less than $22,000 rose from 20 per cent to 30 per cent. The economic middle class is shrinking. Changes such as these are evident in societies around the world, especially developed Western societies, all contributing to the general universal interest in identity. In Australia and New Zealand, however, the two most influential factors to contribute to this concern over identity are immigration and the developing state of the indigenous populations.

**Immigration**

Both Australia and New Zealand are immigrant nations. A multicultural society, where ethnic groups other than Anglo-Celts are represented, has existed in both countries for most of their short European histories. The gold discoveries of the mid-nineteenth century in particular, precipitated considerable visiting and migration to both countries, meaning that colonial Australia and New Zealand consisted of a high number of overseas-born people, with their different languages and cultures. It is only during the latter parts of the twentieth century, however, that these varied groups have succeeded

---

50 ibid., p.137.
51 I use the term ‘anglo-celtic’ to link Australians of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh descent, but without implying a single identity between them.
in gaining a particular role in society, amidst a growing awareness of the complex and
diverse nature of both societies.

**Australia**

Australia is one of the few countries in the world that has had significant immigration
every year since the Second World War. Immigrants have also been selected under a
wide diversity of categories and a large number of countries of origin, being drawn from
more than 120 other countries over the last fifty years. Where only 9 per cent of
Australians were born overseas in 1947, 23 per cent were in 1991.

This diverse society clearly stands in opposition to the traditional image of the white
British Australian, as well as the ideals of the infamous White Australia policy. The
White Australia policy was established by the passing of the *Immigration Restriction
Act* in 1901, and it remained the basis for Australia’s immigration for over seventy
years. Established in the year of Federation, the White Australia policy helped create for
the new nation a sense of identity through racial consciousness, and was a major force
in Australian nationalism, as the perceived threat to racial purity and British/Australian
institutions stimulated national sentiment and unity. This type of attitude was an
important factor in determining the restriction of citizen rights for Asians and other non-
Europeans. A white Australian democracy could not be conceived of as allowing access
to anyone who was not racially and culturally British. James Jupp has described the
abstract model of the ‘White Australian’ nation state:

> This model works best if it is democratic and tolerant enough to give scope to cultural
> variety and rich enough to meet the economic needs of its people. The price of

---


54 J. Jupp, ‘Immigration and National Identity: Multiculturalism’, in Stokes (ed.), *The Politics*, p.138. Such figures have also been aided to an extent by increasing numbers of refugees accepted for asylum in Australia.
Australian tolerance was the exclusion (as immigrants) or the suppression (as Aborigines) of those who might otherwise have been the victims of intolerance.\(^{55}\)

Largely due to the enforcement of the White Australia policy, this model seems to have operated until the Second World War, as apart from a small influx of southern Europeans in the late 1920s and of Jews in the 1930s, there were few ethnic minorities in evidence who needed to be tolerated. After the war, however, a perceived need for regional security, the rapid expansion and structural change in the Australian economy, and the establishment of a national manufacturing sector, led to a strong need for additional labour, which could not be met by natural population growth.\(^{56}\)

Consequently, the Department of Immigration was founded under Arthur Calwell in 1945, to initiate a programme of large-scale labour immigration. In keeping with ‘White Australia’ though, the policy was highly selective and there was certainly no desire to create a multi-ethnic society. The aim was at first to attract British immigrants, but when it became clear there was a shortage of these, due to Britain’s own scarcity of labour, northern, eastern, and later southern Europeans were recruited. It was deemed that these were racially acceptable, and it was expected that they would be fully assimilated into the ‘Australian’ way of life. For the entire period from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, non-British migrants were expected to assimilate totally into the ‘traditional’ Australian culture, so as not to present a threat to a concept of national identity based firmly upon the shared British roots of the bulk of the population. In this sense, the different cultures and histories belonging to these ethnic minorities were not acknowledged as either being relevant or contributing to the human history or identity of Australia.\(^{57}\)

By the 1960s, this policy of assimilation was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Australia’s ideals of racial purity had to be relaxed in the face of factors such as Britain itself becoming multi-racial, global ideological shifts towards tolerance, and particularly Australia’s shifting industrial structure and international economic position. Since the 1950s, the importance of Japan and Southeast Asia as trading partners had

\(^{55}\) Jupp, ‘Does Australia…’, p.227. Also see McQueen, *The New Britannia*.

\(^{56}\) Castles et al, *Mistaken Identity*, p.23.

\(^{57}\) As will be evident in later chapters, museums perpetuated this by excluding any representation of ethnic minorities from their displays and collections. Before the 1970s, human history was rarely collected at any rate, but when it was it reflected the white male Anglo-Celtic population.
rapidly increased, and as a result the White Australia policy became an embarrassment. High rates of growth in northern Europe in the early 1960s, also meant that migrants from traditional source countries were harder to find. Consequently the White Australia policy, at least officially, was abandoned. One consequence of this was the signing of the Turkish immigration agreement in 1968, allowing the immigration of the first group of people of a largely Islamic background. Then, from the early 1970s, in the wake of the Vietnam War, the number of Asian immigrants and refugees began to increase, to the extent that by the mid-1970s Asians accounted for around 3 per cent of the total population.

The official policy of assimilation was also abandoned, as the racial exclusiveness and intolerance associated with the ‘Australian way of life’ gradually weakened. From the late 1960s, a policy of integration was developed: one where migrants were expected to accept a new identity which did not require homogeneity, but rather adherence to existing values and forms of behaviour. In effect though, the policy was little different from assimilation, as the basic aim was still to preserve a homogeneous population. Integration recognised that first generation migrants might find complete assimilation impossible, but the goal remained the eventual complete assimilation to the ‘Australian’ mainstream culture. Any notion of cultural pluralism in subsequent generations did not exist. As Billy Snedden, the minister largely responsible for the policy of integration explained: ‘We ask particularly of migrants that they be substantially Australians in the first generation and completely Australians in the second generation.’

It was not long, however, before policy in Australia shifted once again, this time towards multiculturalism. In 1973, the Minister of Immigration, Al Grassby, announced to the nation that Australia was now a multicultural society, in a speech entitled *A Multicultural Society for the Future*, given official recognition by the publication of *Australia as a Multicultural Society* in 1977. In the years since, as Australia became increasingly multi-racial, any sense of a uniform national identity created by previous generations has been steadily eroded and consequently those institutions that

58 Castles et al., *Mistaken Identity*, p.53.
59 ibid., p.170.
60 White, *Inventing Australia*, p.168.
61 Quoted in Castles et al., *Mistaken Identity*, p.52.
traditionally represented that national identity, such as museums, have been forced to respond. Increasingly, many non-British migrants refused to be forced into the uniformity of the Australian way of life, preferring to retain their traditional customs and beliefs. The different churches, restaurants and cultural groups that many migrants had established, in order to preserve their distinctiveness, gradually began to be accepted and by the 1980s there was far greater acknowledgement and acceptance within Australia of the present social and cultural diversity. Finally, in 1989, the Office of Multicultural Affairs produced the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*. Migrants were no longer officially expected to shed their cultural identities or conform to the cultural practises of their new society. However, as is later discussed, this cultural diversity continues to cause conflict and tension within Australian society, and the tendency to promote traditional monocultural images of the nation, by both politicians and the public, continues to exist.

**New Zealand**

Turning to New Zealand, it is possible to see a similar pattern. In the past, New Zealand has been regarded, and has considered itself, as being more racially tolerant than Australia, because it has not had an official policy restricting non-white immigrants like that of the ‘White Australia’ policy. Yet New Zealand actually carried out an unofficial ‘white New Zealand’ policy throughout the nineteenth century and until the 1970s. Indeed, in many ways it was more exclusive than Australia, as it was largely a policy which favoured Protestant Anglo-Celts.

For much of its European history, there was public hostility in New Zealand to Chinese, Jewish, Greek Orthodox and Catholic settlers. The Chinese, for example, were excluded from the Old Age Pensions scheme introduced in 1898, while the Lebanese in the 1890s were forced to live in an inner city ghetto in Dunedin, and were labelled ‘Assyrian

Hawkers’ by politicians such as the Premier, R.J. Seddon. 66 There was also a period of fear of the so-called ‘Yellow Peril’, and there was much criticism in both New Zealand and Australia of the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Treaty. Seddon described it as a ‘cloud on the horizon’, as it was essential to guard ‘the purity of the race’. 67 Even the Catholic Irish, though technically British for much of the time, were treated as an unfavoured ethnic minority. Only the Scandinavians and Germans were seen as relatively acceptable, as they were Protestant and their cultures were not as noticeably distinct. 68 As Tom Brooking and Roberto Rabel have explained, New Zealand was viewed by successive governments ‘as a Utopia for the chosen few; preferably white, Protestant Britons’. 69

Like Australia, there were strict policies restricting immigration. The Immigration Restriction Amendment Act of 1920, stated that persons not born in Britain could only apply for residence if they made postal applications in advance. 70 This posed major problems for those who had little English, and even if they managed to overcome this obstacle they could still be refused entry. 71 These exclusive policies continued and by the end of the Second World War, New Zealand was one of the most ethnically homogenous of all European settler societies. In 1945, for example, 93.3 per cent of New Zealand’s total population was of European descent. 72

These policies were all to perpetuate the image of New Zealand as a ‘Great Britain of the South’. 73 A second Britain was to be created; one which shared British ideals such as respect for authority, being reserved and given to understatement, but which also had other qualities which disavowed British snobbery, arrogance and self-conceit. The period after the Second World War, however, forced policymakers to re-address immigration policy. As in Australia, labour shortages demanded careful planning, particularly as Britain’s own post-war labour shortage suggested it would be difficult to find immigrants from there. New Zealand also turned to other northern European

---

67 New Zealand Herald, 9th February 1906, quoted in Sinclair, A Destiny Apart, p.91.
68 Brooking & Rabel, ‘Neither British…’, p. 29.
69 ibid., p. 23.
70 This was an amendment to the Chinese Immigrants Restriction Act of 1881 that had imposed language tests on prospective immigrants.
71 Brooking & Rabel, ‘Neither British…’, p. 32.
countries for immigrants, such as Norway, Sweden and Holland: ‘Southern and Eastern Europeans were not considered to offer the same potential, and the possibility of non-European migration was dismissed out of hand.’\textsuperscript{74} New Zealand, however, did not later turn significantly to the countries of southern and eastern Europe, and accordingly Australian society became a great deal more cosmopolitan during the 1950s and 1960s. Ironically, by expressing fewer public anxieties over Asia, New Zealand succeeded in clinging to a far narrower ethnocentric immigration policy than Australia. During this period, however, immigration policies were widened to include Pacific Islanders, as there was a perceived labour surplus in Pacific countries. Many of these immigrants entered on temporary work permits, but remained in New Zealand beyond the granted period, resulting in large numbers of overstayers. It was not felt, however, that they had much to contribute to the New Zealand ‘way of life’, and as Laidlaw describes, ‘they were here on sufferance and nothing else and they were not made to feel particularly welcome’.\textsuperscript{75}

As in Australia, assimilation was expected, and this continued into the 1980s. In contrast to Australia, however, New Zealand did not have a steady flow of immigration after the Second World War, and at times it almost stopped completely. In 1968, when the economy began to falter and unemployment began to appear, there was a dramatic fall in migration and net migration losses in the following two years. With the beginning of economic recovery in the early 1970s, the government did move to reverse this trend by introducing new measures to encourage further immigration from Britain, Europe and North America,\textsuperscript{76} but throughout the period immigration was more moderate than in Australia, particularly that from Asia.\textsuperscript{77} Unlike Australia, there were insufficient numbers of non-British migrants arriving in New Zealand to reject assimilation and retain a distinctive community life.

During the 1970s, nevertheless, the ‘British’ identity that had hitherto guided New Zealand’s assimilationist immigration policy began to be questioned, influenced by

\textsuperscript{74} Brooking & Rabel, ‘Neither British…’, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{75} Laidlaw, \textit{Rights}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{76} Brooking & Rabel, ‘Neither British…’, p. 41.
factors such as the Vietnam War and Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. Having had to weaken its ties with Britain since the Second World War, New Zealand was forced to look for more diversified economic links with the rest of the world and a greater degree of cultural independence. This brought with it a greater acceptance of cultural diversity culminating in the 1987 *Immigration Act*, which stated that migrants were to be selected based on personal merit rather than ethnic origin. As a result, the number of Asian immigrants has risen dramatically. In the 1991 to 1994 period, for example, Asians accounted for 54.2 per cent of the 69,090 approvals granted by the Immigration Service for permanent migration into New Zealand. Like Australia too, migrants were no longer expected to forgo their cultural identities through assimilation, though their increasing presence continues to provoke tensions within society.

*Diverse Societies*

With this growing diversity in both countries, society has gradually renounced the old ideologies of nationalism that were based on common race, culture and ancestry, and Australians and New Zealanders are left searching for a new national identity. One argument is that it is the diversity itself that is now the best formulation of Australian and New Zealand national identity. Indeed, this was the image followed by the Australian Bicentenary Authority in 1988, summed up in its motto ‘living together’, as it tried to render equivalent all ethnic groups under the sign of the nation:

> The Bicentenary in 1988 represents much more than the anniversary of this event [the landing of the First Fleet]. The Bicentenary celebrates all the people who have settled in this land over many thousands of years…

The identity that was constructed in 1988 was a multicultural one, which acknowledged and celebrated the changes in the ethnic composition of Australian society. The success or failure of the Bicentennial celebrations will not be pursued here, though it should be noted that this ‘multicultural’ image was very publicly challenged by both indigenous

---

and non-indigenous groups throughout the build up to the Bicentenary in the 1980s. Aboriginal groups, for example, saw it as just another attempt to deny them their rights and ignore their place as the original inhabitants of the land, while some non-indigenous Anglo-Celtic Australians saw multiculturalism as favouring migrants of non-British origin. To celebrate and promote a nation as united and diverse, on a day that marks both settlement and invasion, was always likely to be a formidable task.

In New Zealand, there have also been attempts to claim a ‘Pan-Pacific Identity’. The influx of Pacific Islanders which began during the 1950s manufacturing boom, means that some Pacific Islands, such as the Cook Islands and Niue, are now represented by greater numbers in New Zealand than in their countries of origin. This idea of a ‘Pacific Identity’ was outlined in a Labour Party document in 1990, *Towards a Pacific Island Community*, though reaction to this document was less than enthusiastic.80

The proximity of Australia and New Zealand to Asia, is another factor related to multiculturalism that has a profound effect on how people view their identity in a number of ways. Of particular relevance to Australia, the most obvious effect is that concerned with multiculturalism generally, through an increase in migrants and different cultures. Yet, the increase in immigrants from Asia has another effect, due in part that for much of their European histories, both Australia and New Zealand have feared an Asian ‘invasion’. Australia’s immigration programme after the Second World War, for instance, was justified on the slogan ‘populate or perish’, which played on the wartime fears of Japanese invasion and the image of the ‘yellow peril’.81 At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concern is more of becoming increasingly Asian, culturally, politically and in population, as trade links become stronger and immigration continues. Some believe that Australia should decide conclusively to position itself as part of Asia, and should modify its ethical culture accordingly, as Australia’s economic security is dependent upon trade with Asian countries.82 Indeed, this was the policy broadly pursued by Prime Minister Paul Keating between 1991 and 1996, though his successor John Howard was less enamoured by such ideas.83

81 Castles et al., *Mistaken Identity*, p.23.
83 The contrast between Keating and Howard’s policies, especially in regards to their attitudes to history, is explored more fully in Chapter Four concerning the National Museum of Australia.
Zealand too, there are trade-motivated cries that the country is ‘part of Asia’. However, fears over Asia are not as strong in New Zealand, both because it has positioned itself more as a Pacific nation and because it is much farther away from Asia, and indeed from any populous country.

In terms of geography, however, both countries are Asia-Pacific countries. Yet, many Australians and New Zealanders still think of themselves predominantly as part of a European country, or at least a Western one. The tightening of links with Asia certainly contributes to the problematic nature of non-indigenous identity. Despite a wide acceptance of multiculturalism, there is also evidently still intolerance towards diversity in both countries, and there are calls for a return to the old ideals of the white digger image. The values of tolerance came under attack, for example, during the 1996 election in Australia, when Pauline Hanson established the One Nation Party with its anti-immigration message. Indeed, John Howard came to power in 1996 promising ‘to recapture Australian history so that it would once again emphasise the achievements of the white “pioneers”’. The first acts of his new Liberal-National Party government included lengthening the waiting period for unemployment benefits for new migrants from six months to two years, and cutting back the annual refugee intake by around a third. More recently, Australia’s immigration policies again came under intense scrutiny with the Tampa crisis in 2001, when the government refused to let hundreds of asylum seekers and ‘illegal’ immigrants land after being rescued at sea. The growing diversity of society has not been unproblematic in New Zealand either, with high levels of material and scholastic achievement by Asian immigrants, for instance, drawing criticism as well as praise. Conversely, attitudes towards Pacific Islanders are also hostile because of alleged under-achievement. In the extreme right there is also still the idea of preserving the image of New Zealand culture as a ‘white, British, morally conservative essence’, and anti-immigration fringe groups exist in both Australia and New Zealand. The point is that the immigration from diverse countries during the

---

84 Bell, *Inventing New Zealand*, p.8.
87 Brooking & Rabel, ‘Neither British…’, p. 47.
second half of the twentieth century, has created societies within which there is little consensus over national identity.

**Indigenous Histories and Identities**

In both modern Australia and New Zealand, indigenous peoples have called for greater rights, land and sovereignty. The European history of both countries has been characterised by the exclusion and suppression of the indigenous peoples, and for most of the twentieth century, government policy towards them was largely the same as that towards immigrants: assimilation. This can be seen to be especially true in terms of national identity, and also in regards to the later discussion of museums – where indigenous culture was largely deemed as either irrelevant to colonial development, other than to show the progress Western societies had made, or as constituting part of the natural history of the countries. Today, however, no representation of Australia or New Zealand is possible without reference to indigenous cultures. This discussion reviews the developing political and cultural situation of Aboriginal and Maori peoples, focusing on the last few decades during which indigenous claims have gained significant ground.89

In Australia there has been a strong historical tendency to exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from images of national identity. This is despite the Aboriginal presence being a central feature of the white Australian experience since the beginning of settlement. The British colonising state believed that acknowledgement of sovereignty in parts of its Empire, depended on notions of agriculture, property

---

ownership, and architecture as measures of civilisation. In this, Aborigines were regarded as irredeemably primitive and too far behind in their levels of civilisation to be able to form part of a stable society. Particularly in the late nineteenth century, as colonists began to write their own histories, Aborigines were gradually eased out of the story. Fuelled by theories of Social Darwinism in which only the fittest races survived, the European settlers had a foundation for their irreverent and cruel treatment of the indigenous peoples. They were also expected to die out within a few decades, and consequently deemed to have no role to play in history or in the construction of a stable national identity. As historian Henry Reynolds has described:

Both scientific and popular opinion asserted that the Aborigines were a dying race, condemned to extinction by the iron laws of evolution. With an insignificant role in the past and none in the future it mattered little if they were overlooked in works which celebrated the triumph of progress and the emergence of a new nation.

At the same time, the Aboriginal peoples own identities have been constantly threatened in the two centuries of European occupation. Broadly, for example, the term ‘Aborigine’, by representing the indigenous peoples as a homogeneous group, suggested a uniformity of identity and culture that was unknown to the original inhabitants. More obviously though, by following a policy of effectively wiping out the Aboriginal peoples, in such a way that they did not interfere in the construction of national identity, such as through disease and massacres, the European settlers were deeming any notion of an Aboriginal identity irrelevant. The settlers inscribed meanings onto Aboriginal lives. For example, family practises and ceremonial forms, such as mortuary rites and circumcision rituals, were perceived as being ‘barbaric, uncivilised, un-Christian, un-Australian and anathema’, and were subsequently suppressed. Throughout much of their history since European settlement, Aborigines have been subjected to indignity and suffering: their traditions were threatened and their families broken up, even when there were no great benefits to the colonisers. In a sense, as Bob

93 Hodge & Mishra, Dark Side of the Dream, p.25.
Hodge and Vijay Mishra have described, it was done so that ‘White Australians could feel more comfortable about being Australian’.  

In New Zealand, there was also a clear tendency to exclude the indigenous people from images of national identity. Despite being considered ‘superior’ to their Australian Aboriginal counterparts, the Maori people were also seen as evolutionarily backward and not a suitable part of the white British ideal, and in some quarters they were expected to die out under European control. As Alfred Newman told the Wellington Philosophical Institute in 1882: ‘the disappearance of the race is scarcely subject for much regret. They are dying out in a quick, easy way, and are being supplanted by a superior race’. In any discussion of the indigenous populations in both Australia and New Zealand, however, it is essential to be aware of the important differences in their situations. Arguably the most significant of these is the lack of treaty concerning the Aborigines in Australia. In other settler countries such as New Zealand and America, colonisation and the taking of land, and often subsequent indigenous uprisings, have usually resulted in or been augmented by some form of treaty. Though such treaties were often not observed, there at least existed a framework of law upon which to campaign during the twentieth century. The only formal ‘treaty’ with Australia was that agreed between John Batman and the Aborigines in the Port Phillip district in 1835 whereby, in return for certain goods, a large tract of land was ceded to him. Yet Sir Richard Bourke, Governor of New South Wales, nullified this within the same year by a Crown proclamation, repudiating all agreements by individuals with Aborigines for the cession of their lands. The absence of any other treaty, has meant that Aborigines have been disadvantaged in claiming rights that might be expected to flow from prior possession and ownership.

Another difference, and one reason for the absence of a treaty in Australia, is that of the relative population numbers of the Maori and Aborigines. It is now estimated that in 1788, there were around one million Aborigines in Australia. Yet they were scattered across the continent and population density was consequently very low. In contrast, the

---

97 Yarwood & Knowling, *Race Relations*, p.84.
98 Gale & Brookman, *Race Relations*, p.49.
Maori, though numbering at the most 150,000, were concentrated in the northern half of the North Island giving a high density of population.\textsuperscript{99} They also hoarded food and so were able to defend themselves on a chosen site, their military organisation was formidable, and their tribal units held more people than Australian Aboriginal units.\textsuperscript{100} With small groups confronting the resources of the Australian colonists, there was no chance of an organised military resistance of the kind that held up European land-seekers in New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{101} Such considerations certainly helped to determine the respective reactions of the colonisers in Australia and New Zealand. Consequently, the indigenous Maori population was generally treated with more respect by the early settlers than their indigenous counterparts in Australia. For example, the first European colonisers tended to refer to the Maori as ‘New Zealanders’, distinct from themselves as ‘settlers’ or ‘pioneers’.\textsuperscript{102} Aboriginal Australians were given no such respect in the early years of European settlement. The main consequence of this, of course, was the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi by Maori chiefs and representatives of the British Crown in 1840. Relative population numbers have continued to play an important part in the history of race relations in both countries. The Aboriginal population of Australia now constitutes around 2 per cent of the total population of Australia.\textsuperscript{103} In contrast, the Maori population has been rapidly growing throughout the twentieth century, to the extent that they now constitute nearly 10 per cent of the total population.\textsuperscript{104} This large minority consequently has a more significant political and economic presence in New Zealand, than the Aborigines do in Australia.

Despite all this, Maori culture was also threatened by European visitors and settlers from the very beginning. Strange diseases introduced by Pakeha seamen devastated the Maori population in some coastal areas in 1790, and again in 1810, while the musket wars of the 1820s were even more destabilising.\textsuperscript{105} By 1835, the Maori longed for peace and turned to missionaries as the peacemakers, but church dogma undermined Maori society by attacking important cultural symbols such as carving, polygamy and

\textsuperscript{99} Howe, \textit{Race Relation}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{100} Blainey, ‘Two Countries…’, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{101} Yarwood & Knowling, \textit{Race Relations}, p.45.
\textsuperscript{103} Commonwealth of Australia, \textit{What it means to be an Australian}, Canberra, 1997, p.16.
\textsuperscript{104} The Maori population is far greater than this if those of mixed ancestry are taken into consideration.
\textsuperscript{105} Pakeha – a person of predominantly British or, more latterly, European descent.
slavery. The Waitangi Treaty, which ceded sovereignty to the Queen and which guaranteed to the Maori the possession of their lands, was subverted by the European settlers within a few years of being signed. This was largely due to the confusion in the understanding of different versions of the Treaty, which remains a major factor of unrest between Maori and Pakeha today. Four years after its signing, the Crown waived its pre-emptive right of purchasing land from Maori. It was restored two years later, but land sales were already a sore issue, and they soon led to the Anglo-Maori Wars that cost the Maori three million acres in confiscated land. These attacks on Maori identity and culture continued into the twentieth century. When schools for indigenous people were established in 1867, for example, Maori language was used only in junior classes in order to induct new entrants into school routines. Thereafter English replaced Maori, and after 1900 the Maori language was banned altogether in schools. In addition, Pakeha control over the printed word and the media contributed to the detraction of Maori identity, by constant negative public definitions of it in terms of the major indices of social status such as housing, education and employment.

**Campaigns for rights**

Both Maoris and Australian Aborigines campaigned for greater rights throughout the twentieth century. In New Zealand, the Maori had managed to establish themselves as a politically viable component of society by the 1920s. Their task was made a little easier to that of the Aborigines, not just because of the reasons highlighted previously, but also because the Maori had been British subjects since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Aboriginal Australians did not achieve the same official distinction until the twentieth century. Despite this, Maori culture and identity continued to be threatened and ignored by Pakeha society, and they were really only accepted as part of New Zealand society because they appeared to be submitting to European values.

---

107 The main problem with the treaty is the difference between the English version in which the Maori cede ‘sovereignty’ to the Crown, and the Maori version which uses the term ‘kawanatanga’, which translates as ‘governance’. It has been a matter of significant debate as to what exactly the Maori chiefs intended when they ceded ‘kawanatanga’. For more on this see I.H. Kawharu, *Maori and Pakeha Perspectives of the Treaty of Waitangi*, Auckland, 1989.
110 ibid., p. 49.
It is only during the last few decades that Maori problems have significantly begun to be addressed, and there is now growing awareness of the integral part Maori heritage and identity plays in New Zealand society. This was due to a large degree to the considerable amounts of urban migration of the Maori after the Second World War, which led to a sharpening of Maori identity in relation to the dominant Pakeha group. These rates of migration are illustrated by the fact that in 1945, about 85 per cent of the Maori population lived in rural areas, while those figures are reversed today.\textsuperscript{112} When the Maori lived in rural tribal enclaves, Maori identity, language and culture were taken for granted, but migration to the towns and cities exposed the Maori to the full assimilationist ethos of New Zealand society.\textsuperscript{113} Consequently, there was a heightened consciousness of Maori identity and a felt need to actively ensure its continuity. Maori who had experienced life in the cities, some of whom had reached university, began to employ concepts such as institutional racism.\textsuperscript{114} Influenced by the black civil rights movement in the United States and other broad social movements such as feminism, groups such as Nga Tamatoa adopted protest tactics to raise concerns over Maori land, language and culture. The momentum was built on in the 1970s, with annual protests on Waitangi Day and the occupation of Bastion Point in 1977 and 1978. The 1981 Maori Sovereignty statement, appearing as articles and then as a book, then provided a type of manifesto for Maori nationalism.\textsuperscript{115}

Since the 1970s, the Maori have made important gains, clearly illustrated by the official positioning of New Zealand as a bicultural society. This biculturalism was effectively launched by the passing of the \textit{Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975}, repositioning the Treaty as New Zealand’s founding document. This was sustained by the Waitangi Tribunal, set up in 1975 to adjudicate the claims of Maori against the Crown under the terms of the Treaty, and by the Department of Maori Affairs adopting a policy of Tu Tangata in 1977, which emphasised community development rather than assimilation. The \textit{Maori Language Act 1987} then adopted Maori as an official language of New Zealand, while between 1984 and 1988 the Labour Government expanded the resources of the Waitangi Tribunal by giving it the power to investigate claims dating back to 1840. This brought

\begin{footnotesize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Walker, ‘Maori…’, p. 49.
\item \textsuperscript{115} D. Awatere, \textit{Maori Sovereignty}, Auckland, 1984. Also see Spoonley, ‘Racism…’, p. 90.
\end{footnotesize}
to the courts important cases over land rights and other resources, such as fisheries and coal. More recently, some significant claims have succeeded. In 1995, for example, the Tainui tribe, who constitute about 30 per cent of the native Maori population, was awarded money and the return of land to the value of NZ$170 million. It also received a formal apology for land confiscations that had followed the Anglo-Maori Wars.\textsuperscript{116} In 1997, the South Island tribe Ngai Tahu also negotiated a detailed settlement with the Crown, which included reinhabitory rights to a large number of rivers and lakes.\textsuperscript{117}

The growing recognition of the political and cultural role of the Maori in society was given particular impetus during the 1980s by the ‘Te Maori’ exhibition, consisting of Maori taonga (treasures) from tribes around New Zealand. The exhibition opened in New York in 1984 and then proceeded to tour New Zealand, and its success had a profound effect on the development of the Maori population. For the Pakeha population of New Zealand, for example, it contributed to a growing awareness of the rich heritage and living cultural life of the Maori, and its possible contribution to New Zealand identity. For the Maori, contact with their taonga again through ‘Te Maori’ greatly increased their own awareness of their heritage, awakening a strong sense of identity and strengthening links with the past that had been steadily eroded during the past two centuries. ‘Te Maori’ and other specific bicultural developments are examined in far greater detail in Chapter Three, which details the evolution of New Zealand museums.

There is now a wider acceptance on the part of Pakeha society in New Zealand that Maori culture and history constitute a part of their own national identity. A survey in 1989, for example, showed that three in every four Pakeha New Zealanders believed the Maori should be given equal opportunities and chances in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{118} Nevertheless, there is a palpable cynicism towards biculturalism in New Zealand, regarded by many Maori and Pakeha alike as a notion latched on to by governments for their own political goals and for the affirmation of a stable, reconciled and modern post-colonial society. It is a view reinforced by the fact that there is still a long way to go before Maori gain equality in the spheres of health, education and employment. From parts of the Pakeha population there is also continuing intolerance towards the bicultural

\textsuperscript{117} Park, ‘Going between…’, p. 184.
position, towards Maori culture and particularly their continuing claims to land and resources. For instance, the 1989 survey also showed that two-thirds of Pakeha New Zealanders disapproved of special land and fishing rights for the Maori. There is also a growing intolerance, a ‘white backlash’, towards the increasing claims of the Maori which show no sign of diminishing, to the extent that some New Zealanders have even expressed concern over the possibility of civil war.

Aboriginal Australians have also succeeded in gaining greater acknowledgement of their role in Australia’s history and society, after campaigning for much of the twentieth century for political and economic rights and recognition. Historically they have campaigned by portraying their identities in two different ways. In the 1930s and 1940s, for instance, they argued for full citizenship rights by emphasising their ‘sameness’, downplaying any notions of difference from Europeans. After the federal constitutional referendum of 1967 however, which gave the Commonwealth Government primary responsibility for Aboriginal affairs and allowing it to enact uniform electoral laws, Aboriginal campaigns shifted to highlighting the uniqueness of Aboriginal people. Within this process of constructing Aboriginality can be seen specific events, such as the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns of Parliament House in 1971, and the Aboriginal flag. Both of these provided a symbol of pan-Aboriginality that brought together Aborigines from all over Australia, while the flag also provided a symbol of Aboriginal sovereignty.

Aboriginal progress in gaining greater political and economic rights gathered momentum in 1972 when, after twenty-three years of Liberal Party rule, the Australian Labor Party swept into power on a platform which included opportunities for Aborigines. Aboriginal people seized the chance, and embarked on programmes to

---

119 ibid.
122 Stokes, ‘Citizenship…’, p.164. Australian Aboriginal activists have not affirmed biculturalism as the Maori have done. Several reasons come to hand for this: firstly, an ethnic group making up 10 per cent of the population can more easily demand cultural parity than one constituting just 2 per cent; secondly, the non-white British immigrants for whom multiculturalism began to be affirmed for in the 1970s were far less numerous in New Zealand than Australia; finally, the absence of a dominant Aboriginal language, unlike that of the Maori, prevents any real campaign for biculturalism in schools or elsewhere.
123 ibid., p.166.
improve their position. At the same time, researchers began publishing statistics which showed the situation of the Aboriginal people in comparison to the rest of the population in terms of health, housing, life expectancy and imprisonment rates; and demonstrations over such conditions were held around the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane in 1982. Much of this data was publicised widely, and the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1988 destroyed any notion of Australia being an egalitarian society.  

In recent years, reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples has become a global issue. This was illustrated in 1994, when the United Nations proclaimed a Decade of the World’s Indigenous People, adopting the theme ‘Indigenous peoples: a new partnership: partnership in action’.  

In Australia, the Aboriginal community has continued to assert that their culture is the ‘foundation of whatever may emerge as “an Australian culture”’. ‘Reconciliation’ has become a constant word in Australian society. Patrick Dodson has described reconciliation as meaning ‘respecting each other’s cultures’, while the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation provides a vision of ‘a united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all’.

Two significant moments in the Aboriginal struggle of recent years, the Australian Bicentenary celebrations of 1988 and the High Court’s 1992 Mabo decision, highlight the growing role of Aboriginal Australia within national and historical consciousness. After being asked to participate in the Bicentenary celebrations in 1988, for example, the Aboriginal people countered by organising their largest demonstration ever, called ‘Survival ’88’ in recognition of their struggle over two centuries of oppression. The demonstration drew considerable interest, particularly from overseas, and it was becoming increasingly obvious that Aboriginal people could no longer be ignored as an important part of Australian society. The High Court’s 1992 Mabo decision, and the Native Title legislation that was finally passed in December 1994, then fundamentally

---

125 For example, the Commission found that in 1987, Aboriginal people made up 21 per cent of the deaths in custody, although less than 2 per cent of the Australian population. See D. Fields, The fight for black rights, Canberra, 1995, pp.19-22.
126 Commonwealth of Australia, What it means, p.17.
127 ibid.
changed the position of Aborigines in society.\textsuperscript{129} In effect, after 204 years, there was recognition that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were in Australia when the Europeans invaded.\textsuperscript{130} The court found that native title to the continent was part of the common law of Australia. While in many parts of the country the decision has been extinguished in subsequent years,\textsuperscript{131} the decision, at least, finally gave Aborigines a legal frame upon which to base their claims for rights.

There have, of course, continued to be problems with the process of reconciliation. Most notable are the continuing debates concerning human rights, the stolen generations of Aboriginal children, and mandatory sentencing in the Northern Territory and Western Australia.\textsuperscript{132} There is also discussion surrounding the importance of history, especially whether the non-indigenous Australians of today should apologise for the Aboriginal sufferings of the past, and Prime Minister John Howard’s decision in August 1999 to express regret, but not to use the word ‘sorry’. The \textit{Mabo} decision too, while revitalising sovereignty claims, also triggered a backlash, with many pastoralists, mining companies and politicians predicting disastrous consequences for their ‘national’ interests.\textsuperscript{133} There is also evidence of continued intolerance towards Aboriginal people, similar to that noted concerning multiculturalism. Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party in the 1990s, for instance, in a drive towards a return to a white Anglo-Celtic Australia, called for an end to programmes of positive discrimination for Aborigines. There have also been reversals of hard-won gains. For example, in the August 1996 budget, the Commonwealth Government made cuts of more than $400 million, over four years, to various programmes targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.\textsuperscript{134}

\begin{itemize}
\item[^{130}] Fields, \textit{The fight}, p.23.
\item[^{131}] Dodson, \textit{Reconciliation}, p.12.
\item[^{133}] Pearson, \textit{The Politics of Ethnicity}, p.164.
\item[^{134}] Another illustration of this intolerance can be found in the national election of March 1996, when a number of Liberal-National Party and Independent candidates successfully fought their campaigns on anti-Aboriginal policies. See Marden & Mercer, \textit{The Tyranny}, pp.29-30.
\end{itemize}
Nevertheless, during the last twenty years Australian Aborigines have clearly made significant steps forward in gaining greater political and economic rights. In addition, few now defend the treatment of the Aborigines since 1788, nor are they any longer seen as a ‘dying race’, having the fastest natural growth rate of any ethnic group.\(^{135}\) Significantly, they have also successfully fought around the country to gain control of their cultural heritage – which in the European appropriation of their culture had been designated as ‘relics’.\(^{136}\) Aboriginal heritage is being increasingly recognised and appreciated in a variety of ways in Australian society. On a broad level for instance, there have been various symbolic changes. Landforms have been renamed with their traditional Aboriginal names, such as Ayers Rock to Uluru, the Aboriginal flag has been recognised, and there is greater negotiation over the management of Aboriginal sacred sites. Non-indigenous Australians as a whole have become much more conscious of Aborigines and their values, and their cultures are beginning to be accepted by many people as a significant part of Australia’s multicultural society. The conservation movement, the demand for Aboriginal paintings, the greater interest in Aboriginal customs and legends, are becoming distinctive features of many Australians lives.\(^{137}\)

Aspects of Aboriginal culture are also now being recognised internationally as symbols of Australia. This has long been the case for Aboriginal weapons and musical instruments, but it is only recently that Aboriginal art has become recognised as uniquely Australian. This growing position within the country challenges every one of the old perceptions of what it meant to be an Australian.

Notwithstanding continuing tensions and the still present gulf between Aboriginal and other Australians, and Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders, which will probably never completely disappear, it does seem clear that Aboriginal and Maori people do now have an increasingly accepted influence on other Australians and New Zealanders and their sense of identity. There is little doubt, however, that the situation is still marginally better for Maori New Zealanders. Maori have been a far more important part of the political history of New Zealand than Aborigines have in Australia, if only because of

\(^{137}\) C.A. Price, ‘Environment, Aborigines, Nationalism, Ethnic Origins and Intermixture’, in Price (ed.), *Australian National Identity*, p.3. There have also, however, been noted points of conflict between Aborigines and conservation movements, especially over issues such as land use in national parks.
the presence of a treaty and the relative sizes of their populations. The absence of a history of political relations between European and Aboriginal Australians weakens the demands for contemporary reconciliation. As Paul McHugh explains: ‘Aborigines certainly have a political presence in Australia today, but this presence lacks a strong sense of historical imperative.’

**Conclusion**

There is at present, therefore, a period of significant change that is challenging the conceptions of Australian and New Zealand cultures. Until the later stages of the twentieth century many Australians and New Zealanders when considering identity used the term in the singular, assuming the existence of a single uniform national identity. It was considered that there was a set of attributes and values that marked people and things as being Australian, or being characteristic of New Zealand. This belief has been increasingly challenged. Broadly, as the continuing arguments over land rights, multiculturalism and Asian immigration have shown, there is no longer any agreement about a shared Australian or New Zealand identity, or the values implied in such an identity.

For the white settlers there was no history before 1788 in Australia, or before New Zealand became a British colony in 1840. Any nationalism had to start from nothing, or they had to regard themselves as part of the history of the British. Both countries grew as part of the British Empire, yet, unlike many of Britain’s other colonies, neither managed a significant independence movement. The creation of a nation in a struggle for independence is usually the foremost moment for the definition of national character, language and culture. Australia and New Zealand experienced no such struggle and consequently, the task of defining themselves is much harder – not aided by their distance from Britain, ‘the mother country’, or their proximity to Asia. The white British myth and the images typified by the digger or bushman have also clearly come under attack. As women insist on their inclusion within images of the national character and indigenous peoples demand the acknowledgement of their histories, and

---


as the proportion of white Anglo-Celts shrink, the traditional images of Australia and New Zealand and their way of life become increasingly untenable.

It is possible to get identity from shared beliefs and so forth, and when talking about either an Australian or New Zealand identity people often point to ideals such as equality, fairness, independence and physical fitness. These are all individual and personal attributes though, and despite efforts in the past, can not realistically relate to the nation as a whole. In this respect, all the images of national identity that have been put forward, both in the past and today, can be seen as ‘invented’ and misplaced. While such ideals may play a part in contributing to the many identities which form the nation, they can not be seen to represent a common identity for the entire country. In one sense, both Australia and New Zealand have distinctive identities, in that their legal, political and economic structures and institutions relate to the whole country, but are not quite like those in any other country. These distinctive features though, also do not describe a typical Australia or New Zealand, nor a typical Australian or New Zealander, as there is no single experience, nor has there ever been, that can be generalised across the country and population.

It could be argued that there is no need in the modern day to single out a particular identity. Yet, countries all around the world continue to seek and discuss the concept of a common, unified, national identity, and this is illustrated, as will be evident later in this thesis, by the prominent position national museums now hold in societies around the world. National identity is vital both in tourism, when marketing the nation to the world as a distinctive travel destination, and in playing the role of unifying a society. Often it is governments who promote this, as national identity can be used positively to build pride and a spirit of co-operation, but also in a negative way to persuade people to do things they might not otherwise do. Regardless of government influence though, people everywhere seek some kind of unity between themselves and the things around them. They cling to things with which they can identify and by which they can be identified: those things that give them stability and a sense of belonging to a place. In Australia this search seems particularly prevalent, largely due to the changes and problems already discussed. The concept of a single national identity however, while always misplaced, can at the beginning of the twenty-first century be said to be especially inappropriate. This is despite the prevalent use of national images, especially
in advertising and tourism, and illustrated by the wide-scale use of such imagery at the Sydney Olympic Games opening and closing ceremonies in 2000. It is more relevant to discuss and acknowledge the different national identities that exist within a nation, and to understand the connections and characteristics between them that form a united and coherent nation. In Australia and New Zealand, there is a need to understand these different identities, so it is possible to identify a common connection between each other, in order to answer the interdependent questions of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Who are we?’ ‘Why am I here?’ and ‘Why are we here?’

As should already be evident, it is very often histories and images of the past that are used in the construction and proclamation of identity. One of the most important roles of the past is its bearing upon cultural attitudes in the present. It is in this way that many identities are constructed or ‘invented’. The past figures significantly in peoples’ self-representations because it is through recollections of the past that people represent themselves to themselves, yet the pasts that are used are often specifically appropriated sets of memories and discourses. At any rate, the past clearly plays an important role in the formation of national identity and nationalism. A potent example of this, within a struggle against colonialism, is that of Southern Rhodesia, where there was persistent use of the Great Zimbabwe monuments to demonstrate a continuous cultural identity within which the colonial period was seen as no more than an irrelevant episode. When Southern Rhodesia gained independence in 1980, it elected to take the name of those monuments – Zimbabwe.

With Australia and New Zealand then, in order to understand and give meaning to the diverse identities that exist, it is necessary to look at the histories that form these identities. In regards to this thesis, it is important to be aware that alongside the general challenges of immigration and the assertion of indigenous rights, new writings of history have also emerged to contribute to the general widening of historical consciousness. Other new histories that have emerged from the feminist and labour movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which have not been examined in detail here but

---

that have also challenged traditional white, masculinist images, also play an important part in an understanding of modern identities.\textsuperscript{143}

It is possible to suggest a number of different histories and images that, upon sharing and understanding, could form the basis of some kind of national unity and comprehension. David Carter has singled out five different histories in Australia upon which the country can build in the future for its national identities, and the basis of these could also be used in discussing New Zealand: a history of immigrants, a history of the land, an Aboriginal history, a global history, a folk history.\textsuperscript{144} Within each of these histories, however, problems arise if one history is emphasised too much. For example, a history of immigrants, the history that was used by the Australian Bicentenary authorities and that presents an image representative of a multicultural society and without a British core, can be seen as denying the indigenous populations their rights by turning them into just another migrant group. In New Zealand, this has been explained as one of the reasons the Maori rally behind a call for a ‘bicultural identity’, as many suspect what Kenneth Inglis explains: ‘that multiculturalism is another Pakeha ploy to fob off their rightful demands as the indigenous people of the country’.\textsuperscript{145} At the same time, multiculturalism often seems only to speak to the post-war, non-British migrants, in the sense that it seems to take away the traditional Anglo-Australian or Anglo-New Zealand identity without replacing it with anything substantial,\textsuperscript{146} while it can also be argued that multiculturalism will only have real meaning in Australia and New Zealand once the British are seen as just another ethnic group, and there is not a monarch as the head of state.\textsuperscript{147}

Problems can also be found in the over-emphasis of the other histories. Concentrating on Aboriginal or Maori history, for instance, clearly presents problems to non-indigenous Australians and New Zealanders, who form the vast majority of the population, many of whom may find little in the long indigenous pasts to which they can relate. Similarly, an emphasis on folk history, which refers to the traditional images of the bushman, pioneers, diggers, mateship, and others relating to the colonial heritage,
can signal a possible return to the racial and sexual discrimination of previous times. There is also a lack of relevance in this even to present day Anglo-Celtic Australians and New Zealanders in that, apart from the images associated with war and Gallipoli, it is a history almost entirely situated in the nineteenth century.

By exploring Carter’s notion of multiple histories it is apparent that one image, history or identity is not sufficient in proclaiming a nation. Only by an understanding of the different pasts and histories which exist can identities, whether national or not, become less confused in the modern world. Museums, as one of the primary vehicles through which these histories can be explored, play an important role. This chapter has highlighted the issues surrounding national identity in Australia and New Zealand, identifying the relevance of history and the broad challenges that confront Australians and New Zealanders as they search for identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Museums have clearly been confronted with parallel tensions and challenges, as they seek to be representative of the communities in which they exist. In their endeavours to adequately represent the indigenous populations in recent years, for example, many museums have aroused considerable debate over a perceived marginalisation of the contribution of non-indigenous Australians and New Zealanders, reflecting similar concerns that this chapter has identified. The two new national museums in particular, emerging as they have when notions of national identity are becoming increasingly contested, face the challenge of exploring and negotiating these different histories and identities in order to achieve credible representations of the nation.
CHAPTER TWO

The Development of Museums in Australia and New Zealand, 1800 – c.1975.¹

In 1975, the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections in Australia acknowledged that there was no major institution which could be termed a ‘Museum of Australian History’. The Committee also stated that there were only about five institutions across Australia which had curators for whom it would be appropriate to give the title of ‘history’.² The outcome of this report, and the parallel emergence of new social histories such as those of indigenous peoples and women, was that many Australian museums moved to establish history departments and collections, and generally become more representative of the nation as a whole.³ This has occurred rapidly enough that historical collections, particularly those of social history, are now often regarded as very important components of any large museum.

The situation is similar in New Zealand where, despite not having a comparable report, there have also been new pressures on museums to change their traditional practices. Museums in Australia have existed since the early nineteenth century, and in New Zealand from the mid-nineteenth century, yet their focus for much of this time has been largely towards natural history, science and technology, and to a certain extent, and for various reasons, ethnography and the indigenous populations. This chapter provides an overview of the history and development of the major museums in Australia and New Zealand, since their foundation until around 1975 – a time which can be seen as

marking a new era for museums in both countries. Focusing on the motives behind what was and was not collected, and highlighting the general, though not total, absence of historical collections in museums, it questions how and why they developed with little interest in, or at the very most a narrow focus on, the history of their own countries, and also why these attitudes began to change during the 1970s.

Where historical collections are discussed throughout the chapter, it generally refers to material collected for the purpose of recording and interpreting the human history of Australia and New Zealand. Libraries played an important role, often aided immensely by the donation of private collections, such as the establishment of the Mitchell Library in 1910, formed from the bequest of Australiana by David Scott Mitchell. This thesis however, is concerned with museums, and their particular role in collecting and interpreting the past and the history of their nations, which extends from paper records, that were often of prominent individuals, to the material life of ordinary people.

In many ways, the history of museums reflects the issues identified in the previous chapter regarding the broader question of identity. Museums developed in a manner that perpetuated narrow images such as the masculine and British nature of the nation, ignoring the relevance of indigenous, ethnic or everyday histories. For example, the neglect of settler history by museums contributed to a common perception that Australia and New Zealand did not have a non-indigenous human history worth collecting, or upon which to base a national identity distinct from the Empire. Meanwhile, the growing embrace of such history, especially since the 1960s, reflects both the unsettling of these traditional interpretations of identity, and the growing preoccupation with finding new definitions for the nation. The development of these museums, therefore, illustrates the gradual widening of historical consciousness in both countries that has contributed both to the problematic nature of national identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and to the particular role of the new national museums of Australia and New Zealand.
**Museums in the Nineteenth Century**

The history of museums in Europe is generally well documented. The majority of large museums and libraries in Europe began as private collections of the royalty, the nobility, and the very wealthy. Consequently, the establishment of many early museums, such as the British Museum that opened in 1759 under the bequest of Sir Han Sloane, stemmed from particular individuals’ own interests and wealth. Collecting was a privilege of the wealthy, and collectors would often accumulate anything ‘old, unfamiliar or marginal’.

This remained the case for much of the nineteenth century, though from the end of the eighteenth century the motives behind the establishment of museums did shift. The European Enlightenment created a society curious about the world, while at the same time preoccupied with the concept of nation. Western societies became fascinated with collecting evidence of the scientific, artistic and material progress of their own country. From the end of the eighteenth century in Europe, museums began to significantly flourish. They were seen as public institutions of the nation, being representative of the wealth of the country and especially an example of imperial power. As Chris Healy has explained within the context of France:

> In the historiography of museums, the paradigmatic moment is the French Revolution after which the museums of the new Republic were transformed into representational spaces that refused the inevitability of dynastic order and installed the nation-state as the object of collective identification.

In Australia, a country ‘discovered’ and first settled by Europeans at a time when this nationalism was growing, and in a period of increased interest in scientific enquiry and the unknown, it was only natural that Australians would begin to collect the wonders of

---


the new world. Museums were seen as having a practical role, and so collectors began to acquire examples of anything potentially useful, including minerals to help the mining industry and plants and animals to aid agriculture. They also began to collect examples of anything unusual or novel, from flora and fauna to Aboriginal skulls. Often they sent specimens back to museums in Great Britain as part of a network of imperial trade in objects, especially those of the natural world, in order to illustrate imperial progress and the degree of civilisation of the Western world. For these same reasons, within fifty years of the first European settlement, the first museums in the Australian colonies were formed.\footnote{For further reading on the history of museums in Australia and New Zealand see the Introduction.}

The first museum erected in the colonies was the Ancanthe Museum. Established near Hobart by Lady Franklin in 1842, it was comprised mainly of zoological specimens.\footnote{S.F. Markham & H.C. Richards, \emph{A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia}, London, 1933, p.5. This museum became part of The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart.}

There were, however, the foundations of museums before this. The first museum in Australia was actually founded in 1821, as part of the Philosophical Society of Australasia.\footnote{M. Van Leeuwen, “’Everything around us is new’ – Museums and colonial culture”, in Museums Australia (ed.), \emph{Communicating Cultures: conference proceedings}, Proceedings of the National Conference of Museums Australia, Brisbane, 21-25 November 1995, Brisbane, 1997, p.64.}

Initially containing just seven members, the Society remained exclusively the domain of the wealthy, with heavy fines imposed for non-attendance. As the first minutes record, the Society had two main purposes:

\begin{quote}
It is therefore proposed to form a Society, for the purpose of collecting information with respect to the natural state, capabilities, productions, and resources of Australasia and the adjacent regions, and for the purpose of publishing, from time to time, such information as may be likely to benefit the world at large … to be called the Philosophical Society of Australasia.\footnote{Philosophic Society of Australasia Minute Book (27 June 1821), (Mitchell Library), Minutes reproduced in \textit{Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society for New South Wales}, vol. LV, p.bxviii.}
\end{quote}

The museum of the Philosophical Society was short-lived, due to internal disagreements surviving only until the end of 1822.\footnote{R. Strahan, \emph{Rare and Curious Specimens: An Illustrated History of the Australian Museum 1827-1979}, Sydney, 1979, p.5.} It was not until 1826, when Alexander Macleay arrived in Sydney to take up the position of Colonial Secretary, that a museum was formally discussed again, and in 1827 a ‘Colonial Museum’ in Sydney was first
mentioned in despatches.\textsuperscript{13} The Colonial Museum became the Australian Museum, though the name Australian Museum, despite occurring in print as a suggestion as early as January 1828, only came into definite use in 1834.\textsuperscript{14}

The museum’s collections, consisting mainly of natural history and ethnological specimens, for many years had no permanent home. In 1838, the Colonial Office approved a grant of four thousand pounds for a museum building, and in June, the ‘General Committee of the Australian Museum and Botanic Gardens’ had their first recorded meeting.\textsuperscript{15} It took until 1846 for construction to begin, however, and in 1849 the museum moved to the permanent site on College Street in Sydney that remains its home today.\textsuperscript{16}

In the second half of the nineteenth century, museums began to proliferate throughout the Australian colonies, often originating from the private collections of similar Philosophical Societies and supported by colonial governments, beginning with the establishment of a small zoological museum in Melbourne in 1854. This was followed by the Ballarat School of Mines Museum in 1856, the Museum of the Swan River Mechanics’ Institute in Perth in 1860, the Adelaide Museum in 1861 and the Queensland Museum in Brisbane in 1862.\textsuperscript{17} By 1870, the number of museums in Australia had increased to over a dozen.\textsuperscript{18} Melbourne perhaps best illustrates the rapid rate at which these museums were established in Australia, as within twenty years of the city being founded in 1835 it had a public library, university and museum. As Redmond Barry pointed out in his address at the University’s foundation in 1854: ‘Probably in the world’s history no country had attempted to found both a University and Public Library within a score of years of its first settlement.’\textsuperscript{19} By 1891, there was at least one museum

\textsuperscript{13} T.S. Dixson, \textit{Australian Museum, Sydney: Lecture on its origin, growth and work. A lecture delivered at the Australian Museum, on 10th June, 1919}, Sydney, 1919, p.4. Alexander Macleay brought with him an extensive collection of insects that formed the basis of the Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney, founded after the bequest of the collection by Macleay’s nephew, William John Macleay, in 1874.

\textsuperscript{14} S.F. Markham & H.C. Richards, \textit{Directory of Museums and Art Galleries in Australia and New Zealand}, London, 1934, p.64.

\textsuperscript{15} Galbally & Inglis, \textit{The First Collections}, p.15.

\textsuperscript{16} Markham & Richards, \textit{A Report}, p.5. The Australian Museum continues today as the state museum of New South Wales.

\textsuperscript{17} B. Bartz, H. Opitz & E. Richter (eds.), \textit{Museums of the world}, Munich, 1992, p 12.

\textsuperscript{18} Markham & Richards, \textit{A Report}, p 6.

\textsuperscript{19} E. La Touche Armstrong, \textit{The Book of the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria}, Melbourne, 1906, p.20.
established in the capital city of each Australian colony, and they continued to grow in prominent towns. In 1903, a survey by the Museums Association listed thirty-nine separate museums and art galleries in Australia. Sally Gregory Kohlstedt has remarked on the rate museums were established in the Australian colonies:

Considering … the substantial convict population and migration of working class poor, it is truly impressive that museums were built in the early decades of development and generally predated both well established scientific organisations and universities, or at least appeared simultaneously with them.

This rapid rate of museum development was mirrored in New Zealand, with the first discussion of a museum actually taking place on one of the first immigrant ships. This came about during a meeting on board the New Zealand Company’s ship the Whitby, commanded by Captain Wakefield, on the 17th May 1841, when the Nelson Literary and Scientific Institution was established for ‘the objects of diffusing general knowledge, by means of an extensive library and museum of history and ethnology, and encouraging any scientific researches’. Not a great deal is known about the early organisation of the Institution, but it is understood that by July 1842 it had accumulated £280, £100 from the New Zealand Company and £180 from subscriptions raised in the Colony, and construction had begun on a library and reading room. The building opened officially on the 27th September 1842, where natural history and ethnological specimens were stored but not exhibited, and where members could enjoy British and colonial newspapers. Unfortunately, largely due to being too exclusive, the Institution’s membership dwindled to almost nothing by 1850 and people began to organise book clubs instead. Nevertheless, the Library and Reading Room effectively laid the foundations for the Nelson Provincial Museum that was officially established by the Nelson Institution Act in 1859.

---

21 Markham & Richards, A Report, p.6.
23 Arthur Wakefield, Diary, 21st May 1841, Quoted in R.M. Allan, Nelson: A History of Early Settlement, Wellington, 1965, p.177. The Institution was also known as the Nelson Literary and Scientific Association, and more briefly as the Institute.
25 Allan, Nelson, p.179.
The first major museum to be established in New Zealand was the Auckland Museum, which had its origins in 1852, largely due to the exertions of its first Honorary Secretary, John Alexander Smith, and the Colonial Secretary, Dr. A. Sinclair.\footnote{ibid., p.89.} Bringing together local collections of natural history specimens in an old Government farmhouse, in what are now the grounds of the University of Auckland, the museum opened officially to the public on 27th October 1852. As the front page of *The New Zealander* described on that day, the museum contained ‘many specimens of New Zealand minerals, some handsome stuffed birds, shells, insects, and various other things amongst which an hour may be very agreeably and instructively spent’.\footnote{Quoted in A.W.B. Powell (ed.), *The Centennial History of the Auckland Institute and Museum*, Auckland, 1967, p.7.}

The success of the museum’s first year can be judged from its 708 visitors.\footnote{ibid., p.10.} In 1857, however, John Alexander Smith, the man largely responsible for its early organisation and development, moved to Napier leaving the museum to fall into neglect.\footnote{P. Baskett, ‘A museum is born’, *New Zealand Herald*, 28th October 1992.} Little improvement was made until 1867 when, with the establishment of the Auckland Institute reviving interest, the museum was moved to the more central location of Princes Street, where it was hoped that more people would be ‘induced to visit and feel more inclined to forward further contributions to the stock of curiosities which it contains’.\footnote{New Zealand Herald, 11th May 1867. Quoted in Powell (ed.), *The Centennial History*, p.11. The Auckland Institute was founded in November 1867 as the ‘Auckland Philosophical Society’, altering its name to the Auckland Institute in March 1868. In May 1868, it affiliated with the New Zealand Institute; a scientific body modelled on the British Royal Society. The New Zealand Institute became the Royal Society of New Zealand in 1933, but the Auckland Institute retained its original title. See S. Park, *An Introduction to Auckland Museum*, Auckland, 1986, and Powell (ed.), *The Centennial History*, pp.11-12.} In 1869, the Superintendent of Auckland Province officially transferred the Auckland Museum to the control of the Auckland Institute. This led to the appointment of Thomas F. Cheeseman as Curator in 1874, who set about significantly building the collections of the museum as a focus for research.

The 1860s also saw the establishment of various other significant museums in New Zealand, most of which were founded on the collections and by members of geological surveys, which had been appointed by various Provincial Governments to explore the natural resources of the land.\footnote{New Zealand was divided into provinces until 1876.} The first of these was the Canterbury Museum, founded
in Christchurch in 1861 largely due to the efforts of the Provincial Geologist Julius von Haast. Consisting initially of around 6000 specimens, its creation realised a proposal by the Colonists’ Society in 1859 to establish a natural history museum.\textsuperscript{33} For the first few years of its existence, however, the collections were housed in two small rooms in the Provincial Council Buildings with little public access. It was not until 1868 that the Provincial Government granted £1,200 for the building of a stone museum building, with a further £150 for showcases, and on the 1\textsuperscript{st} October 1870 the museum was finally opened to the public by Mr. W. Rolleston, the Superintendent of the Province.\textsuperscript{34}

The Colonial Museum was established in 1865, later renamed the Dominion Museum and then the National Museum, and was the forerunner of the new Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa that opened in 1998. Pressure had been put onto the New Zealand Government during the 1860s to survey the mineral resources of the newly settled country, particularly for gold, coal and iron.\textsuperscript{35} In 1865, the Government appointed Dr James Hector, Director of the Otago Provincial Geological Survey, to form a New Zealand Geological Survey, which would be associated with a public museum. A good example of the practical role of the colonial museum, a wooden building housing the combined Colonial Museum and Survey was subsequently opened to the public later that year. By September 1866, the museum already contained just under 14,000 specimens, mainly items collected by the Geological Survey of the Province of Wellington and the Provincial Survey of Otago.\textsuperscript{36}

As in Australia, once these first museums were established, similar institutions began to spread around New Zealand, beginning with the Otago University Museum in Dunedin in 1873. The first public art galleries were also opened, often prompted by Colonial and International Exhibitions that had begun to spread since the mid-nineteenth century. The

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
Dunedin Public Art Gallery was formed in 1884, followed by the Auckland Art Gallery in 1887 and a public art gallery in Christchurch in 1890, before the foundations of the Southland Museum at Invercargill in 1890, and the Alexander Museum in Wanganui in 1892. By 1934, a survey by the Museums Association described twenty-six museums and art galleries in New Zealand. The origins and development of the early museums in New Zealand was often largely due to the commitment and length of service of some of the Curators. T.F. Cheeseman, for instance, served as Curator of the Auckland Museum from 1874 to 1923. Similarly, James Hector and Julius von Haast were both Directors of their respective institutions for over thirty years.

Natural History and Science

These early museums in Australia and New Zealand primarily collected and displayed natural history and ‘curiosities’, such as Aboriginal skulls. As Kimberley Webber has explained in regards to Australia, these collections of flora and fauna were not to establish any unique identity, but rather were to fix the country’s place in the natural world order, specifically that of Britain. Donald Fleming has described the important role of natural history in colonial societies in the nineteenth century:

[The study of natural history] was a fundamental part of the quest for a national identity in societies where the cultural differentiation from Britain was insecure and the sense of the land correspondingly important for self-awareness.

The nineteenth century, however, was the age of the Industrial Revolution, and the great interest in science and technology led to new kinds of museums being founded, as well as providing impetus to a change in the role and social purpose of museums. To a

---

37 The art gallery in Christchurch became the nucleus for the McDougall Art Gallery, which opened in 1932. The Exhibitions of the nineteenth century also gave impetus to the development of various art galleries in Australia, such as the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, founded in 1884 as the first provincial gallery in Australia, and the Bendigo Art Gallery, founded in 1887.
38 Markham & Richards, Directory.
39 Griffiths, Hunters and Collectors, p.28.
degree this was initiated by the rush of both Colonial and International Exhibitions, which showed off the wealth and genius of the different nations or colonies. These became regular events in the second half of the nineteenth century, following the success of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851.

In Australia, the first colonial exhibition on a large scale was held in Melbourne in 1854, with 428 exhibitors. At this point, the colonies generally acted independently of each other within the exhibitions, whether at home or abroad. This was indicative of often intense nineteenth-century colonial rivalry, illustrated by the short-sighted decision by both New South Wales and Victoria to build their railways using different gauge tracks, in an attempt to contain their trade within their own borders. However, a new community of purpose was promoted by the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866-7 in Melbourne. It was hoped that, by showing the progress of industry, the interchange of communication and thought could be encouraged. As the Honourable Mr. Bindon said, when he moved for the approval of the Intercolonial Exhibition in Parliament in May 1865, the Exhibition ‘would probably bury any little asperities which existed between the different Australian colonies’.

The Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866-7 in Melbourne was of particular significance, with one of its main effects being the creation of an active interest in the promotion of technical and industrial education throughout Australia. In Victoria, Professor Frederick McCoy had advocated the establishment of a Museum of Applied Science as early as 1857, but it was not until the passing of the Library, Museums and Gallery Act in December 1869, that the Industrial and Technological Museum came into existence in the rooms where the Exhibition had been held. Elsewhere, this interest in science and technology culminated in the colonies’ first international exhibition, the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879. The exhibition was such a success that the

---

44 Colonial rivalry is explored further in Chapter Four, in regards to proposals for an Australian national museum.
45 ibid., p.vi.
46 Allom, Lovell, Sanderson Pty Ltd. (In conjunction with the Heritage Group Public Works Department), State Library and Museum of Victoria Buildings: Conservation Analysis, Melbourne, 1985, p 27.

The development of museums in New Zealand differs in this regard. Despite holding similar Exhibitions, the first of note being held in Dunedin in 1865,\footnote{G. McLean, 'The Colony commodified: trade, progress and the real business of Exhibitions', in J.M. Thomson (ed.), \textit{Farewell Colonialism: The New Zealand International Exhibition, Christchurch, 1906-07}, Palmerston North, 1998, p.28-9.} New Zealand did not follow Australia in establishing a new breed of science museums, though the Exhibitions did contribute to more widespread collecting of Maori material as well as the development of art galleries. The 1934 report by the Museums Association, for instance, emphasised that in New Zealand ‘one is amazed at the absence of collections dealing with technology, meteorology, geography, etc.’.\footnote{S.F. Markham & W.R.B. Oliver, \textit{A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of New Zealand}, London, 1933, p.97.} This lack of scientific and technological collections when compared to Australia can be seen as indicative of the relative sizes of the two countries and insufficient government support in New Zealand. It was not until the Cawthron Institute Museum opened in Nelson in 1921 that New Zealand had a museum dedicated largely to technology,\footnote{Markham & Richards, \textit{Directory}, p.104-5.} and as late as 1944 W.R.B. Oliver noted:

> Every museum in New Zealand contains some technological exhibits; but there is in New Zealand no technological museum like that in Sydney; nor is there a large technological department as there is in the National Museum in Melbourne … some degree of development along technological lines is required in New Zealand museums towards organised informative displays of the productive and industrial achievements of the country.\footnote{W.R.B. Oliver, \textit{New Zealand Museums: Present Establishment and Future Policy}, Wellington, 1944, p.11.}

The International and Intercolonial Exhibitions did contribute in New Zealand, and in Australia, to a change in the role of museums. During the first part of the nineteenth
century, though clearly having a practical role too, museums were more often seen as places of ‘curiosity’ – considered sites of amusement and peculiarity than as serving a higher purpose such as education. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, they were seen as institutions of power, and instruments of education, enlightenment and social salvation. Overwhelmingly public institutions, which were usually formed with the support and funding of colonial governments, the museum took its place, along with libraries, churches and schools, as a means of providing a sound intellectual and moral culture to the working classes. At the same time, in Australia, museums were seen as a vital part of the colonial culture, as they could order and make ‘comprehensible the newness of the “natural world” in Australia’. In New Zealand, the later establishment of museums from the 1860s meant that many were founded with education already as their primary focus. As James Hector, the first director of the Colonial Museum wrote in 1866:

The Colonial Museum should be formed … for the purpose of giving instruction respecting the resources and natural history of the country, as well as acting as a stimulus and guide to local research in those branches of knowledge.

The early museums in Australia and New Zealand were foremost natural history museums. Later, with the advent of the Colonial and International Exhibitions, these evolved to include public art galleries and, especially in Australia, museums of science and technology. They were established primarily to educate and enlighten the general public as to the wonders of the nineteenth-century industrial world and, as discussed later, to resolutely affirm the colonies’ place within British and imperial progress and history.

53 S. Kirby, ‘Policy and Politics: charges, sponsorship and bias’, in R. Lumley (ed.), The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display, London, 1988, p.91. The support which governments provided for these museums is examined in part by the Carnegie Reports of 1933. In particular, the reports acknowledged the generous support of New Zealand governments in relation to most other Western societies, including Australia and the United States. See Markham & Oliver, A Report, and Markham & Richards, A Report.
54 C. Healy, From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory, Melbourne, 1997, p 85.
55 Hector, ‘Memorandum concerning…’, p.3.
Historical Collections

Museums of natural history, science and art, continued to grow and flourish in both Australia and New Zealand up to the outbreak of the First World War. Not one of these large museums held a significant historical collection representing the human development of their respective countries. For example, in 1870, when the National Museum of Victoria came under the control of the Trustees, it was decided that it ‘should be entirely devoted to the illustration of Natural History’.56 The Exhibitions too had little concern for the history of Australia. The departments to be shown at the Victorian Intercolonial Exhibition of 1875, for instance, were numerous, ranging from minerals and agricultural products to jewellery and machinery, with no mention at all of a human history of Australia.57

Historical collections, however, were not totally absent from museums in the nineteenth century. Chris Healy has highlighted two forms of historical material relating to Australia that was collected and preserved, and these can also be seen in New Zealand: that which was in paper form, and material relating to the indigenous populations.58 By the end of the nineteenth century, paper records were to be found in many museums. Queensland, for instance, which did not establish a register of historical items until 1911, had earlier acquired ‘archival and photographic items’.59 In New Zealand, the Taranaki Museum in New Plymouth, also held ‘a collection of pictures and documents illustrating the early history of the Taranaki Settlement’,60 while the Otago Early Settlers Museum which opened officially in 1908, and which is discussed in more detail later, was initially solely concerned with collecting records and documentary material before broadening this to include ‘things’.61

57 Victorian Intercolonial Exhibition 1875, Preparatory to the Philadelphia Exhibition 1876, *Official Catalogue of Exhibits*, Melbourne, 1876. For more discussion concerning the absence of historical material in the exhibitions see G. Davison, ‘Exhibitions’, *Australian Cultural History, No. 2 1982/3*, Canberra, 1983, pp.5-21, and also V. Rigg, ‘Curators of the Colonial Idea…’, pp.188-203.
58 Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, p.88.
60 Markham & Richards, *Directory*, p.106.
Most other large museums had similar small historical collections consisting mainly of paper records. Yet, these records were generally personal papers donated by either the elite in society or those directly concerned with the museums. The Australian Museum, for example, still holds letters and documents of its first curator, George Bennett (1835-1841), and the personal correspondence of Gerard Krefft, the Curator and Secretary between 1860 and 1874. Many of these paper records were representative of a very small segment of society and certainly not representative of the history of Australia or New Zealand. At any rate, they were often regarded as unsuitable material for museums and consequently were passed on to libraries. In this way, as Healy points out, libraries, as well as government archives, were the principal historical collecting institutions from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century.

The largest collections of evidence of the Australian human past in museums were those of ethnography, consisting of Aboriginal material appropriated by the non-indigenous population. This was not, however, through any notion that the Aborigines were part of the country’s human history, rather they were generally categorised in ethnographic terms or with any other kind of flora and fauna. In other words, they were considered as being either a curiosity or as constituting part of the natural history of the continent. This view is demonstrated by John Henderson, in 1832, when he published *Observations on Zoology, from the Order Insecta to that of Mammalia; the latter including the Natives of New Holland*.

From the early years of European settlement Aboriginal artefacts were collected, mainly to show the progress the settlers had made, as Aboriginal culture was seen as totally inferior, or even totally irrelevant, to European civilisation. To an extent, this was because Australian museums were launched at a time of great interest in biological evolution, particularly with the spread of Social Darwinism in the later parts of the nineteenth-century, and so were interested in the early development of humans as well as other species. Aboriginal Australians were seen as living examples of one of the

---

63 Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, p.90.
earliest stages in the evolution of man. Echoing the view held for most of the nineteenth century, Professor Baldwin Spencer stated in 1927:

> Australia is at present home and refuge of creatures, often crude and quaint, that have elsewhere passed away and given place to higher forms … Just as the platypus, laying its eggs and feebly suckling its young reveals a mammal in the making, so does the aboriginal show us, at least in broad outline, what early man must have been like before he learned to read and write, domesticate animals, cultivate crops and use a metal tool. It has been possible to study in Australia human beings that still remain on the culture level of men of the Stone Age.\(^{66}\)

Both Aboriginal culture and people were appropriated by the non-indigenous population for ‘scientific’ purposes or museum display.\(^{67}\) They were treated as ‘living fossils’ and displayed in the nineteenth-century manner of taxonomic classification identical to that of other flora and fauna.\(^{68}\) As Michael Ames points out: ‘Following the tradition of the cabinets of curiosities, primitive peoples were considered to be parts of nature like the flora and fauna, and therefore their arts and crafts were to be classified and presented according to similarity of form, evolutionary stage of development, or geographical origin’.\(^{69}\) This was aided by the evolutionary theories that spread following Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), fuelling the growing belief that the Aboriginal race was dying out, and would soon become extinct. Hence, there was a need to collect evidence of their existence as part of the natural history of the world. Healy has highlighted the role these evolutionary theories had in Australia:

> Aboriginal people were constituted as objects of a new ‘scientific’ curiosity; their bodies and their cultural artefacts were relentlessly pursued; not just any bodies or artefacts, but predominantly those which were unsullied by European blood or cultural influence, those which exemplified the prehistoric character of Aboriginal people.\(^{70}\)

---


\(^{68}\) Commonwealth of Australia, *Museums in Australia 1975*, para. 4.29.


\(^{70}\) Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, p.96.
The situation was similar in New Zealand where Maori cultural artefacts and human remains were also collected and displayed from the early years of European settlement. Like Australia, and despite Maori culture being regarded as less ‘primitive’ than Aboriginal culture, the principal motivation was to acquire the objects from what many Europeans believed was a dying race, and it was felt that Maori artefacts should be collected before all were lost to the ‘tide of colonisation’. Museums set about collecting prime examples of Maori ‘taonga’ (treasures) and other emblems of Maori tribal identity, such as ‘whare whakairo’ (carved meeting-houses) and ‘waka taua’ (war canoes). Frequently, the manner in which these were acquired was also highly questionable, with little respect for Maori customs and beliefs. Arapata Hakiwai explains:

> Many believed that the Maori race would suffer dramatically as a result of ‘colonisation’ and thus vigorously collected, recorded and documented this ‘noble and savage’ race before its inevitable fate. Some collected these ‘curios’ to further personal interest and personal definitions of value and social reality while others looted, ransacked and pillaged burial grounds and other sacred places.

Aboriginal artefacts and remains were also collected and displayed as a means to illustrate the progress both the colonies and civilisation, particularly European civilisation and the white race, had made compared to ‘primitive’ cultures. At the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879, for example, the commissioners regarded a sculpture of Truganini, described in the *Notes* as ‘the last of the Tasmanians’, as a memento ‘of a people which like most other dark races died out when brought into contact with civilised life’. This was also the case in New Zealand, though the belief existed that Maori culture was more sophisticated than that of Aboriginal Australians. As the report of the New Zealand Exhibition in 1865 stated:

---

72 There also existed small collections of foreign ethnological material. See, for example, R. Livingstone, *Foreign Ethnology Collections in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa*, MA thesis, Massey University, 1996.
The Maoris have most deservedly been considered one of the finest and most intelligent of aboriginal races. Their intellectual and physical powers have from the time of Cook downwards enlisted the admiration of travellers and the respect of the Colonists. Compared with the Native inhabitants of Australia, and of many of the uncivilised islands in the South Pacific, the Maoris stand out as their superiors in every respect.

This perception of the relative ‘superior’ nature of Maori culture was also reflected in museums where, for instance, the recording of Maori oral traditions went on from the latter years of the nineteenth century, showing some awareness of its historical importance. Indeed, as Greg McManus has pointed out, ‘there has always been Maori involvement with museums in New Zealand’. Especially from the late nineteenth century, various museum people maintained key relationships with Maori communities and individuals, including T.F. Cheeseman of the Auckland Museum, Elsdon Best of the Dominion Museum, and Roger Duff of the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch. Perhaps the most notable example is Augustus Hamilton, Director of the Colonial Museum between 1903 and 1914, who had established the museum of the Hawke’s Bay Philosophical Institute based partly on his relationship with the local Maori community. Nevertheless, museum philosophy was still underpinned by traditional ideologies of ‘the triumphalism of the colonisers, the presumption that Pakeha had vanquished the indigenous tribes of New Zealand’ and the ‘anticipation that Maori culture and society were speedily heading for extinction’. Consequently, Maori artefacts were normally relegated to the ranks of natural history, displayed alongside stuffed birds, animals and other artefacts as curiosities, divorced from the indigenous people who had created them.

Aboriginal and Maori material, therefore, was collected by museums, but by placing them within the ancient and natural history of the world they were explicitly denying

---

75 New Zealand Exhibition, 1865, New Zealand Exhibition, 1865: reports and Awards of the Jurors, and Appendix, Dunedin, 1866, p.321.
77 See D.R. Simmons, ‘Anthropology in New Zealand Museums’, AGMANZ News, vol. 15, no. 3, September 1984, pp.2-4, and Fea & Pishief, Culture of Collecting, pp.7-16. This museum was a precursor for the Hawke’s Bay Museum that exists today, founded in 1936. Hamilton also played a central role in calls for a National Maori Museum at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is discussed in Chapter Five, which examines the early history of New Zealand’s national museum.
the indigenous people their own history or culture. As Jonathan Mane-Wheoki has explained, ‘Maori culture was communicated not only as though it had no connection with the present – to living communities of indigenous people – but as though it belonged to another country in another age.’\textsuperscript{79} It also did not occur to these curators that these remains or artefacts might lead to specific Aboriginal or Maori identities,\textsuperscript{80} as they were classified and displayed with the rest of the exhibits. These attitudes continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. In regards to the notion of the Aboriginal race becoming extinct, for example, T.S. Dixson remarked in 1919, after seeing for the first time in a museum an Australian Aboriginal family scene in the Bishop Museum in Honolulu:

\begin{quote}
It is to be regretted that there is no museum in Australia where the various main tribes of aboriginals are thus represented by models or even paintings, because the chance of doing this will soon be as utterly gone for Australia as it has long been gone for Tasmania.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

Therefore, if material was collected relating to the human histories of Australia and New Zealand, it largely consisted of paper and indigenous material. However, there were various other small collections relating to Australia’s history. For example, the Aquarium Museum in the Melbourne Exhibition Building, which opened in 1887, held collections of industrial exhibits and historical photographs alongside the more traditional specimens of zoology and ethnology.\textsuperscript{82} In the Queensland Museum too, on a list of natural history and mineral specimens in 1876, there was a single section entitled ‘Curios, Machinery, Weapons and Furniture’, listing 36 objects which would now be covered in the area of history.\textsuperscript{83} At the same time, small amateur historical collections widely existed around both Australia and New Zealand, often housed in small local museums, yet these were generally unsystematically collected and badly documented.

\textsuperscript{79} ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Dixson, \textit{Australian Museum}, p.17.
\textsuperscript{82} Markham & Richards, \textit{Directory}, p.55.
\textsuperscript{83} Mather, \textit{A Time for a Museum}, p.222.
Museums during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were affected by two vital influences – evolutionary theory and the ‘economic and technological utilitarianism’ which culminated in the Exhibitions. Consequently, Australian and New Zealand museums were predominantly museums of natural history and science. They were not historical museums, and few had significant collections designed to relate to the human history of their respective countries. Of course, within the museums, especially those of science and technology in Australia, there did exist items which would now be considered historical material, such as tools and farming implements. Yet these were in no sense collected with the aim of representing the human development of Australia. Rather they were collected to celebrate the wonders and progress of industry and technology. This situation was not that dissimilar to that in Europe, where there was a comparable lack of interest in modern history, especially in displaying the lives and customs of the contemporary working classes or the labouring classes of the pre-industrial era. In Europe nevertheless, there was an evident growth of historical consciousness throughout the nineteenth century; illustrated by increases in the number of historical societies and by moves towards the preservation of buildings. The growing acceptance of the importance of historical material in Europe can be seen in the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1867, which included a section showing the different stages through which each country had passed before arriving at its present state. There is no such evidence in Australia until the late nineteenth century, when David Scott Mitchell began the first major collection of Australiana in 1886. The Royal Australian Historical Society was not founded, with Mitchell as its first patron, until 1901.

**Lack of History – Lack of ‘Nation’**

A significant reason for this lack of interest in both Australia and New Zealand’s past was that there seemed to be a limited sense of national and historical consciousness. European museums in the nineteenth century were founded at a time when people had become pre-occupied with the concept of nation, and museums were seen as public

---

85 As recently as 1985 in Britain, for example, Oliver Green noted the ‘lamentable lack of interest by most of the museums profession in either the very recent past or contemporary life’. See O. Green, ‘Our recent past: the Black Hole in museum collections’, *Museums Journal*, vol. 85, no. 1, June 1985, pp.5-7.
86 Webber, ‘Constructing Australia’s past…’, p.158.
institutions of the nation. In Australia, however, the non-indigenous population in the nineteenth century did not regard the country as having a past upon which to build. The penal origins of non-indigenous Australians were generally ignored. As Healy says, ‘nineteenth-century white Australia lacked the material from which to fashion history because of the shallowness of the historical soil’. The objects that dominated European museums at the time were, alongside natural history, those of classical antiquity, nation formation and war. Australians did not have the same association with such events. As Tony Bennett indicates, when compared to European national pasts, the post-settlement period in Australia was regarded as a vacuum:

The fact, as it was often expressed at the time, that the Australian nation had not been forged in war – that it had not played any major role in the theatres of ‘real history’ – meant that it could not lay claim to a past which might be represented on the same footing as the pasts of other nations within the militarised modes of national commemoration which were dominant at the time. It was mainly for this reason that the post-settlement period, when viewed from the comparative perspective of European national pasts, was regarded as a vacuum.

In this sense, Australia did not have a nation on which to base historical collections. The indigenous population was regarded as outside time and history, while the penal roots of the non-indigenous population were not regarded as worthy of preservation or commemoration, and certainly not the right basis upon which to build a nation.

Despite not having the same concern as Australia over a convict past, the relatively short European history of New Zealand was also not regarded as being worthy of preservation. The non-indigenous population still largely saw themselves as being British or European, and so any history they might have was assumed to have originated from there. Museums in New Zealand, like those in Australia, developed in the colonial manner whereby they celebrated the dominance of European culture and society over

---

88 Healy, From the Ruins of Colonialism, p.87. Also see M. Anderson, ‘Selling the Past: History in Museums in the 1990s’, in Rickard and Spearritt, Packaging the Past?, p.131.
90 The colonies did however strive to show the progress they had made, particularly through the Exhibitions, which in some ways can be seen as being typical of nationalism. Nevertheless, the motives behind this were more often directed towards the different colonies trying to outdo each other, rather than proclaiming how great the entire country had become.
‘primitive’ indigenous populations. As Paora Tapsell has pointed out, the traditional practice of displaying ‘Maori objects as “curios”, primitive art, or artefacts, contributed to New Zealand’s growing colonial identity’. 91

Broadly therefore, both Australia and New Zealand were regarded as young countries among the nations of the world, and as such had no history worthy of preservation or display. Compared with the British national past for example, which was organised primarily around the exploits of monarchs, great statesmen and military heroes, there was little history of similar substance in either Australia or New Zealand. 92 There was no ‘suitable’ history upon which to construct a distinct national identity, and consequently museums succeeded in perpetuating traditionally narrow images that relied on the nation being ‘British’. As a consequence, non-indigenous museum curators often turned towards their roots in Europe for continuity. Despite the lack of historical material relating to Australia and New Zealand, there did exist historical examples of sorts, illustrating the glories of the old country. Museums often brought copies of objects and plaster busts of sculptures from Europe. The National Museum of Victoria brought Europe to Australia in the form of copies of the Magna Carta and plaster casts of classical Greek and Roman sculptures, highlighting the classical heritage of the Western world. 93 Similarly, the Auckland Institute and Museum had a collection of plaster casts of Greek statues scattered around its natural history galleries, 94 while the British Museum had presented to the Colonial Museum 187 specimens ‘being chiefly a collection of celts and other stone implements and weapons’. 95 This was to confirm the continuity of Australia and New Zealand’s place as part of the Empire, reinforcing the sense of imperial identity that was explored in the previous chapter, and also re-affirmed the colonies as part of Europe’s white history.

Australian and New Zealand museums grew in the colonial tradition, whereby their function was, to a large degree, to celebrate the march of Western civilisation over the world. Perhaps the best illustration of this was the opening of the first significant

93 Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, p.85.
museum in the Australian colonies to be devoted to history: the Nicholson Museum of Antiquities at the University of Sydney in 1861.\textsuperscript{96} Though a museum of history, the museum had no relation with the Australian past, and rather consisted of Egyptian busts and Greek and Italian vases.\textsuperscript{97} It was Dr. Charles Nicholson’s view that Australia did not have its own history, and that this was ‘a state of affairs that needed to be alleviated by the importation of historical objects from overseas’.\textsuperscript{98} The lack of interest in the history of their own countries by museums was also reflected throughout this period by the constant sending of specimens abroad. This was part of a collecting economy that existed within a system of international trade. Most museums had extensive connections abroad, particularly with Britain and the United States, resulting in the steady export of objects illustrating the natural history and indigenous peoples of the two countries.

\textbf{Into the Twentieth Century}

In the early 1930s, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, aiming to extend its grants to Commonwealth countries, funded a number of surveys of museums and art galleries in countries including Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Canada and South Africa. The subsequent Australian report, undertaken by British museum authority S.F. Markham and H.C. Richards, Professor of Geology and Mineralogy at the University of Queensland, highlighted the fact that the absence of historical collections was ‘one of the most notable gaps in the whole of the existing museum collections’.\textsuperscript{99} Likewise, the corresponding report in New Zealand, undertaken by Markham and W.R.B. Oliver, Director of the Dominion Museum in Wellington, stressed that the ‘modern historical material dealing with early missionaries, settlers, etc., is probably the least well displayed museum material in the Dominion’.\textsuperscript{100} Nevertheless, in the early twentieth century there are some notable differences in the evolution of museums in Australia and New Zealand. For this reason, it is useful to examine these developments separately.

\textsuperscript{96} Van Leeuwen, ‘Everything around us…’, p.67.
\textsuperscript{97} Markham & Richards, \textit{Directory}, p.77.
\textsuperscript{98} Van Leeuwen, ‘Everything around us…’, p.65.
\textsuperscript{99} Markham & Richards, \textit{A Report}, p.44
\textsuperscript{100} Markham & Oliver, \textit{A Report}, p.93.
The Carnegie survey in 1933 concluded that there were only three museums in Australia that drew particular attention to the history of the continent’s European settlement: the Australian War Memorial, which at the time was in Sydney whilst a permanent home was being constructed in Canberra, Vaucluse House in Sydney, and a historical collection in the Parliament Buildings in Canberra.\(^{101}\) It is worth discussing two of these ‘museums of history’ and why they were established: the Australian War Memorial and Vaucluse House.\(^{102}\)

The Australian War Memorial was the first museum to devote itself entirely to the history of the post-settlement period in Australia,\(^{103}\) and was a clear indication of the growing desire to retain Australian material rather than send it abroad. Initially founded to commemorate the dead of the First World War, the Australian War Memorial’s function was thus to perpetuate the memory of those who had died in the first war Australia had entered as a nation.\(^{104}\) The Memorial was conceived by the war correspondent C.E.W. Bean, who believed that the national monument should not be found simply in ‘statues of stone’. He felt that a museum could both commemorate the deaths of those he had known, and convey to Australians how and why they died.\(^{105}\) The foundation stone was laid in Canberra on Anzac Day in 1919, yet due to the depression did not officially open until Australia was at war again, on Remembrance Day, 11 November 1941. After the Second World War, the charter of the Memorial extended to encompass all the wars in which Australians had died.

The War Memorial is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the context of this thesis, it is significant that a museum was seen as an appropriate form for a national memorial to take. More importantly with regard to this particular discussion, however,

\(^{101}\) Markham & Richards, *A Report*, p.44. It should be noted, however, that the Report did acknowledge that, by the 1930s, many museums held limited historical collections relating to the history of the town in which they were situated. However, these were often disorganised and not satisfactorily classified.

\(^{102}\) The collection in Canberra is not discussed as it was comprised largely of paper material, existing more as a library than a museum, and as explained earlier this discussion focuses on the particular role of museums in collecting and interpreting the past.

\(^{103}\) Bennett, ‘Museums…’, p.79.

\(^{104}\) For a good history of the Australian War Memorial, see M. McKernan, *Here is their spirit: a history of the Australian War Memorial, 1917 –1990*, St. Lucia, 1991.

is that through the Memorial, Australia was now seen as having a material history worth preserving and also upon which to distinguish it as a separate nation. This history remained one which was heavily enmeshed in the deeper and longer histories of Europe, but it was now possible to identify Australia as having played an individual and separate part in these histories. The First World War provided a basis upon which non-indigenous Australians could now create a national ideal. One which ignored convict origins, and which relied on a ‘real’ history, similar to those histories upon which the nations in Europe were built. Tony Bennett has explained the significance of the Australian War Memorial:

In its remembrance of the Australian troops in Europe and the Middle East (the theatres of ‘real history’), this institution – intended as both a museum of the nation’s military history and a shrine to its war dead – enabled there to be figured forth and materialised an Australian past which could claim the same status, weight, and dignity as the European pasts it so clearly sought to emulate and surpass.\(^\text{106}\)

Vaucluse House is also significant in this context of the ‘nation’. The former home of William Charles Wentworth, seen as the father of Constitutional Government in New South Wales, Vaucluse House opened as a public museum in 1926.\(^\text{107}\) In applying for funds during the 1920s, the trustees relied on the historical past to intentionally construct a national identity. For example, in one guide they try to create Vaucluse House as ‘Australia’s Mt. Vernon’:

Americans have venerated Mt Vernon, home of George Washington, and Vaucluse House holds for us just as much significance and epochal glamour. For it was here that the Constitution Act, or Charters of Liberty, was framed. Love of country entails appreciation of these patriots of the past, like Wentworth, that we may have their example before us in future undertakings.\(^\text{108}\)

The success of these two museums, and the growing awareness of the important role museums of history could play in national identity, did not however, lead to a

---

\(^{106}\) Bennett, ‘Museums…’, p.79.


burgeoning of history museums. In fact, the Australian War Memorial remained the sole attempt to interpret Australian history in a major museum, until the Western Australian Museum incorporated the history of the State into its collecting brief in 1970.\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{New Zealand}

New Zealand differs from Australia in that from the end of the nineteenth century a number of museums were established with early colonial history as their basis.\textsuperscript{110} The first of these New Zealand institutions was the Otago Early Settlers Museum in Dunedin. The origins of the Otago Early Settlers Association, and its museum, are found in the Otago Jubilee celebrations of 1898, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the two ships, the \textit{John Wickliffe} and the \textit{Phillip Laing}, at Port Chalmers in 1848.\textsuperscript{111} One of the objectives of the Association was ‘to collect and place on record anecdotes and reminiscences of early years’, and by 1901 a sufficient collection had been built up to display it to the public.\textsuperscript{112} As Séan Brosnahan states: ‘New Zealand’s first social history museum was under way.’\textsuperscript{113}

The emergence of a museum such as the Otago Early Settlers in New Zealand rather than Australia is significant as it illustrates an early realisation of the importance of preserving New Zealand’s non-indigenous human history, and perhaps illustrates the prevailing view of non-indigenous Australians that the early convict years of their settlement were not worth preserving. This growing awareness in New Zealand of the importance of historical material is also highlighted by the passing of the \textit{Maori Antiquities Act 1901}, which forbade the export of Maori relics and all other articles of historic or scientific value to New Zealand. These developments, however, are not indicative of a sudden desire in New Zealand to celebrate their settler origins as part of a new national identity separate from European roots. In fact it was the opposite. Another of the initial purposes of the Otago Early Settlers Association was ‘to encourage love of country and to strengthen patriotic bonds which unite us with the Home land’.\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Similar museums did not come into existence in Australia until well into the twentieth century.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Brosnahan, \textit{To Fame Undying}, p.9.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} ibid., p.20. It was not until 1908 that the museum moved into its first permanent building.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} ibid., p.9. Of course, the museum also did not extend to include Maoris within its role. As being ‘first’ in Otago was the ‘fundamental claim to fame for the ‘Early Settlers’ as a group’. See Brosnahan, p.21.
\end{itemize}
Otago Early Settlers Museum is significant in marking the beginning of collections of non-indigenous New Zealand history, and it led to various other towns establishing Early Settlers’ Associations, as well as the opening of an Old Colonists’ Museum in the Auckland Public Library in 1916.\textsuperscript{115}

The major metropolitan museums of New Zealand though, continued to ignore the history of their own country. Yet, as in Australia, the First World War had an affect on some of these museums. In Auckland, the Institute and Museum had petitioned for a new museum building in a prominent position on Domain Hill since 1913, but it was not until 1920, with public calls for a suitable war memorial for Auckland, that funds were granted for its erection and in 1929 it opened as the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Unlike the Australian War Memorial, the choice of the museum as a memorial did not initially mean it would also become a repository for military history. Some war relics were displayed in and around the First World War Hall of Memory, but it was not until a Second World War extension opened in 1960, that sections of war relics and the history of arms significantly expanded.\textsuperscript{116}

The First World War also provided impetus to the Dominion Museum, as the Colonial Museum was by then called, and in 1915, the museum began a collection of materials illustrating New Zealand’s part in the ongoing war. This was an extension to a National Historical Collection that the museum had initiated in 1916, and to which, by 1917, ‘a fair amount of material’ had been donated.\textsuperscript{117} By the end of 1918, the collection consisted of 858 items, but significantly these continued to be almost entirely of paper form. As the Director’s Report described: ‘A considerable amount of historical material has been obtained … including early books, newspapers, maps, views, and portraits, autographs, letters, account books and diaries’.\textsuperscript{118} The collection was also, as were the Early Settler Association’s collections, based upon material relating to prominent ‘early settlers’, hardly representative of the development of New Zealand society as a whole. At any rate, by 1920 the National Historical Collection had been transferred to the

\textsuperscript{115} Markham & Richards, \textit{Directory}, p.88.
\textsuperscript{116} Powell, \textit{The Centennial History}, p.33.
\textsuperscript{118} Report of the Director ... \textit{1918}, Wellington, 1918, p.2.
Alexander Turnbull Library, which had been founded in 1918, while the National War Collection was moved to the Trentham military camp near Wellington.\textsuperscript{119}

Despite the popularity of Early Settler Associations, the major museums in New Zealand, like those in Australia, continued to concentrate on natural history and ethnology well into the twentieth century. It was not until the early 1980s that they began to take significant notice of the human history of their own country, though for various reasons some began to construct colonial history galleries during the 1960s.

**Growth of Heritage, Conservation and Museums**

After the Second World War, public interest in heritage and the past began to quicken around the world. In Australia and New Zealand, impetus was provided by many of the developments indicative of a post-colonial society, such as the steady increase of immigration following the war and the gradual assertion of women’s and indigenous rights, all illustrative of a widening historical consciousness. Elsewhere, the devastation left by the war, the world-wide economic boom in the 1950s and 1960s, and the depopulation of the countryside, meant that development became a dominant theme.\textsuperscript{120}

In developed countries, major highways began to spread, historic town centres faced the threat of property developers, mineral extraction ate into the countryside, and new towns were built to accommodate growing populations. The rapid pace of modernisation seemed to encourage a feeling of instability and change, and as a result there was suddenly a new interest in the past, as people looked to it in order to gain stability and an understanding of the changes that surrounded them.\textsuperscript{121} Consequently, in order to save those aspects of the past that were understood and which were being threatened, environmental and heritage conservation, in various forms such as legislation and archaeology, became a major international preoccupation. In 1969, the United States of America enacted its *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA),\textsuperscript{122} and in South Africa, the *War Graves and National Monuments Act* was passed.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{119} Markham & Oliver, *A Report*, p.94.
\textsuperscript{122} Cleere, ‘Introduction…’, p.3.
1972, the United Nations established the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) to mitigate the impact of development, and in Europe, almost every country enacted some form of antiquities or environmental legislation during the 1970s.

This impetus also existed in Australia, beginning with the National Trust movement in 1945.\textsuperscript{124} This new interest in the past was also aided by the increasing feeling of separation from Britain, in part due to the Second World War, leading people to search for their own history.\textsuperscript{125} This public interest and concern in heritage led to a rush of State and Federal legislation, beginning with the \textit{Native and Historical Objects and Areas Preservation Act 1955-60}, which related to the protection of Aboriginal and historic archaeological sites and artefacts in the Northern Territory.\textsuperscript{126} The Australian Council of National Trusts was established in 1967, followed by the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate in 1973, leading to the enactment of the \textit{Australian Heritage Act} in 1975 and a register of protected properties.\textsuperscript{127}

In New Zealand, growing public interest in heritage and the past also led to new legislation protecting both the natural and built environment. During the 1950s, for example, the \textit{National Parks Act 1952} and the \textit{Historic Places Act 1954} were both passed, before the National Archives were created by the \textit{Archives Act 1957}. These were followed by the Nature Conservation Council being established by an Act of Parliament in 1962, and then the \textit{Antiquities Act 1975}, which repealed the \textit{Historic Articles Act 1962}.\textsuperscript{128} As in Australia, these moves towards conservation, and the growth of museums discussed below, can to some extent be attributed to the emergence of a new nationalism, as a New Zealand identity separate to that of Europe and Britain began.

\textsuperscript{124} In 1989, membership to the National Trust stood at around 85,000. See J. Flood, ‘‘Tread softly for you tread on my bones’: the development of cultural resource management in Australia’, in Cleere (ed.), \textit{Archaeological Heritage Management}, p.79.
\textsuperscript{125} Bennett, ‘Museums…’, p.80.
\textsuperscript{126} Flood, ‘‘Tread softly…’’, p.82.
\textsuperscript{127} By 1981, 6,707 sites had been listed in the Register. See Bennett, \textit{Out of Which Past?}, p.10. The Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections was subsequently established in 1974, leading to the \textit{Museums of Australia Act} in 1980. This is discussed in later chapters. An interesting feature of Australia’s heritage conservation movement was the development of ‘green bans’ by trade unions, especially in the early 1970s. Beginning with the Builders Labourers Federation, who refused to work on a site if it meant destroying a place of heritage value, they soon spread from state to state. These green bans demonstrated the degree to which the preservation of both natural and historic environments had gained popular support, and Bennett links them to the ‘new nationalism’ of the Whitlam administration which was able to present their environmental policies as representing the expressed wishes of the people. See Bennett, \textit{Out of Which Past?}, p.10, and Flood, ‘‘Tread softly…’’, p.79.
to emerge. A paper by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage describes the motives behind the government’s involvement:

The deeper undercurrent in the history of the government’s cultural role is the development of New Zealand culture itself ... New Zealand cultural production increased greatly in scope in the period following the government initiatives of the 1940s, and ... cultural forms inherited from Europe began to take on a New Zealand identity.¹²⁹

The period after the Second World War saw notable increases in the number of museums in Australia and New Zealand, and around the world. This was aided by both Australian and New Zealand history which, in the 1950s and 1960s, had finally broken away from British history and began to be taught separately in universities.¹³⁰ Small, local historical museums began to proliferate everywhere, focusing specifically on their region. As Richard Dell, Director of the National Museum in New Zealand, noted in 1976: ‘The building of museums is almost a national disease in this country.’¹³¹ A directory containing the entries of 112 institutions in 1969, compared to 38 in 1958, illustrates this.¹³² In Australia, the Pigott Report in 1975 also noted:

In the last fifteen years hundreds of small museums have been founded as a result of the quickening interest in Australian history. This has been primarily a grass-roots movement, one of the most unexpected and vigorous cultural movements in Australia in this century. Its strength lies outside the capital cities.¹³³

This growth of interest in history can also be seen in the introduction of new types of museums. Most noticeable perhaps is the development of the open-air, living history museum. Artur Hazelius opened the first of these at Skansen, near Stockholm, in

---

¹²⁹ Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Government’s Role in the Cultural Sector: a survey of the issues, December 1998, see Appendix, para. 32, website, www.mch.govt.nz/publications/govt_role_in_cult_sect/ Examples of such initiatives in the 1940s are the implementation by the Department of Internal Affairs of a National Library Service and a New Zealand Literary Fund, and the commissioning of war histories.
¹³³ Commonwealth of Australia, Museums in Australia 1975, para. 5.8.
but it was not until after the Second World War that they became popular. In Australia, by 1975, four of the most successful museums were this type of large open-air museum, though each is very different in how and what it represents: Swan Hill on the Murray River, Sovereign Hill in Ballarat, Lachlan Village at Forbes, and Old Sydney Town. The four main open-air museums in New Zealand were equally popular: the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) in Auckland, the Tauranga District Museum Historic Village, Shantytown in Westland, and the Ferrymead Historic Park in Christchurch. This kind of museum marked a new direction in the interpretation of history. Whereas in the nineteenth century the lives of everyday people, and particularly those of subordinate classes, were largely absent from museums, these living history museums concentrated on creating an effect of familiarity upon the visitor – by focusing on everyday lives to which many people might be able to relate. Like the traditional museum, however, these ‘living history’ museums were also generally monocultural, usually concentrating on the European material culture and history since settlement, with little acknowledgement of indigenous populations.

This evident growth of interest in history in Australia, especially the growing concern for representing those groups previously neglected, was very much confined to these small and regional museums. In Victoria for example, the Minister for the Arts, Norman Lacy, acknowledged in 1981 that: ‘There are some aspects of human history in Australia, namely European and other non-Aboriginal history, which are beyond the present scope of either of the two major State Museums’.

In New Zealand, the growing popularity of the early colonial past did provide some impetus for the major museums, and they consequently began to introduce some post-European settlement history into their displays. This was generally in the form of the construction of colonial streets, through which visitors could walk past shops and

---

135 Commonwealth of Australia, *Museums in Australia 1975*, para. 5.23.
136 Thomson, *Art Galleries and Museums*, pp.118-131. Not all of these, however, have maintained their success. The historic village at Tauranga, for example, has recently been dismantled, while Ferrymead has funding problems.
businesses furnished in the style of the day. Both the Canterbury and Auckland Museum constructed such streets during the 1960s. ‘Centennial Street’ for example, which opened at the Auckland Museum in 1966, gave an impression of Auckland’s Queen Street in 1866 with one of the shops represented as the drapers of Milne and Choyce, the company which sponsored the exhibition. These colonial history galleries, however, were very much restricted to early nineteenth-century colonial history and they certainly did not lead to the sudden widespread collecting of New Zealand’s non-indigenous history by the major museums. ‘Centennial Street’, for example, was supposed to be a short-term temporary display, and its continued existence today is owed only to its popularity amongst museum visitors.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the major museums in both Australia and New Zealand continued to focus on the collection and display of natural history and science, illustrated by the total absence of history departments in any major Australian museum until the 1970s. In New Zealand, the first curators of colonial history were appointed in 1968, at both the Auckland Museum and Dominion Museum.139

Conclusion

Museums in Australia and New Zealand have therefore developed as colonial institutions, illustrating the progress of Western civilisation and emphasising the dominant colonial power. This invariably would mean either neglecting the presence and contributions of minority cultures, especially that of the indigenous populations, or relegating them to a place in the natural history of the country. At the same time, the non-indigenous human histories of Australia and New Zealand since European settlement were not regarded as being suitable material to be collected or presented. Consequently, the focus of the museums in both countries has largely been on natural history, science and technology.

The lack of historical material relating to Australia and New Zealand contributed to a unique sense of colonial identity, and especially a sense of imperial identity. In developing in this manner, museums promoted the fashioning of the narrow myths and

---

images of the nation that were discussed in Chapter One. By disregarding the value and meaning of indigenous cultures, for example, they helped support the image that to be an Australian or New Zealander was to be white and British. Non-indigenous museum curators, by neglecting their own histories since European settlement, also did not allow for the development of a national identity distinct from that of Britain, and even when historical material was collected it was so limited in scope that it could hardly be illustrated as representative of the nation. Women’s history, for instance, was generally unrepresented, contributing to the masculinity inherent in most traditional notions of identity.

After the Second World War, various factors combined both to challenge these common interpretations of nation, and to position ‘history’ for an increasingly important role in society, both culturally and politically. In terms of museums this has been effected by the emergence of new histories previously absent from both national and historical consciousness, by a general growing awareness of the need to acknowledge the presence of different groups within society and within different interpretations of society, and in Australia by the publication of the Pigott Report. Such factors are also indicative of the increasingly problematic nature of national identity, and the growing preoccupation with defining the nation that was identified in the previous chapter. They have gradually forced museums to reassess their roles in society, leading to significant change and professional development, so that a museum environment has been created within Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand that is markedly different from traditional colonial museum practices. The major museums of both countries have moved towards collecting and presenting both their national and local histories, especially those since European settlement, and all the different histories of which they consist. As the subsequent discussion shows, however, both in the general progress and specifically the more detailed examination of the national museums, these developments are not straightforward, largely due to the particular complexities of Australian and New Zealand society.
CHAPTER THREE

The Development of Museums in Australia and New Zealand, since c.1975.

During the last few decades, changing historical scholarship, central government policy, and the Pigott Report, have had far-reaching effects for museums in both Australia and New Zealand. They have combined to pressure museums to examine their traditional roles and methods, to become more professional, to incorporate different types of historical experience, and to be more representative of the nation as a whole. This chapter reviews the ways museums have developed since the 1970s. While there was a growing number of local museums since the Second World War, indicating a widening historical consciousness and interest in different interpretations of the past, it is the 1970s that can be taken as the period when such concerns properly entered public awareness, playing an increasingly important role in debates over national identity, society and museums.

Due to their particular complexities, Australia and New Zealand are examined separately. Each section begins with an overview of government policy affecting museums, and the professionalisation of the museum industry. The main discussion focuses on the question of history, exploring how successful museums have been in incorporating Australia and New Zealand’s human history within their collections and exhibitions. The post-colonial climate has led to many different groups asserting their fundamental rights, claiming control of their own cultures and histories, and calling for inclusion within representations of history and nation. This chapter examines how, or if, major museums have responded to these challenges. While national museums have a particular role in representing the ‘nation’, distributed national collections exist throughout museums in Australia and New Zealand, and these museums also have an important role in interpreting national histories and the diverse communities they represent.
The gradual inclusion of new histories and interpretative techniques by museums, including an increased use of technology and post-modern interpretation, has not been straightforward. There have been checks and balances throughout, which reflect both the problematic nature of national identity in Australia and New Zealand identified in Chapter One, and the complex political and cultural role that history holds in society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In their determination to include groups that were traditionally excluded from museum representation, for example, museums have been accused of marginalising the history of white British settlers. The Australian Bicentenary in 1988 illustrated these problems. The Bicentennial Authority, by attempting to render equivalent all the different ethnic groups under one multicultural sign of the nation, contributed to a perception that they were effectively denying Aboriginal people their rights while also marginalising the contribution of the Anglo-Celtic majority.

Concerns have also been raised over a perceived neglect of education in museums in favour of popular entertainment. John Denton, the architect of the new Melbourne Museum which opened in 2000, explains that competition from entertainment venues and the Internet means that museums have to reinvent themselves as ‘theatres of knowledge’. Yet, it is this reinvention that has stimulated criticism. As Kevin Murray from Craft Victoria has observed in regards to the Melbourne Museum: ‘The extensive use of video clips is like candy – the flavour doesn’t linger. Do people want more of the same, or do they want some connection to the mystery of the past that is the traditional business of museums?’ Moves towards post-modern interpretation within museums have also provoked controversy, especially through its presentation of artefacts without a historical context or framework – controversy perhaps reflected best in the reaction to the Museum of Sydney on opening in 1995 and to Te Papa in New Zealand in 1998.

The function and role of museums has become increasingly complex and controversial in recent years. Though such tensions will be apparent, this chapter does not explore these challenges in great depth, nor does it attempt to be especially critical of the ways museums have developed. Rather, it provides an overview of developments – to

---

2 Quoted in M. Mottram & R. Usher, ‘Pierced penises, online exhibits and Kylie’s wedding dress from Neighbours … Victoria’s new museum is funky, but is it a museum?’, *Age*, 21st October 2000, p.1(Extra).
contribute to an understanding of the role and state of museums in Australia and New Zealand today, and to provide a background to why their two new national museums have developed as they have. However, it is important to remember that such conflict and challenges exist, as they are indicative of the prominent and complex role of the museum in society, and will be seen to be especially prevalent in the later examination of the two national museums.

AUSTRALIA

The Pigott Report and other Government Policy

During the last few decades, symptomatic of the post-colonial era in terms of the increasingly prominent political and cultural role of history, emphasis has been placed on the importance of the arts and heritage by various federal and state governments. This government involvement has had a notable influence upon the museum community in Australia, particularly in terms of its professional development and methodology, which can be seen to have been initiated by the election of Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister in 1972.\(^3\) Whitlam believed strongly in the arts, and their importance within the life of the nation:

> In any civilised community arts and associated amenities must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not be seen as something remote from everyday life. Of all the objectives of my Government none had a higher priority than the encouragement of the arts, the preservation and enrichment of our cultural and intellectual heritage.\(^4\)

One outcome of this was the establishment of a Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections in April 1974 to survey museums in Australia and make recommendations for government policy. The report of this Committee, popularly known as the Pigott Report after its Chairman Peter Pigott, marked a major turning point in the history of museums in Australia. By acknowledging that the functions of

---

\(^3\) This is both reflected and stimulated by the ‘new nationalism’ that emerged during the 1970s, central to which was the need to take into account the entire population when discussing and representing ‘nation’. See T. Bennett, *Out of Which Past? Critical Reflections on Australian Museum and Heritage Policy*, Cultural Policy Studies, Occasional Paper No. 3, Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane, 1988, p.10.

museums are always changing, the report highlighted that museums had no reason to remain rooted to their nineteenth-century collection and exhibition policies. The report illustrated this by discussing museums of technology. In the nineteenth century, museums of technology were seen as vital in instructing mechanics, engineers and inventors. This kind of informal training had been succeeded by formal courses in colleges and other institutions, and consequently the old museums of technology had become ‘museums of the history of technology’.5

The Pigott Report contributed to increased funding for museums, and prompted calls for specialised training for museum professionals.6 However, the report’s greatest impact was in forcing museums to reassess their roles, by highlighting the traditional separation of Aboriginal and settler human history, and by emphasising the lack of history in museums relating to settler society.

Central to the report was the recommendation that a Museum of Australia be established in Canberra, and that it should concentrate on three main themes: ‘Aboriginal man in Australia; European man in Australia; and the Australian environment and its interaction with the two-named themes’.7 This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, but in proposing a museum focusing on Aboriginal history rather than anthropology, on the environment, and on ‘recent history’,8 the report was suggesting that museums could be receptive to differing versions of the past. It was written, of course, at a time when agitation over the emergence of ‘new’ histories concerned with groups previously absent from core national history, was rapidly growing. Consequently, the report was largely derived from this expansion in Australian historiography: ‘Australia’s natural history and human history is unusual, and today the knowledge of many facets of that history is unfolding in exciting ways.’9

---

6 J. Mulvaney, ‘Museums’, in Australian Cultural History No.2 1982/3: Institutions and Culture in Australia, Canberra, 1983, p.43. The report also recommended the creation of an Australian Museums Commission to foster the development of museums generally in Australia, and to assist in co-ordinating federal expenditure on museums and galleries. Unfortunately, the Commission was never established.
7 ibid., Commonwealth of Australia, Museums in Australia 1975, para. 2.11 & 12.6.
8 ibid., para. 12.9.
In 1975, the Whitlam Government also established the Australia Council to aid the national development of the arts, and in the *Australia Council Act 1975*, the objectives of the Council included: ‘to foster the expression of a national identity by means of the arts’.10 This emphasis on the significance of arts and culture has been the policy broadly followed by successive governments since Whitlam. In 1979, the Fraser Government decided to adopt the Pigott Report’s recommendation to build a national museum, leading to the *Museum of Australia Act 1980*, and in 1986 the McLeay Report acknowledged that the arts industry ‘enhances national identity, pride and prestige’.11

Turning towards more recent government initiatives that had direct significance for heritage and museums, of particular relevance was the publication of *What Value Heritage?* in 1990, by the Department of the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories (DASET). The paper, a rebuttal to *What Price Heritage?* released by the Department of Finance in 1989, emphasised that museums ‘identify the values, creativity, traditions and tastes’ of society.12 Thus major museums should represent the whole of society: ‘For museums to enrich society’s intellectual development and cultural identities and values, they must seek to reach all components of society.’13

*What Value Heritage?* however, defined for the Commonwealth itself very limited responsibilities for movable cultural heritage, instead putting responsibility onto the State Governments. This changed in 1992 when the Keating Government took office, with the release of a discussion paper by DASETT, titled *The Role of the Commonwealth in Australia’s Cultural Development*. The paper marked a distinct shift in policy, stating that the Commonwealth could also be a partner in developing national strategies which would ‘encourage the continued development of excellence’ in Australian museums, and support the rational development of ‘representative collections

13 ibid., p.48.
in all regions of Australia.\textsuperscript{14} This was part of a general move by the Government to identify the arts as a distinct industry. As John Gardiner-Garden explains: ‘With Mr Keating as Prime Minister there was an effort to place arts policy in the wider context of Australia’s cultural development, economic interest and international identity.’\textsuperscript{15}

This culminated in the publication of the Keating Government’s cultural policy statement \textit{Creative Nation}, in 1994, which declared itself as ‘the first national cultural policy in our country’s history’.\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Creative Nation} was based on the assertion that all sections of society made up what it means to be Australian. It stated that urban life, rather than the bush, and multiculturalism, rather than the dominance of the Anglo-Celtic majority, now played a large part in constructing the national image. It went on to state: ‘The culture and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians has become an essential element of \textit{Australian} identity, a vital expression of who we all are.’\textsuperscript{17}

The statement had many shortcomings, not least that it made little mention of heritage legislation. Nevertheless, amongst other points, \textit{Creative Nation} also made firm commitments towards a National Museum of Australia, and to indigenous people ‘in their efforts to retain their material, intellectual and spiritual heritage’.\textsuperscript{18} Of particular significance, was \textit{Creative Nation}’s emphasis on the fact that culture was the basis of identity, ‘the identity of the nation, communities and individuals’.\textsuperscript{19} As one of the prime means by which different cultures are represented in society, the ‘collections held in national, State, Territory and local museums, libraries and galleries give further meaning to Australia’s history and to the place of each Australian in that history’.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15} Gardiner-Garden, \textit{Arts Policy}, p.9.
\textsuperscript{17} ibid., p.6.
\textsuperscript{18} ibid., p.79. It should be noted that the form of the National Museum proposed by \textit{Creative Nation} was widely criticised by the museum community. Briefly, the statement rejected the construction of a new museum comprising Aboriginal Australia, the environment and Australian history. Rather it proposed a separate Gallery of Aboriginal Australia existing alongside an intangible National Museum network, which would continue to produce travelling exhibitions and education programs. Policy developments towards the National Museum are explored in more detail in Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{19} ibid., p.5.
\textsuperscript{20} ibid., p.75.
Central government initiatives prompted similar undertakings by the different states. For example, in 1991, the Western Australian Government appointed a Task Force for Museums Policy, one role being ‘to make recommendations on future directions for museum development and services in Western Australia, and establish priority policies and strategies which will best realise these directions’. In 1992, the *Victorian Museum Survey Report* examined the levels of museum involvement with their communities, while in 1994 the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts Museums Advisory Council published *Future Directions for Regional and Community Museums in New South Wales*, highlighting the benefits of greater access and understanding in museums.

**The Professional Development of the Museum Community**

Inevitably, these government policies and reports have forced museums to reassess their functions and practices. Governments can significantly affect the development of particular institutions and also the wider profession to which they belong: by promoting and defining excellence in museum practice, by the protection of movable cultural heritage, and especially by encouraging cultural heritage institutions to maintain and share the cultural traditions of all Australians including those of Aboriginal and ethnic communities. The state museums are also funded by their respective governments, and are naturally influenced accordingly. Government policy in Australia, combined with growing calls for the inclusion of histories previously excluded from museums and also the greater involvement of communities, has led to a markedly different museum environment to that which existed until the 1970s. Put simply, in various ways Australian museums have become more professional, in their internal structures and in their dealings with the public.

One indication of this is the introduction of new departments and the reorganisation of existing ones, and can be illustrated by the incorporation of Australian history into

---

museums. Apart from the Western Australian Museum, which formally began collecting the history of the State in 1970, museums generally continued to ignore history as a separate discipline until the 1980s – when the ‘new’ histories that had been emerging since the 1960s began to be established in the nation’s historical consciousness. In 1980, the History Trust of South Australia was formed to bring together scattered heritage collections from around the state and, in the same year, the Australian War Memorial broadened the Memorial’s concern beyond the wars themselves to the impact of war on Australian society. In 1982, the Museum of Australia held a conference on Australian history in Canberra, and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences opened a historical department in the restored Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney in 1985. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart, and also the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, established history curatorships in the 1980s, while the Museum of Victoria finally formalised its history department in 1985.

This reorganisation was accompanied by a professionalisation of the museum industry, which is perhaps best illustrated by the gradual move towards a single museum association. Museum associations in Australia have existed since the Art Galleries & Museums Association of Australia and New Zealand was formed in 1936, largely for bringing together museum directors for occasional conferences. This continued only briefly though, before it fragmented to become the Museums Association of Australia (MAA), no longer concerned with art galleries. Then in the early 1960s, the Art Galleries Association of Australia was formed, renamed the Art Museums Association of Australia (AMAA) in the 1970s to conform to international practice, and other organisations soon followed.

---


30 ibid. Other associations that were formed during the 1970s, include the Australian Federation of Friends of Galleries and Museums (AFFGM), the Museum Educators Association of Australia (MEAA), and the Australian branch of the International Council of Museums (ICOM Australia).
There was no shortage, therefore, of official associations serving different aspects of the museum profession in Australia. However, these had generally grown in an ad hoc fashion over the years, and while each held conferences and published journals, they were frequently disorganised and without expert membership. By the late 1970s, there was a growing realisation of the benefits a single association could bring, as it could ‘create a more united profession, ensure a commitment to greater understanding and integration’.31 The first move towards this single association was the establishment of the Council of Australian Museums (CAMA) in 1981. Initially existing as an affiliation between the MAA and the AMAA, other associations soon joined during the early 1980s. CAMA was concerned, as the first issue of its quarterly journal Muse News stated, ‘to promote the status and standing of the profession within the community by co-ordinating those activities which are common to the two Associations, and by improving communications within the profession’.32

Discussion concerning the proper amalgamation of the two main Associations did continue, but in 1982 the Art Museums Association chose instead to actively foster affiliation.33 The formation of CAMA, however, was the beginning of a new era for museum practice in terms of its professionalism, standardisation and accreditation, and throughout the 1980s efforts were made to advance Australian museums in line with an increased awareness of their important role in society. For example, CAMA’s profile was raised by the first joint conferences held by the two main Associations,34 and in 1982 it published its first draft Code of Ethics, ‘a document of importance to everyone in the museum community’.35 CAMA also succeeded in lobbying government for policy statements concerning museums. Its 1988 National Conference produced recommendations for how collections could become more representative of Australia’s

32 Muse News, June 1982, p.6. Muse News replaced the existing journals of Kalori: Quarterly Newsletter, published by the MAA, and AMAA News, published by the AMAA. The MAA had also published a journal of longer articles, Kalori: Journal of the Museums Association of Australia, replaced by the irregular publication of a journal titled Museums Australia. Muse News was itself replaced in 1992 by the professional publication Museum National – a further step towards the amalgamation of the associations.
34 The first of these was in October 1984.
diverse communities, resulting in the publication of the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* in 1989, and the subsequent 1991 Commonwealth publication *A Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia’s Cultural Diversity*. Another step was the formulation by CAMA of the policy for museums and indigenous peoples, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*, in 1993. Intending to forge new partnerships between museums and the first peoples of Australia, the policy emphasised the importance of the involvement of indigenous peoples in museum affairs.

Throughout the 1980s, there was also a surge of interest in standardising individual disciplines in museums. As a result, often under the umbrella organisation of CAMA, special interest groups (SIGs) were formed dealing with different types of museums and interests, such as women in museums, ethnic groups, museum historians and university museums. In February 1985, for example, the Working Group of Museum Historians was formed with two broad aims: ‘to provide a forum for historians working in museums to discuss their aims, assumptions and methodology; and to promote the understanding of an interest in Australian history through the use of material culture’.

Another group to be established was the Heritage Collections Working Group in 1990. With the support of the Commonwealth and all States and Territories, one of its primary tasks was to ‘advise the Cultural Ministers’ Council on ways of improving the community’s access to its cultural heritage’. The Heritage Collections Committee (HCC) was also established in 1990 by the Cultural Ministers’ Council, with the purpose of giving ‘the museum community the opportunity to strongly support and verify concerns with contemporary social issues affecting Australia’s destiny’.

One longstanding problem, which CAMA did its best to rectify, was the lack of professional museum training available in Australia, especially in the field of conservation. The Canberra College of Advanced Education was one of the first to offer

---

such training, introducing a Masters Degree in Material Conservation in 1982 alongside its two existing undergraduate courses in conservation, while Victoria College in Prahran offered a Masters Degree in Museum Studies from 1983. However, Muse News acknowledged the lack of training in Australia: ‘most museums in Australia have great difficulty in obtaining people with appropriate skills and knowledge.’41 New professional museum courses of one description or another have since appeared in various universities around Australia.42

In the early 1990s, discussion concerning the amalgamation of the separate museum associations again came to the fore. Subsequently, at the 1993 CAMA Conference, the MAA, AMAA, and the Museum Education Association of Australia (MEAA) resolved to amalgamate and form a new association named Museums Australia Inc..43 Australia finally had an acknowledged body representing all the different museums across the country, whether they be science, history or art museums. A single association created a more united profession through which greater support could be gained for museums, both financially, particularly via government funding, and in achieving recognition of the role of museums in society.

Of particular significance is the production by Museums Australia of various policy guidelines applicable to museums throughout Australia. In many ways these reflect the growing democratic nature of museums, as they recognise the need to be more representative of cultural diversity in museums and more responsive to different contested histories. Policy guidelines dealing with the representation of women in museums were finally published in early 2000, for example, while in 1999 Museums Australia published its Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines for Museum Programs and Practice, highlighting that the histories of gay and lesbian people, like those of ethnic communities, have traditionally been neglected in museums, and that they ‘are now seen as an important part of the culturally diverse matrix of Australian society.’44

---

42 In terms of general museum studies, for example, Deakin University in Victoria offers various certificates and diplomas in cultural heritage and museum studies.
During the last two decades, therefore, the museum sector in Australia has gone through major change and reorganisation. Alongside this, museums have had to change their conventional methods of museum practice as new social histories, as well as new technologies and other interpretative devices, have emerged.

In particular, museums have moved to involve their different communities in the presentation of their own histories. One way this has been achieved is through ‘outreach’ work, whereby the museum is taken into the community through schemes such as the creation and loans of small exhibitions, by visits to schools, and by the development of ‘virtual museums’ on the world wide web. Especially in large towns and cities, outreach can be a means of contacting people otherwise often excluded from the museum, such as the elderly and people in distant suburbs or the country.45

The main way in which people come into contact with museums, however, is still in the museum itself, and more significantly through the exhibitions. In the past, museums were considered ‘the storehouses of knowledge’,46 and consequently visitors were not expected to question the exhibits or interpret them independently. In a sense, the viewpoint of the curator who had produced the exhibition was assumed to be the correct view, not allowing for contesting versions or ideas. This might lead to inaccuracies in the message that was conveyed, perhaps most evident in exhibitions dealing with indigenous cultures, that had been produced by non-indigenous curators. In recent years, however, exhibitions have become more open to interpretation. Museums no longer expect their publics to passively digest a single viewpoint, and often now actively promote debate over an exhibition. One example is the Museum of Sydney, which opened in 1995 rejecting the imposition of a ‘master narrative’ throughout, based on the argument that to impose such a narrative ‘destroys other possible meanings and privileges certain aspects of history’.47 As Peter Zellner has described, rather than attempt to narrate a singular history for Sydney and its people, through a combination of disciplines, including history and art, the Museum of Sydney ‘presents history as a

tableau of disparate and sometimes competing voices’. In other words, there is no clear statement of the site’s history. Instead the text panels consist largely of quotations from primary sources and fictional accounts which address the idea of Sydney, with the aim of aiding each visitor to create their own individual understandings.

The Museum of Sydney’s approach, however, contributed to growing debate over the use of post-modern interpretation. Guy Hansen at the National Museum of Australia, was critical that the material remnants of the past were ‘not being interpreted, but rather being used as props in a larger artwork’, and he found the museum troubling because the ‘rejection of the use of didactic text and the deliberate use of ambiguity in the presentation of artefacts did not open up new possibilities of meaning’. The lack of actual historical context and interpretation can be ambiguous and confusing in a museum. As Linda Young has described, ‘the death of certainty, the denial of the possibility of any objective historical truth, makes post-modern approaches shallow and suspect’.

The move towards opening up interpretation and making museums more accessible has been significantly aided by the involvement of different communities in the production of exhibitions. This has developed to the point where no museum would now even consider producing an exhibition without proper consultation with the community to which it applies, aided by the development and use of new techniques such as oral history in museums. The new ‘Indigenous Australians’ gallery at the Australian Museum in Sydney, for example, which opened in 1997, is flanked on all sides by videos of contemporary indigenous Australians discussing how their traditional culture has adapted to the modern world. Even if these stories are not being audibly spoken within the gallery, it is often the case that visitors will spend more time reading lengthy texts when the stories are real and personal, rather than generic.

---

49 See A. MacDonald, ‘Creating a Sense of Place: “Edge of the Trees” at the Museum of Sydney’, *Melbourne Historical Journal*, vol. 27, 1999, p.82.
51 L. Young, ‘Exhibition Review – Museum of Sydney, on the site of First Government House’, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 105, October 1995, p.666. As discussed in later chapters, similar criticism has been applied to Te Papa in New Zealand.
The most tangible sign of change in museums must be the increased use of technology and multi-media. Museums are the custodians of real objects, which provide a potent and tangible link with the past, and displays can be produced to stimulate people’s imagination and help give these objects meaning. The traditional museum normally consisted of a series of fixed displays, often collections of ‘very heterogeneous objects in a homogeneous space’. In many ways, such displays can not adequately communicate a sense of identity or the past, as endless cases of artefacts can become tedious and stifle the meanings of objects. Especially in the last decade, alongside the growing realisation of the need for a more active role in the community, many museums have modified their methods to make their visitors more involved with the collections, and so to increase their understanding of them. Interactive exhibits can aid people’s understanding and appreciation of exhibits by making their experience not only intellectual but also physical.

Like the increased use of post-modern interpretation, however, the growth of interactive displays has contributed to tensions within the museum community. This is broadly related to the growing need for museums to be more competitive in the market place, in order to be financially viable. Competing for both public audiences and government support, this has led to concerns that, in their desire to become more popular and entertaining, museums are neglecting their traditional scholarly and educational roles. The new Melbourne Museum, for instance, has been criticised in this respect, with the question being asked: at what point ‘does an institution that is part modern art gallery, part shopping centre, part amusement parlour, stop being a museum?’ Such criticism is of course open to debate. There is little reason to believe, for example, that people are more intellectually passive when looking at moving images or using interactive exhibits, than when reading a book or interpretative museum text. There is also no reason why museums should not be able to both educate and entertain, and in many museums, particularly those that are concerned with less popular topics, the need to make themselves appear entertaining may be vital for them to succeed in educating. The same

56  Belcher, Exhibitions in Museums, p.65.
can be said for entertainment, as it is difficult to make something appear entertaining if it does not have something informative about it, or if it is just ‘pure nonsense’.

There is little chance of these debates diminishing, especially as museums continue to have to compete in a developing marketplace. Indeed, this leads to other questions over intellectual integrity, as museums become increasingly reliant on corporate sponsorship. Especially with those museums seeking to interpret social history, there is often the need to ‘sell’ exhibitions on diverse themes, which can challenge the integrity of what the exhibition is trying to convey. It has the potential to distort the messages which curators seek to deliver and can significantly influence what exhibitions are actually developed. As Margaret Anderson has claimed, there is ‘a clear danger that more radical exhibition proposals will be passed over in this scramble for the corporate dollar’. Good illustrations of this were the new social history exhibits at the Powerhouse Museum, which reopened in Sydney in 1988, where four out of the five different exhibits were supported by some kind of sponsorship.

‘New’ Histories and the Response of Museums

In recent decades, therefore, there have been a number of important developments affecting museums in Australia, particularly the evolution of government policy towards museums and the subsequent professional development of the industry. These can be seen to have arisen largely as a result of the emergence of new histories, and calls for their inclusion within representations of history and nation. The discussion now turns to examine these histories, and their influence on museums during the last few decades. Much in the same way that they challenged traditional concepts of national identity in Australia, the acknowledgement of these new histories has forced museums to reassess their representations.

61 Although each of these ‘histories’ are addressed separately, they can often be connected in terms of exhibitions, such as the representation of Aboriginal women. Also, while the National Museum of Australia might be mentioned here, it is examined in far more detail in later chapters.
It is important to be aware that, especially since the early 1980s, various new museums have been established addressing different and specific types of history. In regards to immigration and multiculturalism, the Migration Museum in Adelaide opened to the public in 1986, and the Immigration Museum (a campus of Museum Victoria) in Melbourne in 1998. Smaller, community supported museums have also opened, such as the Museum of Chinese Australian History (1985) and the Jewish Museum of Australia (1982) in Melbourne, and the Sydney Jewish Museum (1992). In line with the greater awareness of indigenous culture and history, and indicative of the growing Aboriginal movement to regain control of their own heritage, Aboriginal cultural centres, or keeping places, have also been established. The first of these was in Shepparton in 1980 with the support of the Aboriginal Arts Board, and numbers have grown steadily since. The Brambuk Living Cultural Centre (1985) in the Grampians in Western Victoria, for instance, is designed as ‘a place where both Koori and non-Koori people can come together to share the knowledge of the past and to discuss the issues confronting Koori today’. Both these Aboriginal keeping places and ‘culture-specific’ museums can in many ways be seen as sites of resistance, in that they are in response to the perceived lack of representation of their histories in more established museums. For example, founded and often at least partially funded by the ethnic communities they represent, many of the culture-specific museums were built on the belief that mainstream museums were ‘under-representing the ethnic contribution to Australia’s history’, and consequently cultural traditions were being lost.

The existence of these new museums, nevertheless, does not diminish the obligation that major state museums have in representing these same groups and histories. The major museums have a responsibility and unique ability to represent these different histories, especially if they are to fulfil their role of being representative of Australian society. This discussion addresses a specific number of these histories – those that can be seen to affect museums the most – exploring their emergence and whether they are being recognised in museums as integral parts of the history of the nation.

62 The Migration Museum had been founded in 1982.
64 Brambuk Living Cultural Centre, A Journey Through Time, Brochure, (no date), p.15.
Women’s History

Until the 1970s, there was a distinct absence of women in the writing of Australian history. This was due to the common belief that history rested on the great deeds of men – a woman’s place was in the home, largely invisible to the history that was traditionally recorded. As Marilyn Lake has described: ‘Women, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, did not figure in Australian history books because, it was said, when justifications at last became necessary, we hadn’t done anything.’

Not surprisingly, this absence of women in historical writing meant that women were also ignored within historical representations of Australia’s past. Museums have been male-dominated institutions, to the extent that it is not even clear when the first woman worked in an Australian museum. During the nineteenth century, science and technological museums celebrated the technical achievements of men, while the isolated historical collections that did exist were generally associated with early pioneers, explorers and heroes. In the twentieth century, museums continued to present a past that was largely devoid of women. The establishment of Commonwealth museums around the generally male topics of war and maritime life illustrates this invisibility of women, firstly with the Australian War Memorial that officially opened in 1941, and more recently with the Australian National Maritime Museum in 1991. The construction of other specialist museums since the Second World War, has also continued around masculine themes; through transport museums, sports museums and industrial museums devoted to male-dominated industries. There was a significant gender imbalance in regards to Aboriginal collections too, with a survey in 1991 revealing that around 75 per cent of objects related to the material culture of men.

---

72 Anderson, Heritage Collections Working Group, p.49.
The place of women’s history in both literature and museums has gradually improved. The impetus was primarily the women’s movement, which gained momentum in the early 1970s, and the subsequent recognition that half the population was substantially invisible in ‘the mainstream historical canon’. As Judith Allen has highlighted, one of the earliest demands of that movement was an end to the exclusion of women from the making of knowledges. New courses in women’s history began to be established in many colleges of advanced education and universities, along with a rapid growth in feminist research and scholarship. While many Australian universities, until the 1970s, did not have any women with research expertise in Australian history in permanent academic posts, Allen estimates that by 1989, women held almost a fifth of tenured Australian history positions. This continues to grow, though women are still in the minority, especially at senior levels. Equally, despite growing awareness and research of women’s history, it has taken time to gain enough impetus to challenge traditional histories, and for historians ‘to engage in reinterpretations of masculinity, Englishness, Britishness and Australian national identity’.

Alongside this growth in feminist scholarship there have been significant moves during the last two decades to acknowledge, and to rectify, much of the criticism regarding the lack of representation of women in museums. The Women’s Section of MAA was formed in 1988, for example, and a number of subsequent conferences have focused on

---

74 Allen, ‘From women’s history…’, p.221.
75 ibid.
76 The first Women’s Studies course began at Flinders University in Adelaide in 1973.
78 Allen, ‘ From women’s history…’, p.221.
how museums should represent women. Various museums have also now put into effect internal policies with the aim of remedying masculine biases in museum practice. The new National Museum of Australia, for instance, has a Women’s Collecting Policy, while most of the state museums now have gender considerations in their policy statements. More significantly though, particularly from the mid-1980s, is the inclusion of women within museum exhibitions. The exhibition ‘never done...’ – women’s work in the home, for example, at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, examines the history of domestic work in Australia around the themes of sewing, cooking, baking and laundry work. Other examples include the Queensland Museum, which opened Women of the West in 1995, exploring the interaction between women and the environment in rural Australia, and an exhibition in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in 1991, Convicts in Van Diemen’s Land, which dealt in some detail with the experience of women convicts. More recently, a major travelling exhibition by the Western Australian Museum, titled When Australia was a Woman, opened in Melbourne in October 1998 examining representations of women as symbols of the nation.

Despite these moves to include women within museum representations, feminist historians continue to be critical of the thoroughness and extent to which this has been implemented. Indeed, similar criticism is evident with all the ‘new’ histories that began to be recognised during the 1980s and 1990s, illustrating continuing tensions over the prominence given to different histories and the difficulties of satisfying everyone in museum display. Julia Clark, for instance, has pointed to a survey by the Tasmanian Office of the Status of Women, which revealed that of the major exhibitions mounted by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in 1992, six dealt with men alone, five were mixed art exhibitions, two exhibitions dealt with non-human subjects, and just one dealt with women only. Equally, the professional museum bodies have been slow to properly acknowledge the important role of women within representations of Australia’s history. The 1990 CAMA Conference, endorsed a definition of cultural diversity that

---

83 See M. Anderson (ed.), When Australia was a Woman: Images of a Nation, Perth, 1998.
was supposed to include gender and class. Yet, at the 1991 Conference, various papers dealt with cultural diversity in terms of ethnicity, but none mentioned gender. This is perhaps best illustrated though, by the fact that it took until early 2000 for Museums Australia to produce women’s policy guidelines for museums. As Joanna Leahy also concluded in 1999, despite an informal commitment towards the representation of women and the development of gender history, the majority of museums still did not include any formal assurances in their policy or mission statements.85

Women’s history, therefore, while clearly gaining a role in museums during the last twenty years, can often still be seen as secondary to more traditional historical interpretation. Another common concern is that women in museums are represented mainly in the home, ‘almost always genteel and generally grouped with children’, divorced or absent from any kind of trade or work, other than what might arise in the domestic setting such as needlework.86 The message being conveyed is that women in the past did not work outside the home at all.87 Such mis-representation obviously restricts any kind of realistic meaning concerning the history of women being derived by the visitor. The progress and development of this type of history in museums continues to be slow, despite a high proportion of female museum staff.

**Aboriginal History**

As discussed in Chapter Two, Aboriginal material, unlike that of women, had been collected and displayed in museums from the nineteenth century, but it was generally represented as part of the natural history of the continent, divorced from human history. This was largely due to the European settler society being founded upon the principle of *terra nullius*, meaning a land with no people, immediately stripping the Aborigines of a human identity, and providing the settlers a basis upon which to regard the indigenous peoples as primitive and soon to become extinct. By collecting Aboriginal material museums were explicitly denying the indigenous people a history or culture. It also did

not occur to these curators that these remains or artefacts might lead to a specific Aboriginal identity, as they were classified and displayed with the rest of the exhibits.

This was central to the treatment of Aborigines in both museums and literature for much of Australia’s European history, as few historians before the 1960s considered ‘white settlement to be anything other than natural and inevitable’. During the 1960s, however, the situation began to change, partly due to research by archaeologists and physical anthropologists discovering evidence that Aborigines had inhabited the country for at least 50,000 years. This showed that their society had survived dramatic climatic changes, which belied the colonial image of them as a primitive culture, and also challenged perceptions of the legitimacy of colonisation. In other words, it challenged the dominant historiographical traditions of non-indigenous Australians, which were founded upon the view that Aborigines were passive and primitive. As a result, new histories of the Aboriginal people began to be written, often with reference to the occupation of Australia by the Europeans as an ‘invasion’, such as those by Henry Reynolds and, in a different way, Geoffrey Blainey.

The rewriting of Aboriginal history has continued in the last two decades and has been influenced by various topical debates, such as ‘land rights and compensation, the appropriate custodians of Aboriginal remains and just whose nation the Bicentenary was celebrating’. The indigenous cause was given impetus by the emergence of the black rights movement in the United States, and by the indigenous nationalist struggles to remove colonial powers that had taken place throughout Africa, Asia and the Caribbean since the Second World War. The combination of these spurred the Aboriginal movement and, particularly from the late 1970s, both the political and non-indigenous public sphere have shown greater acknowledgement towards Aboriginal rights and the inequality they have suffered since European settlement.

---

88 S. Garton, ‘Aboriginal History’, in Walter (ed.), *Australian Studies*, p.190. Garton’s chapter is a useful analysis of how Aboriginal written histories have developed during 200 years of European settlement.


91 This has been shown, for example, through Aboriginal protests leading up to the Bicentenary, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1987-90), the Mabo case (1982-92), and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.
There are a number of general initiatives that have compelled changes in attitudes towards Aboriginal material culture in museums. The Pigott Report, for example, which included the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, drew attention to the need to recognise the contributions of Aboriginal Australians within the heritage of the nation. In outlining a national museum of history the report stated:

> The argument for a major display of Aboriginal history is overwhelming. The chronology of the human occupation on Australia is dominated by Aboriginals. If the human history of Australia were to be marked on a 12-hour clockface, the era of the white man would run for only the last three or four minutes.\(^92\)

By putting the Aboriginal past within this context of human history, the report was effectively declaring that the divorce of the indigenous population from museums of technology and human history was no longer acceptable. Similarly, the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia put emphasis on the importance of training Aborigines in conservation techniques, and on the need for consultation between museum curators and Aboriginal communities.\(^93\)

Since the Pigott Report, there have been various other efforts to improve the care and use of indigenous material. For instance, the MAA endorsed its first policy towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in 1980, within which it stated that museums should ‘recognise the importance of improving the awareness of the general public of Aboriginal and islander cultures’.\(^94\) In 1989, the New South Wales Ministerial Task Force on Aboriginal Heritage and Culture acknowledged the need for full consultation with Aboriginal communities, and in 1990, the Commonwealth Government established the Australian Aboriginal Affairs Council Task Force on the Return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Property: to move for the return of cultural property from both overseas and Australian institutions.\(^95\) Then, in 1993, CAMA published *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*, the underlying premise of


\(^{93}\) ibid., para. 3.10 & 4.13 (Gallery of Aboriginal Australia Report).


which was that ‘museums can no longer function on the basis that they alone may
determine what use is made of cultural material or what access is allowed to indigenous
people. The continuing responsibility of museums to respond to the concerns of
indigenous people is a moral imperative.’

These types of policy, along with the emergence of new written Aboriginal histories,
have forced museums to reassess the way they treat indigenous cultural material.
Museums have consequently made significant advances by giving Aboriginal people a
greater role in the representation of their own history, and by paying more attention to
their history since European settlement. As Margaret Anderson and Andrew Reeves
have pointed out, emerging disciplines such as Aboriginal history, and Aboriginal
claims to the right to manage their own culture and heritage, have ‘demanded a re-
evaluation of the relationship between museums and Aboriginal communities’.

In 1983, for example, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery underwent its first
reorganisation since 1966, with the new displays of Aboriginal culture including themes
of social organisation, trade, religion. In 1984, the Museum and Art Gallery of the
Northern Territory established the National Aboriginal Art Awards and the Torres Strait
Islander Awards to celebrate and recognise indigenous peoples and cultures, and their
contribution to Australia. Various exhibitions in the late 1980s, such as Koori at the
Museum of Victoria and Ngurunderi: An Aboriginal Dreaming at the South Australian
Museum, reflected the creative impact of collaboration between museums and
Aboriginal advisory groups. Most significantly, many of the major state museums
have redesigned their indigenous galleries during the last few years. The Australian
Museum, for example, which until lately dealt mainly with pre-European Aboriginal
material, has redesigned its indigenous gallery, with considerable involvement from
Aboriginal communities, through the themes of spirituality, cultural heritage, family,
land and social justice. Opening in April 1997, it explores the depth and diversity of the

96 Council of Australian Museum Associations Inc., Previous Possessions, p.7. More recent initiatives
include, in February 1998, the Cultural Ministers’ Council endorsing a plan for the repatriation of
August 1998, p.2. Also, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) published the
Report on Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights in 1999, mapping the rights
indigenous Australians themselves want to their own cultural heritage.
97 Anderson & Reeves, ‘Contested Identities…’, p.118.
cultures and experiences of indigenous peoples all across Australia, with particular emphasis on their contemporary situation.  

More recently, in April 1999, the Western Australian Museum opened its new Aboriginal Gallery, *Katta Djinoong – First Peoples of Western Australia*, after four years of consultation with an Aboriginal advisory committee. Before this, the Aboriginal exhibitions had remained virtually unchanged since 1973, without any real attempt to deal with indigenous history after the European invasion. In early 2000, the South Australian Museum also opened a new indigenous gallery, entitled *The Speaking Land*, focusing on an exploration of the relationship between the Australian environment and its oldest inhabitants. Finally, in October 2000, Museum Victoria’s new Melbourne Museum opened its new indigenous gallery. *Bunjilaka* is based on a conceptual framework of ‘people, land and law’ and explores Aboriginal history and culture, including contemporary culture, through three different exhibitions. ‘Koori Voices’, for example, investigates the history of Aboriginal people in Victoria, focusing heavily on historical sources and processes, while ‘Belonging to Country’ examines relationships to land in Victoria and other selected areas across Australia, mainly through the use of ethnographic objects supplemented by some historical materials. Finally, ‘Two Laws’ examines the differences between Aboriginal and Western systems of knowledge, law and property, including what happens when these come into conflict, through a combination of ethnographic objects, art, and items of popular culture.

The major state museums have therefore made large steps in redeveloping their exhibitions and involving Aboriginal communities. Indigenous people are now increasingly involved in museums in a number of ways. Most major Australian museums now have staff and advisory boards with indigenous representation, while consultation has become a prerequisite for any new exhibition. As Gaye Sculthorpe, the Director of the Indigenous Program at Museum Victoria, highlighted in a conference...

---

paper presented in 1999, each of the major state museums in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney now have some Aboriginal staff, though not all include indigenous people as curatorial staff, and each has an Aboriginal Advisory Committee or has sought external Aboriginal involvement in the development of the galleries.\textsuperscript{104}

However, many historians of indigenous culture consider that there is still much these museums could do. Contemporary popular culture remains largely absent in most of the museums, while the impact of consultation with communities is difficult to assess, and only the new National Museum of Australia has significant numbers of indigenous curators and other staff at senior levels. The indigenous content in Australian museums also seems to remain largely confined within the particular indigenous galleries, rather than being integrated throughout the institutions' exhibitions. Another criticism is that of the generic approach many of the major museums take, representing the indigenous populations of the entire continent or large regions, rather than emphasising local histories and cultures.\textsuperscript{105} For example, as Sculthorpe has discussed, of the five hundred or so items on display in the recent indigenous gallery at the Australian Museum, many appear to be without cultural context in the pan-Aboriginal gallery arrangement: ‘By focusing on contemporary issues of relevance to Aboriginal people, the ethnographic objects often struggle to find meaning within this framework.’\textsuperscript{106} It is likely perhaps, that until Aboriginal people gain the governmental policy and legislative reforms they desire, debate will continue over Aboriginal claims over their own heritage, and they will remain either under-represented or mis-represented in museums.

\textit{Multicultural Histories}

Until the 1980s, Australian museums also failed to adequately represent the different ethnic groups that have existed in the country throughout its European history. Instead,
when they have collected, preserved and portrayed non-indigenous material, it has generally been that of the ethnic majority: the dominant Anglo-Celtic population. This was largely due to the prevailing assumption that Australia remained a ‘British’ society, aided by the White Australia immigration policy and the government’s assimilationist philosophies that were discussed in Chapter One. As Viv Szekeres, Director of the Migration Museum in Adelaide, pointed out in 1988, this bias ‘has meant that the history and cultural experiences of four out of every ten Australians have just been ignored’, and that the neglect of these histories was basically a statement that ‘this aspect of Australian culture was not important and not worthy of preservation’.107

During the last few decades, there has been growing recognition of this historical neglect of immigrant populations,108 largely due to the same heightened awareness of the racism which gave momentum to Aboriginal movements, and the Australian Government’s growing commitment to multiculturalism. While other countries have used the term multiculturalism to recognise cultural differences within their borders, the term is especially pertinent in Australia, as it is one of the few countries to adopt a policy of multiculturalism to reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of its population. Government interest in promoting cultural diversity can be seen strengthening throughout the last two decades through various reports, especially those directly concerned with the histories and cultures of previously ignored ethnic groups. In 1988, for example, the CAMA Conference put forward their submission to the Office of Multicultural Affairs, recommending that comprehensive criteria should be developed ‘for the identification and assessment of heritage materials in the context of a multicultural society’.109 The Office of Multicultural Affairs subsequently produced, 1989, the National Agenda for a Multicultural Society: Sharing our Future, which recognised the need to protect the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, followed by A Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia’s Cultural Diversity in 1991. More recently, Museums Australia produced some national guidelines for museums and galleries titled Caring for Our Culture, highlighting that:

107 V. Szekeres, ‘The problems of collecting and interpreting our multicultural heritage’, in Birtley & McQueen (eds.), New Responsibilities, p.74 & pp.78-79
Communities are made up of a number of diverse cultures and museums can broaden their support base by seeking opportunities in community diversity. Museums need to respect the diversity of cultures in our society and recognise various points of view and ways of understanding the world.\textsuperscript{110}

Aided by such reports and policies, museums are beginning to address ethnic histories and the representation of cultural diversity. Acquisition policies that take into account different ethnic communities have been developed by various museums, including the Powerhouse, Museum Victoria and National Museum of Australia, while an initial collection policy of the National Maritime Museum focused on the ‘maritime experiences which are relevant to Australia’s culturally diverse communities’.\textsuperscript{111}

In 1996, the Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts (DCA) undertook a survey to investigate whether the 1991 \textit{Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions} had been implemented successfully. It found that while the major museums still had a great deal of work to do, they were best reflecting their commitment to cultural diversity through their public exhibitions.\textsuperscript{112} As one of the Powerhouse’s opening exhibitions in 1988, for instance, \textit{Australian Communities} addressed the multicultural history of Australia, while Museum Victoria, in collaboration with the Jewish Museum of Australia and the Italian Historical Society, produced \textit{Bridging Two Worlds: Jews, Italians and a Village called Carlton} to illustrate the cultural diversity of the Carlton suburb of Melbourne.\textsuperscript{113} More recently, in 1998, Museum Victoria developed co-operative agreements with other bodies such as the Museum of Chinese Australian History and the Victorian Folklife Association.\textsuperscript{114}

Despite such developments, it seems that the major Australian museums have not taken the same steps forward in representing the multicultural community that they have in

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{111} Trotter, ‘From monoculture…’, p.57.
\textsuperscript{113} Trotter, ‘From monoculture…’, p.60. The Powerhouse exhibition is discussed in more detail later.
\end{flushleft}
addressing the issues of indigenous representation. While many museums express commitment to cultural diversity, the material reflecting the rich diversity of the Australian people remains very limited,\(^{115}\) and an Anglo-Celtic bias still exists, which means that large sections of the Australian population can not find their pasts reflected in museums. To an extent, this continuing passivity of the large museums is due to the emergence of museums such as the Immigration Museum in Melbourne and other ethnic and ‘culture-specific’ museums previously mentioned. The emergence of such museums, however, indicates the dissatisfaction of different groups with how major museums are representing their diverse ethnic histories and, at any rate, the major museums should not ignore such histories, particularly in regards to their role of being representative of Australian society. As Viv Szekeres has pointed out, the museums need to ‘convince the many different cultural communities that their history and traditions are now being taken seriously and are of value’.\(^{116}\)

**Working-Class History**\(^{117}\)

Finally, it is worth considering the other significant history to be excluded from major museums in Australia, and which has also risen as part of the ‘new social histories’. Working-class history, within which can be included the history of the poor, labour history and everyday history, has long been a neglected area both in Australian research and museums, and has been subordinate to concepts of science and technological innovation. Since their foundation from private collections in the early nineteenth century, museums remained elitist both in their management and collection policies, with the few historical exhibitions illustrating the deeds of powerful and wealthy men. To an extent this was due to the attitude that the history of the working classes, derived from the convict past in Australia, was a past that did not need to be remembered and represented as part of the country’s development. It was also regarded as unfit material for museums as it was seen as a dull, grim and depressing history, especially as it included issues such as disease, deprivation and unemployment.\(^{118}\) Yet, working-class history is one of the oldest and most enduring themes of Australia’s social history since

---


\(^{116}\) Szekeres, ‘The problems of collecting…’, p.79.

\(^{117}\) Working-class history is commonly called labour history. The term working-class is used here, as it seems to apply more suitably when encompassing ‘everyday’ and ‘ordinary’.

European settlement, and that which many Australians can relate to most in everyday life. Very simply, it is the history of ordinary lives, and recognises how class shapes experience. The exclusion of it can result in, ‘a perception that museums represent “high cultural” pursuits of learning and science rather than places of popular enlightenment and edification’.  

Influenced by international trends, new written histories addressing the working classes began appearing from the late 1960s. As these new histories emerged, there was growing realisation that museums must include this type of history too. In 1992, for example, a Labour History Working Party, which was part of a Western Australian Task Force enquiry into museums, put forward recommendations which highlighted the need for the integration of this type of social history, and a re-interpretation of existing collections to acknowledge that labour history was embedded in all material culture. 

Museums have had to recognise that in order to be relevant to the community, they need to be both, more representative of all the histories which exist, and to collect and present that which is relevant and which people can relate to; which includes the working classes. As Carolyn Rasmussen has described, ‘working’ life emerged as one of the strongest themes in Museum Victoria during the 1990s, with its capacity to reveal ‘hidden and yet often commonly-shared histories and experiences’. Such recognition is also evident in some of the exhibitions mentioned previously, such as ‘never done...’ – women’s work in the home at the Powerhouse, which focuses on the experiences of working-class women.

Museums can not ignore themes of working-class and everyday history, as they are integral to society in general. They must deal with the material culture of ordinary people, not just those who have become famous and successful. As Andrew Reeves

---


explains, working-class culture remains one of the ‘oldest, most enduring themes of our cultural history’, and so it is ‘fundamental to the treatment of daily life that public history is introducing into museums’.

Case Study: The Powerhouse

The Powerhouse, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney, is an important example of how museums began to move towards different strategies in regards to their collections. Reopening in 1988 after extensive rebuilding, the Powerhouse was the first major museum in Australia to take significant steps to modify its collection and exhibition brief to incorporate ‘new’ social histories.

Museum mission statements, though often too general to be of great value, can illustrate the philosophical basis behind the museum. In 1981, for instance, the Powerhouse’s mission had no mention of social history at all, instead being ‘to stimulate understanding and appreciation of our society’s evolution in the fields of science, technology and the applied arts’. By the time of its reopening however, the Powerhouse had established curatorial sections named ‘Community and Cultural Life’ and ‘Domestic and Industrial Life’, while its most recent statement also includes reference to the diverse communities that exist in Australia: ‘To inspire diverse audiences by using the collection and scholarship to provide informative, spirited, innovative and well-researched exhibitions.’

The social history exhibits that opened at the Powerhouse in 1988, comprised five separate exhibits brought together under the general theme of Everyday Life in Australia. They included: ‘never done…’ – women’s work in the home, brewing and pubs, pills and potions, the King’s cinema, and Australian Communities. This combination of topics perhaps does not amount to the everyday life of Australia, and was largely influenced by corporate sponsorship, but nevertheless the exhibits did make

---

123 Reeves, ‘Working class culture…’, p.101 and p.104.
serious attempts to address some of the issues that have been explored, and just the title of the theme, *Everyday Life in Australia*, acknowledged the emergence of social history.

The exhibit concerning women’s work in the home was one of the first major permanent exhibitions in an Australian museum to take a woman’s perspective. The display examines the history of domestic work in Australia, with the exhibition booklet acknowledging the traditional invisibility of domestic labour and the lives of ordinary people in history. The exhibit *Australian Communities* subsequently addressed the multicultural history of Australia. Recognising that different communities should play a significant part in the representation of their own histories, and that the material culture of such communities ‘should and must remain in the communities’, space was given to outside groups. The outcome included exhibitions on old working-class suburbs, ethnic minorities and migration, and an exhibition featuring the La Perouse Aboriginal community speaking about their experiences of being on the fringes of society, significant in itself as it focused on post-European settlement Aboriginal history.

To a certain extent, the Powerhouse has managed to incorporate social history and become more accessible and representative of those groups previously excluded. However, the museum remains primarily a scientific and technological museum, which to a degree has limited the success of these exhibitions. Despite considerable advance publicity by the museum about the significance of social history, once the museum opened, the historical exhibitions occupied, and continue to occupy, a small area of the museum. Moreover, apart from these five exhibits, social history is generally absent from the Powerhouse. This is despite, as Richard White highlighted in 1990, many of the exhibits, such as the priceless Boulton and Watt engine, being able to provide a strong focus for social history. Displays on the Industrial Revolution, for example, could make significant reference to workers and domestic life, which might give visitors some recognition and insight into their own working experiences. Yet, the Powerhouse largely remains focused on the affirmation of technological achievement, concentrating

---

130 Anderson, ‘Selling the Past…’, p.135.
131 White, ‘Everyday Life…’, p.293.
on the inventors and factories, with only the most cursory reference to the workers or conditions which were forever present, and certainly not to women or children.

Summary

Since the Pigott Report, it has become impossible to ignore the persistent claims of the history of everyday Australians, creating a museum environment that is markedly more complex and different from that which existed for most of Australia’s European history. Museums have moved towards collecting and presenting the history of Australia, particularly that since 1788, and all the different histories of which it consists. In other words, museums have moved away from the idea of fashioning a national identity by interpreting objects which suggest a single or privileged national identity.

Museums have been faced with one notable constraint when attempting to incorporate these different histories within their exhibitions. They have been limited by their collections. When first responding to the challenge of these ‘new’ histories, the museums’ existing collections established the parameters of the exhibition content.132 The bulk of historical collections, where they existed, consisted of things collected, often unsystematically, amongst the interest in science and technology in the nineteenth century. Most of these were poorly documented, leaving the difficulty of determining the provenance of much of the collections. Twentieth century material was scarce, while existing holdings were biased towards Anglo-Celtic culture.133

Many museums also continue to rely on acquisitions for specific exhibitions, rather than widespread and consistent collecting to fill the many gaps in their collections. This is illustrated by the specific nature of the exhibitions at the Powerhouse in 1988. Regarding social history in general, it was acknowledged in a report by the Heritage Collections Working Group in 1991, that most collections were small and had only begun in the last decade. It estimated that historical collections in Australia comprised in total around 1.4 million artefacts, all but 200,000 of which were to be found in the Australian War Memorial.134 The Memorial’s collection largely relates to Australia’s

133 Trotter, ‘From monoculture…’, p.50.
134 Anderson, Heritage Collections Working Group, p.27.
involvement in war; hence there is a very small historical collection in existence which is supposed to be representative of the entire nation. Another plan by the same Group in 1994, highlighted the paucity of these collections by stating:

Most social history collections … require a significant injection of resources if Australian museums are to attempt the interpretative exhibitions which are so popular in the rest of the world … It is still more common to see other cultures explored in Australian museums than our own culture.\textsuperscript{135}

A considerable amount, therefore, remains to be done. Historical collections continue to be limited, particularly in regard to material reflecting the lives of immigrants and ordinary Australians, while museums often remain embedded within traditional masculine interests. Many of those who stimulated and supported the emergence of ‘new’ histories, continue to be dissatisfied with the method and extent they have actually been incorporated in museums. It should also be clear that the moves towards including both new methodologies and these diverse histories, have created their own complications and tensions within museum society, principally over how museums should properly interpret and represent the past. These are reflected in various, relatively recent, enterprises such as the Australian Bicentenary and the Museum of Sydney – tensions that are particularly significant in the context of the later discussion of the National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. The central point is that while museums have clearly developed in line with changing historiography, politics and opinion, this is balanced by growing debate and conflict over their success and methodology, which is indicative of the increasingly important role and position of museums in post-colonial society.

NEW ZEALAND

In many respects museums in New Zealand have developed in similar ways to those in Australia. They too, have been affected by factors such as the assertion of indigenous rights and immigration. Consequently, there have been similar changes to New Zealand historiography, in terms of the introduction of new histories such as those of women and the working-classes, while the introduction of oral histories and technology in New

\textsuperscript{135} Heritage Collections Working Group, \textit{Heritage Collections}, p.31.
Zealand museums has been as widespread as elsewhere around the world. Similar tensions have arisen as a result. Like Australia, for example, as museums in New Zealand have moved to become more accessible and entertaining to the public they have generated controversy over their traditional function of research and scholarship. As Rosanne Livingstone has described, the increasing public role of museums has created an ‘intellectual crisis’ that has resulted in museums being uncertain of their current and future role in society.136

On account of these similarities, despite following the same format as the Australian discussion, this section does not enter into detailed examination of these particular developments in New Zealand. Instead, greater attention is directed towards the evolution of biculturalism in New Zealand, the factor which has had a unique effect on both New Zealand’s museum community and society as a whole, and which continues to cause significant problems within representations of the nation.

**Government Policy**

Since the 1970s, governments in New Zealand, as in Australia, have put increasing emphasis on the arts, heritage and museums within society. This was partly the result of a new concept of cultural policy which began to be promoted around the world, with a ‘goal of national and community cultural development’; a concept that included the representation of a wider variety of forms of expression, including popular culture and the cultures of different ethnic groups.137 Other factors that began to affect New Zealand governments were the renewed legal force given to the Treaty of Waitangi from the mid-1970s, forcing recognition of Maori cultures, and the continuing increase in the number of museums in New Zealand.138

---

138 For example, in 1974, Dr. J.C. Yaldwyn listed 117 museums that had been established or proposed since 1970. Discussed in *AGMANZ News*, vol. 6, no. 1, February 1975, p.19. The 1975 Pigott Report in Australia most probably also had an effect on New Zealand museums. Many of the issues raised by the report, such as the growing interest in post-European settlement history and the need to treat the indigenous populations as part of the human history of the country rather than as anthropology, have direct relevance for New Zealand as well as Australia.
The beginning of this government commitment towards the arts is perhaps marked by the establishment of the Cultural Affairs ministerial portfolio within the Department of Internal Affairs in 1975, an important ‘commitment on the part of the government to the maintenance of New Zealand’s cultural heritage’.139 The Art Galleries and Museums Scheme had been established in 1974 to assist museums around the country,140 and this was soon followed by extensive restructuring of the Arts Council, which saw the establishment of Regional Art Councils as well as the Maori and South Pacific Arts Council in 1978.141 Also in 1975, the Antiquities Act was passed, placing a ‘great deal of responsibility with New Zealand’s public museums to control the collecting and sale of artefacts and antiquities’, as well as establishing a national register of artefacts to be maintained by the National Museum.142 It also introduced new measures controlling the sale of Maori artefacts.143

This government commitment has continued, an influential factor being the greater acknowledgement of the role of Maori culture in society, with the reaffirmation of the Treaty of Waitangi and particularly the widening of the concept of ‘taonga’.144 Previously seen to include just ‘ancient’ artefacts, the rejection of assimilationist ideas during the 1970s recognised that ‘taonga’ also included cultural practices, the Maori language, as well as contemporary and traditional Maori arts. As a result, Maori artists and writers began to lobby the government to extend its support of the arts, and this was given further impetus by the ‘Te Maori’ exhibition in the mid-1980s. Discussed later, ‘Te Maori’ had a vital influence on the policies and protocol of many institutions. As Oliver Riddell described in 1986, after ‘Te Maori’ the government set its face against ‘monoculturalism’ in museums, wanting ‘to preside over an area of emerging national self-consciousness’.145

141 Ministry for Culture and Heritage, *Government’s Role*, para.15. The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand had been formed in 1963.
144 Referred to in Article 2 of the Treaty.
145 O. Riddell, ‘Museums move to cash in on Te Maori boom’, *The Press* (Christchurch), 22nd August 1986.
Many of the government initiatives towards the arts have consequently been based around biculturalism and Maori cultural development. Legislation, for example, such as the establishment of the Maori Language Commission and the decision to adopt Maori as an official language by the Maori Language Act 1987, and the establishment of the Department of Conservation by the Conservation Act 1987. In 1985, the Government appointed a Project Development Team to develop a proposal for a Pacific Cultural Centre, which would include the National Museum and the National Art Gallery. Although for various reasons the Centre was never founded, the Treasures of the Nation report that was produced, highlighted this bicultural nature of New Zealand:

From the outset the Project Development Team recognised that any redeveloped National Museum system and its associated collections should be a unifying structure that would help to bring all of the cultures of New Zealand closer together. As a consequence, the Team’s deliberations, consultations and investigations were conducted on the basis of a full and equal partnership between the two main cultures of New Zealand.

The 1990s brought about a new wave of government initiatives associated with heritage and museums, beginning with the founding of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in 1990. Then, the Department of Internal Affairs, which had previously been responsible for administering cultural affairs, gave birth to a new department in 1991, that of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. As Christopher Blake has described, ‘the Ministry’s establishment was welcomed as providing overdue recognition of those activities known to government as “the cultural sector” and of their importance to New Zealand life’. In 1999, the Ministry was replaced by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, which included the functions of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs plus an

---

146 There is often some confusion as to how biculturalism is interpreted. In regards to museums, it is often seen as bringing Maori and non-Maori together as one. More specifically in terms of this discussion though, it is seen in terms of Maori participation, whereby Maori actively contribute to the services provided by the museum, as well as their general management and operation.

147 Project Development Team for the National Museum of New Zealand Te Marae Taonga o Aotearoa, Nga Taonga o Te Motu: Te Marae Taonga o Aotearoa – Treasures of the Nation: National Museum of New Zealand, a plan for development, Wellington, 1985, p.2. This report is discussed in more detail Chapter Five, which examines the National Museum.


expanded heritage mandate, and further enlarged in 2000 by the addition of the History and Heritage units from the Department of Internal Affairs.\(^{150}\)

The 1990s also saw the passing of a number of Acts which mean that New Zealand’s four major museums now operate under new government legislation. As well as the *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992*, these are the *Canterbury Museum Trust Board Act 1993*, the *Otago Museum Trust Board Act 1996*, and the *Auckland War Memorial Act 1996*. Significantly, each of these Acts recognise and provide for Maori consultation and input into museums and cultural heritage. Though this remains quite limited in some respects, it has had a significant impact on how the museums have developed over the last few years.\(^{151}\)

Despite these initiatives, there are considerable shortcomings in the government commitment to culture and heritage in New Zealand. For example, the actual control given to Maori through the four museum Acts continues to be limited in some respects, while for many years there has been a recognition of the need, but also a failure to review the legislation protecting taonga provided by the *Antiquities Act 1975*. Perhaps more significant is the failure of governments to produce a framework for cultural policy. While various Australian governments have actively tried to engage different cultural policies during the last twenty years, no New Zealand government has managed to produce a viable document, good or bad. One exception was in June 2000, when the Labour Government released a cultural strategy entitled *Heart of the Nation*, aiming ‘to nurture and sustain vibrant arts and cultural activities which all New Zealanders can enjoy and through which a strong and confident cultural identity can emerge’.\(^{152}\) However, *Heart of the Nation* has since dissolved, one reason being that it

---


\(^{152}\) Heart of the Nation Strategic Working Group, *The Heart of the Nation: a cultural strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand*, June 2000, p.11.
recommended giving special distinction to Maori heritage – a suggestion the
government completely rejected. Therefore, the large amounts of funding towards
heritage and the arts provided by recent governments, illustrated by the injection of
NZ$80 million in May 2000, is significantly balanced by an unwillingness to produce
coherent frameworks and policies.

Professional Development

Nevertheless, government involvement and funding has meant, as in Australia, that
museums in New Zealand have been forced to reassess their functions and practices. In
part, this can be illustrated by the strict structures provided by the Museum Acts
mentioned above, and under which the four main museums now operate. This
professional development, however, extends throughout the museum community in
New Zealand.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the gradual evolution of the museums association in
New Zealand. The Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand
(AGMANZ) was formed in July 1947, to ‘raise the standard of service given by art
galleries and museums in their respective spheres’. Yet it was not until the late 1960s
that these standards significantly began to improve.153 This is possibly marked by the
advent of AGMANZ News in 1968, a new quarterly publication by the Association.154
AGMANZ News brought with it a professional format and began to discuss broad and
important issues concerning the museum profession in New Zealand.155 An illustration
of this improved organisation was a proposal presented to the Prime Minister for capital
subsidy by an AGMANZ delegation in 1971.156

It was not until the late 1970s, that serious efforts began to be made to develop nation-
wide guidelines. Indeed, its President went as far to declare that AGMANZ was ‘in
crisis’ in 1976, due to the withdrawal of financial support from the Arts Council for

154 This was preceded by the bi-monthly AGMANZ Newsletter, usually consisting of news from the major
museums in New Zealand and the occasional paper discussing global museum issues. Little contact
existed between museums and even less co-operative discussion over the how to further the profession.
155 AGMANZ News became the AGMANZ Journal in December 1984, and then the New Zealand
156 G.C. Docking, ‘AGMANZ Delegation to the Prime Minister regarding proposed Capital Subsidy
both AGMANZ News and the Secretariat.\textsuperscript{157} Nevertheless, it was acknowledged in 1977 that the Association was an important component within New Zealand’s museum community, and that AGMANZ ‘can take some credit for the remarkable resurgence of public interest in a revived and transformed museum movement’.\textsuperscript{158}

After this, AGMANZ began developing new schemes and guidelines for museums at a relatively rapid rate. In terms of policies, for instance, the first was an Overseas Purchase Policy for Maori collections in March 1978.\textsuperscript{159} This was followed by the publication of an Art Gallery and Museum Officers’ Code of Ethics, with the primary purpose of providing ‘accepted criteria against which a specific situation or procedure can be measured when a question as to its adequacy has been raised’.\textsuperscript{160} In the 1980s, AGMANZ also began to set up Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to provide narrower focus on specialist topics. By 1980, both a Museum Anthropologists Group (MAG) and an Education Committee had been set up, before the Museum Education Officers Association of New Zealand was formed separately in 1981.\textsuperscript{161} In 1984, the first Museum History Curators Group was launched, aimed ‘at members of AGMANZ who are professionally concerned with the curation of human history collections’.\textsuperscript{162} The AGMANZ Committee on Maori Collections was also established in 1984, with one of its main tasks being to re-evaluate ‘the aims and objectives of New Zealand museums in making and keeping collections of taonga Maori’.\textsuperscript{163} Significantly, it also agreed upon ‘the need for consultation’ and ‘the need to give support to the living Maori culture’. This was one of the first official acknowledgements within the profession of the changing role of the Maori in museums.\textsuperscript{164}

One longstanding problem, which AGMANZ began to rectify, was the lack of professional museum training evident in New Zealand. In 1979, \textit{AGMANZ News}

published an outline for a possible structure for a diploma in museology, and in the same year, AGMANZ began a series of national workshops, designed as a forerunner to the formal establishment of a degree or diploma course. A formal university or college-based course was not established for several years, but in 1980, AGMANZ created its own Diploma in Museum Studies taught through a series of workshops, correspondence and museum experience. Finally, in 1989, the Museum Studies Programme in the Social Sciences Faculty at Massey University, Palmerston North, was established, with the support of the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board.

In line with this professional development, and aided substantially by bicultural developments taking place in New Zealand generally, AGMANZ went through extensive restructuring in 1991. This included a change of name to ‘The Museums Association of Aotearoa New Zealand Inc. – Te Ropu Hanga Kaupapa Taonga’, and a transfer of the editorship of the *New Zealand Museums Journal*, as it was now called, to the Department of Museum Studies at Massey University. The Association’s new statement of purpose read: ‘The Museums Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (MAANZ) … is the national body dedicated to the advancement of New Zealand museums and their work towards the care and appreciation of cultural and natural heritage.’

The most significant aspect of this restructuring was the shift towards biculturalism. Following the general move towards the recognition of Maori rights, and given impetus by the ‘Te Maori’ exhibition, the new bicultural name for the Association had been proposed as early as 1989. Mina McKenzie, the first Maori woman President of the Association, perhaps best describes why it took another two years for the name to be formally adopted. She spoke in 1990 of ‘the fashion for adopting Maori names and a gloss of the Maori rituals of encounter in our museums’, as being ‘tokenism rather than a genuine attempt to implement a marae type management style’. Nevertheless, the

---

166 D. Butts, ‘The Graduate Diploma in Museum Studies, Massey University 1989-1991’, *New Zealand Museums Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1, Summer 1991, p.18. At first a Graduate Diploma was only available. A Masters Degree was added to the programme in 1992. For many years the courses at Massey remained the only formal museological qualifications available in New Zealand.
refocusing of the Association’s structure and services in 1991 did show movement
towards a bicultural commitment. For example, one of the main features of the new
constitution, other than the incorporation of a Maori name, was the election of an equal
number of Maori members to MAANZ’s Council. 169 This led to a new era of co-
operation between museums and Maori, and an increase in Maori employed in
museums. It also saw a major collaboration of Maori and Pakeha museum workers over
a new Code of Ethics and Guide to Professional Practice, finally published in 1994,
stating that ‘The Association and its members are guided by the principle of partnership
established by the Treaty of Waitangi Te Tiriti o Waitangi in all museum work’. 170

During the 1990s, however, MAANZ began to come under increasing pressure and its
influence deteriorated, at least in terms of collaboration and the exchange of views,
illustrated by the cessation of the New Zealand Museums Journal in 1997. This was
partly due to conflict with the Museum Directors Federation, an organisation that had
become generally elitist, consisting of only a very limited number of the larger
museums and art galleries, and who looked for their salvation towards MAANZ and the
museum community as a whole. Consequently, in the late 1990s, MAANZ became
largely non-functional. Very recently, however, there has been a marked improvement
in the structure of a national museum service in New Zealand, with both the continued
development of Te Papa National Services, which is discussed below, and the
emergence of another professional organisation: Museums Aotearoa. Bringing together
both MAANZ and the Directors’ Federation, Museums Aotearoa claims to be: ‘An
organisation working at the forefront of advancing museums and museum professionals,
and their contribution to the social, cultural and economic growth of Aotearoa New
Zealand.’ 171 The Directors Federation subsequently ceased to exist and the Museums
Association finally became defunct in February 2001. 172

170 Museums Association of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Ropu Hanga Kaupapa Taonga Inc. (MAANZ),
Code of Ethics and Guide to Professional Practice: For Governing Bodies of Museums and Museum
172 Museums Aotearoa produces regular conferences, of which four were planned for 2001, and a
monthly publication, Museum News, which compiles articles relevant to museums from newspapers and
magazines around the country. Thanks to Wayne Marriott, General Manager of Museums Aotearoa, for
clarifying some of the issues surrounding the museum associations in New Zealand in recent years.
Largely due to this reorganisation, the main thrust towards professional development during the 1990s originated from the National Services of the new Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). The *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992* stated that one of Te Papa’s twelve functions was, ‘to co-operate with and assist other New Zealand museums in establishing a national service, and in providing appropriate support to other institutions and organisations holding objects or collections of national importance’. Accordingly it set about delivering museum services all over New Zealand by various means, such as public programmes, an exhibition touring agency, and financial support for the care and development of collections. A recent example of these efforts was the publication of a report in 1999, outlining a possible New Zealand museum standards scheme. Amongst various conclusions, it acknowledged that at present ‘the concept of standards for museums is unfamiliar in New Zealand’, and also stressed: ‘A New Zealand museums standard scheme which established basic standards of practice would benefit the country’s heritage collections, museums’ organisational health, public confidence and the professional development of paid staff and volunteers.’

There have therefore clearly been moves towards the professional development of the museum sector in New Zealand. Of course, alongside these developments, individual museums have also begun to standardise their practices. This can be seen by the publication of new policies, such as a collection policy by the Waikato Art Museum in 1976, which put its emphasis on collecting items of New Zealand origin. Another example is that of the Auckland Museum, which published a new collection policy in

---

174 S. Park, ‘The “National Services” of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa’, *New Zealand Museums Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, Summer 1992, pp.19-20. Also see D. Butts, ‘National Services and Objects and Collections of National Importance’, *New Zealand Museums Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1, Winter 1993, pp.25-26. The meaning and role of Te Papa’s national services has shifted in recent years to focus more on training, developing a museum standards scheme, bicultural development and marketing. For more on this see Te Papa’s website, www.tepapa.govt.nz
1990, replacing the only previously published policy that had existed since the museum’s foundation in 1852.\textsuperscript{177}

The clearest evidence of the development of the actual museums is through the emergence of new museological methods. Like Australia, museums in New Zealand have had to reassess their conventional methods in the face of emerging new histories, the increasing need for museums to be competitive with other attractions, and developing visitor expectations. As in Australia, these changes in presentation are most clearly seen in the moves towards opening the objects up for the public’s own interpretation and actively involving the visitor in the display, particularly through the use of oral histories and technology. For example, the Manawatu Museum Oral History Pilot Programme was put in place as early as 1979. Discussing the programme, David Butts described how ‘museums can utilise memories and experiences to create pictures of the past’.\textsuperscript{178} A New Zealand Oral History Archive was proposed in 1982, and the National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ) was founded in 1987.\textsuperscript{179}

The use of oral histories and new technology can clearly be seen, especially in new or recently renovated museums, while major museums will now always conduct extensive consultation with relevant communities when designing new exhibitions. The Treaty of Waitangi Exhibition at Te Papa, for example, shows continuous film of people from various backgrounds discussing their different perspectives on the Treaty. Similarly, the new City Gallery which emerged from a recent NZ$43 million refurbishment of the Auckland Museum, contains many examples of these relatively new methods and is a good example of how new technologies can be utilised while still giving value and importance to the object. Discussing the philosophy behind the refurbishment, Director Rodney Wilson has stated:

\begin{quote}
The first and most persuasive tenet of our interpretation was that Auckland Museum would be ‘collections rich’ in its new displays. The collections would be to the fore, and whilst we would willingly harness new media and new display technologies to interpret
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{177} Auckland Institute and Museum, \textit{Auckland Institute and Museum Collection Policy}, Auckland, 1990.


and present objects, at the end of the day the primacy of the object was to be preserved, and the intimacy of each visitor’s interaction with that object was to be respected.\textsuperscript{180}

There is still much to do in New Zealand, especially in terms of developing policies that reflect interest groups other than the Maori, and in the greater employment of Maori as professional staff.\textsuperscript{181} Debates and conflicts similar to those in Australia have also arisen in New Zealand, particularly in relation to the increased use of technology and the perceived emphasis on entertainment to the detriment of education. Such debates have been especially pronounced in regards to Te Papa, as will be evident in Chapter Six. Despite this controversy, it can broadly be said that both individual museums and the museum community as a whole have gradually reassessed their functions and practices, and have become more professional and more representative of their communities. Roxanne Fea and Elizabeth Pishief have aptly described this growing professionalism in regards to the Hawke’s Bay Museum which, while a small museum, is illustrative of the general museum developments in New Zealand:

This can be seen in the staffing arrangements, the way the exhibitions were displayed, collection policy and management, and the subtle but insidious change in the community’s involvement with the Art Gallery and Museum. … Rampant inflation and the developing professionalism within the museum community were affecting the budgets of many institutions and the Hawke’s Bay Museum was no exception.\textsuperscript{182}

‘New’ Histories and the Response of Museums

As in Australia, one cause of this professional development and increased government commitment to the arts in New Zealand has been the emergence of new histories previously excluded from museums, and the growing calls for their fair and equal representation. Some of these histories, such as those of women, ethnic groups and the working-class, have emerged in a similar fashion to Australia, albeit to a lesser extent. The exception is Maori history and culture. Particularly since the mid-1980s, Maori people have begun to achieve greater control over and more involvement in their

\textsuperscript{180} Unpublished paper by Rodney Wilson, 2000, no title, discussing the differences between the development of Te Papa and the redevelopment of Auckland Museum, p.3. Thanks to Rodney Wilson for providing this author with a copy.

\textsuperscript{181} Te Papa can be praised in this, with Maori staff in most areas of the museum, including at senior level.

histories and cultures. Aided by bicultural policies, this is the single largest factor to affect museums in New Zealand. As biculturalism is a condition that is politically and culturally different from that in Australia it should be examined in some detail.

**Maori History and Biculturalism**

As discussed in the previous chapter, Maori cultural treasures and human remains have been present and even dominated New Zealand’s major museums since their establishment. However, these were dealt with and controlled by Pakeha curators, and so the story that Maori displays told was generally a story of how Maori were, told by and for the Pakeha of today. The Maori were not treated as a living culture and their artefacts and remains were collected and displayed in the same scientific taxonomic manner as other anthropological specimens. Museums were seen as appropriate places to study and store these ‘primitive’ cultures, and the question of ethical or moral considerations rarely arose. While many curators, dating back to Augustus Hamilton and Julius von Haast in the nineteenth century, did maintain relationships with Maori people, but as Gerard O’Regan has pointed out, the driving interest behind these relationships was ‘the fulfilling of anthropological agenda’. In particular, the story of how the Maori had struggled and survived since European settlement was generally ignored. Roger Neich described the situation concerning Maori history, which existed to some extent even in 1985:

> Museums have always been very coy about dealing with 19th century and 20th century Maori history. … Maori displays are set in a timeless ethnographic present. Many museums have walk-through colonial European streets – where are the honest walk-through 19th century Maori villages? Where is the 19th century Maori social history, the evidence of the struggle for Maori cultural and even physical survival in the later 19th century?

Since the 1970s these practices have been rigorously challenged, and today there is a general awareness of the important value and role that Maori heritage and identity has, both in museums and New Zealand society at large. The main impetus for these changes

---

in attitudes was the large urban migration by the Maori since the Second World War, described in Chapter One, which led to a heightened consciousness of Maori identity. Consequently, Maori people began to campaign for better rights and land, as well as for control over their language and culture.

Such activism led to a number of important political and cultural gains. In 1975, for example, the Treaty of Waitangi Act was passed, repositioning the Treaty as New Zealand’s founding document. This effectively launched biculturalism as the official policy in New Zealand, though it was not until the 1980s that the Maori social and political position made significant advances. As Stephen O’Regan commented in 1994: ‘The presence of Maori culture, history, and language in New Zealand’s cultural life has been enormously enhanced over the past few decades, fuelled by a burgeoning Maori population increasingly confident of itself and its direction.’

Not surprisingly, as the principal institutions that had collected, stored and appropriated Maori heritage and cultural artefacts, museums increasingly found themselves under critical scrutiny over their control of this Maori culture. There was growing pressure that Maoris themselves should interpret their own culture, or at the very least be involved in the process. Awareness of this, and a realisation of the value of the objects they held to a living culture, can be seen in museum society from the late 1970s. In 1979, AGMANZ set up an Emergency Action Committee to handle urgent cases for Maori artefact retrieval from overseas, and the creation of the AGMANZ Maori Curator’s Fellowship in 1981 acknowledged that in order to keep pace with changes in society, the employment of Maoris in senior museum and gallery positions was a ‘most important element in the growth and development of our institutions’.

---

186 Under the terms of the Act, the Waitangi Tribunal was then appointed in 1977, to adjudicate the claims of Maori against the Crown under the terms of the Treaty.
190 K. Gorbey, ‘The AGMANZ Maori Curator’s Fellowship’, AGMANZ News, vol. 13, no. 1, March 1982, p.15. Another example is in 1978, when the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts mounted an exhibition of traditional Maori art from the collections of the National Museum. This was an early recognition of Maori artefacts being objects of art in their own right. Traditionally, art galleries did not
It was the mid-1980s, however, that marked the beginnings of significant change for museums in New Zealand, especially in regards to the Maori population. The single biggest catalyst for this was the ‘Te Maori’ exhibition that toured the United States between 1984 and 1986, and its subsequent tour of New Zealand, ‘Te Maori: Te Hokinga Mai (The Homecoming)’. ‘Te Maori’ proved to museums in New Zealand that the ‘interpretation of the “culture” of a country needs to be something more than a lifeless collection of dusty artefacts’.

Consisting of taonga that were assembled from thirteen different museums, representing the heritage of different tribes in New Zealand, ‘Te Maori’ opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York in September 1984. The significance of ‘Te Maori’ for New Zealand’s museums was two-fold: through the involvement of Maori in shaping the exhibition, and through what it signified for both Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders.

The exhibition had been conceived in the mid-1970s, but it was not until around 1980 that plans began to take a definite shape. Maori people gave support, as part of their own resurgent interest in their heritage. Consequently, Maoris were involved in ‘Te Maori’ from early in the planning process. At the first meeting between American and New Zealand representatives in December 1979, ‘it was agreed that regardless of the legal ownership or physical possession, no work could be included unless its spiritual owners – the people from whom it came – agreed’. By the time the exhibition opened, this had been extended so that the objects to be displayed were accompanied by their descendants, as the Maori had agreed to the exhibition on the condition that they could perform a ritual greeting for the sacred objects on their arrival at the museum in

---

consider Maori artefacts to be of sufficient quality to be regarded as art, displaying only a few well-known contemporary Maori names. See R. Neich, ‘A Survey of Visitor Attitudes to a Maori Art Exhibition’, *AGMANZ News*, vol. 11, no. 2, May 1980, p.6.


192 It has been suggested by Paora Tapsell, that amidst growing political uncertainty and Native American protest over the continued display of their cultural objects without consultation, the invitation to the New Zealand government to send a Maori art exhibition to tour the United States was based on the perception that Maori people were non-threatening in contrast. See P. Tapsell, ‘Taonga and Obligations of Reciprocity’, *New Zealand Museums Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1995, p.31.

193 ‘Te Maori’ would never have come about if there had not been existing relationships between Maori communities and various academics and institutions – discussed in the previous chapter.

New York.\(^{195}\) At the same time, acknowledgement was made both of the Maori involvement with the exhibition and of the struggles that they had faced during their history. Discussing Maori art for example, Professor Sidney Mead, one of the exhibition’s organisers, described in the exhibition catalogue how ‘Maori art has been repudiated, rejected, vandalised, neglected, hidden and abused by Maori and white man alike’.\(^{196}\)

Maori participation in the return tour of the exhibition to four major New Zealand museums was even more prominent. Maori protocol was observed at each opening and closing ceremony, guides were drawn from each Maori community, and there were cultural performances by local Maori groups at all the different venues. In this way, ‘Te Maori’ showed that new partnerships could be formed between museums and communities.

There were two aspects of ‘Te Maori’ that could be criticised. The first was that, despite the heavy involvement of Maori people with the exhibition, it was still Pakeha curators who selected the objects for display, according to their own academic or aesthetic criteria.\(^{197}\) The significance of the objects, in terms of their meanings for the Maori, was not considered. The second criticism was that almost all of the taonga displayed dated from before 1860 – there were no contemporary works of art to explain the progress and struggle the Maori people had undergone during the last century and a half. As Bernard Kernot questioned, perhaps the organisers felt the American public could relate easier to a romanticised past than a less comfortable present: ‘After all “Te Maori” in the United States must have raised questions for Americans about Indian art traditions’.\(^{198}\)

Despite such criticism, ‘Te Maori’ had an impact on both New Zealand museums and society that should not be understated. As Philippa Jane Butler has explained, it has become ‘a pivotal point in New Zealand’s history’: ‘Boundaries between Maori and Pakeha have been lowered by Te Maori, and movement is occurring between Maori and


\(^{198}\) Kernot, ‘Te Maori…’, p.4.
The exhibition had different meanings for both Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders. For the Pakeha population, ‘Te Maori’ began to test long-held prejudices against the Maori. It demonstrated, for example, that Maori taonga was more akin to ‘art’ than ‘artefacts’. Before this, art in New Zealand was almost entirely Western, with Maori objects either seen as ethnology in museums or contemporary forms being likened to ‘crafts’, generally reserved for the tourist industry. The success of the exhibition both in the United States and New Zealand, showed that Maori art was able to achieve prominence in international circles. This, combined with the dramatic cultural performances that visitors were confronted with at each venue, added to the growing awareness of the rich heritage and living cultural life of the Maori, and its contribution to New Zealand identity.

For Maori, the exhibition marked a chance to be re-united with the works of their ancestors for the first time. Ancestral objects carry the spiritual bonds of Maori identity, and contact with these objects again through ‘Te Maori’ greatly increased Maori awareness of their heritage, awakening a strong sense of identity and strengthening links with the past. Arapata Hakiwai has explained the deep meaning of ‘Te Maori’:

This exhibition was unique and special, because for the first time in New Zealand’s history the Maori people were, in large part, in control of their artistic heritage. It was a momentous and historic occasion when our ancestors, as represented by these treasures, were freed from their dark and cold resting-places in the galleries and basements of our museums to experience, once again, the light of day.

In particular, it gave impetus to the Maori social, political and cultural renaissance that had been growing in the previous two decades, raising confidence and self-esteem. As Sidney Mead described in 1986, ‘our space in the world has expanded, our vision has risen and our understanding about ourselves has grown.’ By proclaiming tradition,
‘Te Maori’ became both a vehicle of pride for Maori people, and a powerful symbol of Maori identity, and this can be seen in the following years, as the bicultural nature of New Zealand has grown from strength to strength. Broadly, the exhibition marked the beginnings of greater access for Maori to key cultural institutions and resources. The importance of this should not be downplayed. As Mason Durie has highlighted, access to cultural institutions and resources which nurture culture can be seen as a key determinant of Maori cultural identity in the twenty-first century.204

In many ways ‘Te Maori’ was an historical turning point for museums in New Zealand, or as characterised by Mina McKenzie, a member of the exhibition’s management committee, ‘the catalyst for change’.205 After the exhibition, as Maori began to pay more attention to their own cultural treasures, museums were clearly seen to not be representing the indigenous cultures as they should. ‘Te Maori’ illustrated to museums in New Zealand that the treasures they held were part of a present and living culture, and as such they could no longer be presented as lifeless ethnological artefacts, descriptive of an ancient primitive race. In 1986, Matti Wall compared the exhibition to traditional museum displays:

For a New Zealander it was nothing short of a revelation to see Maori art so stunningly displayed. It was light-years away from the memories of the inevitable class-trek through museums at home staring at objects of mainly historic interest, their beauty as works of art and their relevance to the Maori of today entirely unknown. … the exhibition represents a real challenge to New Zealand institutions to look anew at Maori art and its presentation here.206

The impact of ‘Te Maori’ was immediate. Moves began to be made by museums to employ more Maori curators, to build up links with local iwi (tribes), and to reinterpret displays in line with Maori protocol, so that they acted as facilitators in allowing the Maori people to tell their own story, rather than that interpreted by the museums.207

207 An early acknowledgement of this was by the National Museum in 1985. See National Museum Council, Report of the Trustees of the National Art Gallery, National Museum and National War Memorial for the year ending 31st March 1985, Wellington, 1985, p.23. This is discussed in Chapter Five.
In the years following ‘Te Maori’, museums have continued to advance paying considerable attention to developing along bicultural lines, led by the establishment of Te Papa as a bicultural institution. Other developments included the 1994 Code of Ethics, published by MAANZ, which amongst other relevant items, emphasised that in the preparation of exhibitions ‘steps should be taken to ensure that there is full consultation with iwi and people of other cultural backgrounds’.\(^{208}\)

Gerard O’Regan then produced a report in 1997, *Bicultural Developments in Museums in Aotearoa: what is the current status?*, which found that the pursuit of biculturalism had become a major item on the museological agenda, and recommended a series of regional hui (forums) to enhance dialogue between Maori and museums.\(^{209}\)

Most museums in New Zealand, which hold significant collections of Maori material, have also moved to be more representative of their Maori populations; redeveloping their galleries so that visitors can now gain a closer understanding of the original context from which the taonga came. By fully consulting with Maori communities, museums now present Maori treasure as the living cultural objects that they are, describing the meanings and spirituality behind them. One early example of this was by the Hawke’s Bay Museum in 1986, where the exhibition ‘Nga Tukemata, Nga Taonga o Ngati Kahungunu’ was designed to reflect the new national trends and ideas, and involved the local Maori at every stage.\(^{210}\) More recently in 1994, the Otago Settlers Museum, referred to in the past as a ‘tabernacle of Pakehaness’,\(^{211}\) completed the exhibition ‘Kai Tahu Whanui ki Otago’. Telling the story of Otago Maori in the years since European settlement, Séan Brosnahan describes:

> It was an indication of the new status of matters Maori in New Zealand life and the increasing political significance that history could have. It was also a further indication that the Otago Early Settler Association’s museum had left behind its exclusive

---


\(^{210}\) Fea & Pishief, *Culture of Collecting*, p.84. Also see Lindsay, ‘Confronting Partnership…’, p.152.

preoccupation with ‘Early Settlers’. The ‘earliest settlers’ now had an equal claim to its story-telling responsibilities.212

Bilingual labelling is also now a common feature throughout museums in New Zealand. The Otago Museum, which had to completely redevelop its Maori display halls after they were emptied to accommodate the touring ‘Te Maori’ in 1986-7, made sure all the labels were bilingual in the resulting ‘Tangata Whenua’ display, despite this being carried out by a predominantly Pakeha staff.213 Other evidence of this bilingual emphasis is the gradual inclusion of Maori names to describe both museums and galleries. Auckland Museum, for example, now publicises itself as Auckland Museum Te Papa Whakahiku, while in 1988 the National Museum added Maori names to each of its galleries.214

There is also a growing number of Maori people employed within museums, who have direct control and contact with their own taonga, while also assisting established curators with interpretations of taonga.215 This is especially clear in regards to Te Papa. While acknowledging that they remained a minority, Karen Mason remarked in 1994 that there were staff positions occupied by Maori at all levels of the museum and across most departments.216 Te Papa is somewhat an exception in this respect, however, as the employment of Maori as professional staff in museums in New Zealand has generally been slow, especially in the South Island.

The Auckland Museum, which contains the largest and most significant collection of Maori material in the world, is finally worth mentioning. ‘Te Maori’ prompted the Auckland Museum to establish a twice daily Maori cultural show, where a group called

Pounamu performed traditional songs, poi dances and war skills.\textsuperscript{217} Though unashamedly aimed at the tourist market, the show remains today one of the very few places in Auckland where it is possible to sample Maori culture. The museum has since grown along the lines discussed above, in terms of developing its exhibitions, nurturing links with local Maori communities, and increasing the representation of Maori on the Museum Council. As Mere Whaanga, the Manager of Iwi Values at the museum in 1996, explained, ‘the Maori collection here is the most significant in the world and the Museum Council realises there needs to be more of a Maori voice and more Maori focus – true biculturalism’.\textsuperscript{218} As a result, the outcome of the NZ$43 million refurbishment in the late 1990s saw Maori galleries with 70 per cent more taonga than previously exhibited, with the displays allowing the Maori to tell their own story.\textsuperscript{219} This shift towards representing the Maori story can also be seen in the refurbished natural history galleries. Alongside galleries telling the traditional story of New Zealand’s environment and the impact of human settlement, is one that describes the blend of spirituality and knowledge that shaped the Maori people’s relationship with the land.\textsuperscript{220}

Since the 1980s therefore, museums in New Zealand have developed in their treatment of both the Maori objects in their collections and their relationships with Maori people. However, there have been various difficulties associated with these moves. Of particular relevance to this thesis, is the criticism from some of the Pakeha population that museums are becoming too Maori-orientated at the expense of the majority non-indigenous population. In 1995, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki described Wellingtonians as being prone to say: ‘Oh, I never go to the Museum now. It’s been taken over by the Maoris.’\textsuperscript{221} Such criticism was particularly vocal during the planning stages for Te Papa in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{222} Alongside this Pakeha criticism, there are also Maori tribes that want museums to repatriate all their artefacts and the information associated with them so that they can decide what to do with them. They want to regain full control of their taonga and histories, and as Arapata Hakiwai discusses, some have advocated the

\textsuperscript{217} P. Allison, ‘Skeletons in the Closet’, \textit{Metro}, vol. 8, no. 88, October 1988, p.166.
\textsuperscript{218} Quoted by P. Carroll, ‘Managing vital values’, \textit{New Zealand Herald}, 6\textsuperscript{th} January 1996.
\textsuperscript{219} D. Diaz, ‘Museum Piece’, \textit{New Zealand Listener}, vol. 172, no. 3117, 5\textsuperscript{th} February 2000, p.36.
\textsuperscript{220} ‘Remodelling a museum’, \textit{Northern Advocate}, 4\textsuperscript{th} March 2000.
\textsuperscript{221} Mane-Wheoki, ‘Beyond objects…’., p.19.
\textsuperscript{222} See, for example, ‘Museum runs off the rails’, \textit{The Dominion}, 13\textsuperscript{th} March 1996, p.8. This is discussed more fully in Chapter Six.
establishment of ‘tribal museums’ where ‘their own descendants can see, experience and learn about their past and future accomplishments’. These can be deemed ‘sites of resistance’, like the Aboriginal keeping places and cultural centres discussed earlier.

Despite this criticism, the established museums, due to their experience in preservation, can generally be regarded as the best place for Maori history and culture to be represented. Yet, many Maori historians continue to question the extent and especially the way museums control and interpret Maori culture. As Maori anthropologist and curator Paul Tapsell has emphasised, despite the situation improving in recent years, there is much museums could still do to improve understandings of Maori culture and heritage, especially in improving relationships with Maori and taking their taonga beyond the four walls of the museum. The 1997 report into bicultural developments in museums, also found that many Maori museum staff still saw them as Pakeha-centric organisations, culturally insensitive, and often perceived museums ‘to be institutionally racist in the slowness of their approach to providing for Maori interests’.

The report also found, despite the growing number of Maori employed in museums, that with the exception of Te Papa and the Auckland Museum, Maori were not usually the staff responsible for the management or presentation of taonga, while the levels of commitment towards Maori representation in general was related to the size of their holdings. This is perhaps not surprising, and indeed Mark Lindsay pointed out in 1989 that representation, especially in terms of decision-making power, should reflect not the New Zealand population of Maori, ‘but the relative importance that Maori objects have, in qualitative and quantitative terms, in museum collections’. Museum Councils and Boards of Trustees with equal or adequate membership would help ensure that bicultural considerations flowed through each level of the museum. In this, museums have a way to go in providing equal representation. An exception is the Gisborne Museum, a small museum in the Hawke’s Bay region, which now has more Maori than

---

226 Lindsay, ‘Confronting partnership…’, p.152.
Pakeha on its board. As Director Mike Spedding has said, ‘This is the only museum in the country that comes close to that degree of biculturalism in its governance’.  

**Other ‘Histories’**

Museums in New Zealand, therefore, have made significant steps towards incorporating Maori history and allowing Maori self-representation. There has also been a growing interest in New Zealand in areas such as contemporary history, popular histories, minority and oral histories. Gradually, as traditional national identities have been challenged, as different groups have become more assertive over writing and controlling their own histories, and as museums have begun to fully embrace their own role in the formation of identities, the need to be representative of all of society has slowly become accepted. As Jock Phillips has described: ‘Any historian today wishing to explore national identities must go beyond these fields of interest, and confront Maori history, women’s history and the popular culture of New Zealanders in the twentieth century’.  

‘New’ social histories such as those of women, ethnic groups and the working-class, have emerged in New Zealand historiography in a similar manner to those in Australia, and ultimately put pressure on institutions such as universities and museums that have traditionally neglected them. Their impact upon museums in New Zealand, however, has been to a much lesser extent than in Australia. In many respects, the positive nature of ‘Te Maori’, and its effect on the treatment of Maori history, is offset by the continued absence and lack of change in regards to women’s, ethnic and contemporary histories; illustrated in part by the scarcity of policies addressing such histories.  

It is worth highlighting a few of the ways museums in New Zealand have responded to such histories. In terms of the representation of New Zealand’s different ethnic groups, James Mack stated in 1985, whilst discussing the proposal for a Pacific Cultural Centre, that while first and foremost place must be given to Maori culture ‘all other cultures

---

229 As late as 1985 for example, the director’s report of the Auckland Museum had no mention of history, and the ‘Centennial Street’ exhibition remained the only gallery to focus on post-European settlement human history. See G.S. Park, *Auckland Institute and Museum, Director’s Report: For presentation to Council 20th November, 1985*, Auckland, 1985.
dominant in Aotearoa must be represented by the best available examples’. Since then various projects and exhibitions have been initiated, usually of a temporary nature, in an attempt to reflect the diverse nature of society. Most major museums also now make their temporary exhibition space available for community exhibitions, either to be created by the groups themselves or by museum staff relying on consultation.

The two major museums of Auckland and Wellington also now have permanent galleries focused largely around immigration and the development of multicultural society in New Zealand. Amongst the Pakeha history exhibitions at Te Papa, ‘Passports’ tells the general story of non-Maori immigration, while the City Gallery at the Auckland Museum focuses on the continual migration of people into Auckland since European settlement, including that of Pacific Islanders. Pacific Islanders have recently begun to gain greater control of their cultural artefacts, in the same way Maori did in the mid-1980s. Te Papa, where there is a large Pacific Island gallery called Mana Pasifica, in which the Islander’s own interpretations and meanings of their histories and culture are represented, has again led this. This greater representation is indicative of the growing move to position New Zealand as a Pacific nation, discussed in Chapter One.

Women’s history has also slowly found a place in museums. In early 1993, for example, the ‘Voices’ exhibition was opened at the Museum of New Zealand, as the first significant attempt to display an inclusive account of national history. Named for its emphasis on sound and recorded commentary, it emphasised Maori and environmental history, and represented events from women’s experiences and perspectives. The exhibition, explored in Chapter Six, attracted a great deal of criticism both for overemphasising Maori influence to the detriment of Pakeha, and for largely ignoring men. Noted academic Nicholas Thomas has described one journalist at the time observing, ‘that you could leave the exhibition with the sense that men had played

---

231 Petone Settlers Museum, for instance, developed a programme in 1993 through which different community groups, such as the Greeks and Italians, could create their own exhibitions in the museum. See F. Cameron, ‘Pathways to access: the relationship between communities and social history programmes in museums’, New Zealand Museums Journal, vol. 24, no. 1, Summer 1994, p.14.
232 Te Papa, for example, has a major temporary community gallery. On opening in 1998 this focused on the Chinese community in New Zealand, before changing to the Dutch community in 2000.
233 As early as 1975, the Waikato Art Museum mounted an exhibition, ‘Women’s Suffrage in New Zealand’, though while it was originally conceived to cover the development of women’s movements, the end result concentrated just on the nineteenth-century achievement of gaining the vote. See K. Gorbey, ‘Four historical exhibitions’, AGMANZ News, vol. 6, no. 4, November 1975, p.70.
no part at all in the Second World War’, in doing so belittling the accomplishments of those who fought.\textsuperscript{234} The exhibition nevertheless provided impetus for women’s history, and in most recently constructed exhibitions, women’s experiences and perspectives can be found to be represented equally, or at least alongside those of men.

Similarly, the history of New Zealand since European settlement has gradually become a more respected discipline in museums in its own right. It is now rare for any general museum not to have some kind of department dealing with New Zealand history, while the traditional historical collections which were occasionally displayed, such as European furniture, are now often relegated either to storage or loans. It can be said that once the realisation of the importance of the museum in representing the history of its own country took hold, New Zealand generally adapted more rapidly than Australia, perhaps due to the habit of some New Zealand museums collecting early colonial history from the beginning of the twentieth century. Twentieth-century history, working-class and everyday history, in other words those histories that can be considered as most representative of the entire nation, have also slowly gained a foothold in New Zealand museums. A simple example is the Otago Settler’s Museum, as it moves away from concentrating on ‘early’ European settlers, extending its brief to include settlers up to the present day as well as the ‘earliest’ settlers, the Maori.\textsuperscript{235} The City Gallery at the Auckland Museum too, concentrates in part on the development of industry and its impact on everyday city life, while another exhibition ‘Wild Child’, examines the history of childhood in New Zealand up to the present day – another aspect of history which has traditionally been neglected in museums.

**Summary**

There is a growing interest in different areas of history and, as Fiona Cameron has described, this is coupled with the desire to become ‘more community inclusive and focused through the exploration of “ordinary” people’.\textsuperscript{236} The process towards the inclusion of these new histories, however, has been a slow one, and museums in general still do not see the representation of these types of history as one of their primary roles.

\textsuperscript{235} Brosnahan, *To Fame Undying*, p.92.
\textsuperscript{236} Cameron, ‘Pathways to access…’, p.14.
As highlighted, the significant changes to New Zealand museums have been through a re-evaluation of the value and presentation of Maori history and culture. This continues to dominate, with many museums treating the representation of other New Zealand human history as a lower priority. Women’s, ethnic and contemporary histories in particular, still have some way to go before gaining adequate representation. Pakeha historical displays at the Canterbury Museum, for example, are still limited to a walk-through colonial Christchurch street and an exhibition looking at the development of transport. Describing the general situation, Rodney Wilson has stated that ‘definitely in the last 20 years, or more specifically the last 10 to 15, museums have become more attentive to collecting historical material, social historical material, but even then I don’t think we are doing it as well as we should’.

CONCLUSION

Museums in both Australia and New Zealand now at least acknowledge the need for the inclusion of the different types of history that constitute the societies which they represent. It is apparent however, as museums have gradually responded to the ever widening historical consciousness and political dimensions in society, and begun implementing these new practices of museology and interpretation, that considerable debate and conflict has arisen within the museum communities of both countries. In many ways, this illustrates the growing prominence of history. Twenty years ago, debate over the representation of history would not find such a place as it does today, both in the public and political arena, illustrated in part by the increased government involvement already identified. These pressures also reflect the issues that have been identified in previous chapters, namely the complex nature of society in Australia and New Zealand, especially in the problems of balancing indigenous and settler populations, and the difficulties involved in defining a specific national identity for both nations at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Such debate and conflict is a necessary and desirable factor in modern museum society, as only by discussing different interpretations of the past can museums develop in order for people to explore satisfactorily what it means to be part of a society. They are also prevalent throughout the following discussion of the two national museums, and it will

---

237 Rodney Wilson, Personal Interview, 9th August 2000, Tape with the author.
become evident that only by exploring the many contested interpretations of history that exist can museums begin to be representative of their communities.

This chapter has provided an overview of the major developments surrounding museums in both Australia and New Zealand during the last few decades, showing that they have made significant steps towards becoming more professional and towards representing diverse histories and identities. There are checks and balances to all these developments, however, and it is clear that much remains to be done. In particular, there is a long way to go before various groups, especially those of immigrants and ‘ordinary’ Australian and New Zealanders, are adequately reflected in collections and exhibitions.

The national museums of each country, which significantly have opened at an important time in the museum history of their countries, can play an important part in rectifying this imbalance. As Robert Edwards suggested in 1991, ‘the National Museum of Australia has an opportunity to learn from 200 years of museology in Australia.’ 238 In particular, both the National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa have the potential to be people museums, which can explore Australia and New Zealand’s national history and identity by being representative of the everyday lives of people. Standing as national institutions supposedly representative of the entire nation, national museums can also clearly play an important role in the formation of identities. Indeed, when Te Papa opened in February 1998, it proclaimed itself to be a place for all New Zealanders, ‘a mirror on their lives, a place where their stories are told, a place to lose yourself and to find yourself’. 239 By exploring the development of new national museums such as Te Papa and the National Museum of Australia, it is possible to gain insight into the particular nature of these different societies, as well as an understanding of how different histories are now accepted and represented, in order to contribute to the formation of national identities.

PART TWO

The National Museums
CHAPTER FOUR

The Challenge of a National Museum for Australia,


The National Museum of Australia opened in Canberra in March 2001 to celebrate the Australian centenary of Federation. Billed as a national museum of social history, it is based on a tripartite concept inter-relating the long sweep of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, Australia’s history and society since European settlement in 1788, and the interaction of people with the environment. Conceived by a national inquiry into museums and national collections in 1975, and formally established by an act of parliament in 1980, for over twenty years the National Museum of Australia was constantly delayed and almost shelved completely, due to political manoeuvring, the economic climate and fierce debate over its site and ultimate form. It was not until 1998 that the Coalition Government finally committed funds to the construction of a national museum to celebrate Federation.

The new museum is rightly seen as a 1970s Whitlam Government initiative, and in particular the culmination of efforts by various successive governments and groups to bring Australian history to the forefront of national consciousness. As Tony Bennett has commented of the proposal to finally establish a museum in 1975, it was evidence of a clear commitment to the production of a ‘centrally co-ordinated national past’,¹ a commitment to situate the nation in its own past rather than one rooted to European histories, as illustrated by the emergence of ‘new’ histories in the 1960s and 1970s. More generally, it can also be seen as further evidence of the continuing evolution of museum theory and methodology. There had, however, been calls for a national museum in Australia for over a century, with varying degrees of success. Since the late nineteenth century, as the federation movement began to gain momentum, there have been a number of different proposals put forward for the establishment of an Australian national museum. Before this too, a number of museums were established in the Australian colonies that can be seen as proto-national in orientation, though as this

chapter shows these museums were more indicative of a desire to establish the individual colonies than to be representative of a comprehensive Australian ‘nation’. For over a century, the issue of a national museum in Australia has been one in dispute, and especially the form it might take.

This chapter examines the history of the National Museum, focusing on the different types of museums proposed, with particular emphasis on the discussion concerning the inclusion of the human history of Australia. Ian McShane has highlighted four distinct periods in which proposals for an Australian national museum have been in debate.² This author believes this can be widened to as many as seven periods, each reflecting the broad development of museums that has been identified in the previous two chapters. The first period is from around 1825 to 1860, when two museums that aspired to be national were established and another was proposed; broadly indicative of inter-colonial rivalry and the desire to illustrate the progress the colonies had made since European settlement. The second period is that from the late nineteenth century to about the First World War, as museums sought to endorse the federal movement, while the third, the inter-war period, saw three different proposals of zoology, ethnology and history put forward for a national museum, illustrating the changing functions gradually taking place in all major Australian museums. The fourth period is roughly between 1955 and 1970, when museums slowly began adjusting to the post-colonial era and the growing interest around the world in history, and proposals reflected this, including the first real proposal for a Museum of Social History. The fifth era includes the decade leading up to the ultimate establishment of the museum in 1980, while the sixth is between 1980 and 1998, a period when ill fate and disputes constantly hampered the museum’s development, representing the growing role of history and museums within the political and cultural life of the country. The final period takes us from 1998, when federal expenditure for the construction of the National Museum of Australia was finally approved, to its opening in 2001.

² I. McShane, ‘Building a National Museum of Australia: A History’, Public History Review, vol. 7, 1998, pp.75-88. The first of the four periods McShane explores is between 1820 and 1860, when museums were outlets for inter-colonial rivalry. He then moves to the latter half of the nineteenth century, as museums sought to support Federation, and then the inter-war years and the three proposals of zoology, ethnology and history. The final period he examines encompasses the years from around 1960 to the early 1990s, as museums and proposals for a national museum reflected the gradual adjustment to the post-colonial political and cultural era.
This chapter examines the first six of these periods, focusing on the developing nature and role of a national museum, as designs moved from national museums of natural history, to ethnology, and finally to that of history, and illustrating why it took Australia so long to establish a national museum. Museums in Australia had existed from the early nineteenth century, yet their focus for much of this time had been largely on natural history, science and technology, and to a certain extent, the indigenous populations. During the twentieth century, their emphasis slowly changed and this is reflected in the evolving and diverse views about the form of a national museum.

Colonial or National?

Between 1825 and 1860, there were three museum proposals which aspired to be national, all arising from the activities of Philosophical Societies. Two of these came to fruition: the Australian Museum that came into existence in 1827, and the National Museum of Victoria, which was established in 1853. Both were founded as colonial natural history museums, representative of the colony and the Empire. The use of *Australian* and *National* in museums at this time can be considered as proto-national in orientation.\(^3\) However, the term ‘national’ was not used the same way in colonial Australia as it is today, and so it is important to be aware that these early proposals had different motives to the others discussed in this chapter. Tim Bonyhady has discussed the use of ‘national’ in colonial Australia:

> Far from suggesting that these lands were significant for all Australians, ‘national’ indicated that they were of colonial importance, just as ‘national parks’ were ‘colonial parks’, ‘national galleries’ were colonial galleries, and *The National Game*, as Arthur Streeton titled one of his paintings of 1889, was the Victorian game.\(^4\)

By the time the National Museum of Victoria opened, the use of *Australian* and *National* was largely indicative of a desire to establish independent colonies of the empire, and can also be seen to symbolise a certain rivalry between New South Wales and Victoria, illustrated by the fact that the establishment of the National Museum of Victoria was just two years after Victoria’s separation from New South Wales. This

---

\(^3\) McShane, ‘Building…’, p.76.

rivalry can also clearly be seen in the establishment of art museums later in the century. The opening of the National Gallery of Victoria in 1861, for instance, was followed by the National Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1874, the National Gallery of South Australia in 1879, and the National Gallery of Queensland in 1895.5

These early ‘national’ museums, therefore, were not indicative of representing the separate Australian colonies as a comprehensive ‘nation’: a concept that was only occasionally invoked throughout the nineteenth century. As explored in Chapters One and Two, when searching for national identity, non-indigenous Australians identified as much with their homelands and the Empire than with the strange land in which they resided. Consequently, the appropriation of ‘national’ by these museums and art galleries was generally an assertion of the individual autonomy of that particular colony. This can also be seen in the third proposal for a ‘national museum’ in this period: the unsuccessful bid by the Royal Society of Tasmania for a National Tasmanian Museum.6 As early as 1856, the Royal Society of Tasmania called for ‘a sum … as may be adequate to the erection of so much of a building, for the purposes of a National Museum’.7 By 1857, plans for a National Tasmanian Museum had been designed by Francis Buther and presented to the Colonial Treasurer. No initial action was taken however, and in late 1857, the Secretary of the Royal Society, Joseph Milligan, wrote to the Colonial Secretary making it clear that in a new country, museums could ‘exert an influence upon education, intellect, taste, and national feeling, beyond all power of calculation’.8 He went on to state:

Although, therefore, the Tasmanian Museum may be considered as having already attained a magnitude and character which entitle it to take rank as a useful National Institution, it is for the rising generation and for posterity that the foundation of a great

---


6 The Royal Society of Tasmania had been established in 1841. See Royal Society of Tasmania, ‘History of the Royal Society of Tasmania, with portraits of the President, Council and Secretary’, Hobart, 1895, in Science Pamphlets, vol. 3, State Library of Victoria.

7 Letter to the Colonial Secretary from Joseph Milligan, Secretary of the Royal Society of Tasmania, 22nd May 1856. Published in Royal Society of Tasmania, Report of the Royal Society of Tasmania for the year 1856, Hobart, 1857, p.17.

8 Letter to the Colonial Secretary from Joseph Milligan, Secretary of the Royal Society of Tasmania, 30th November 1857. Published in Royal Society of Tasmania, Report … for the year 1857, Hobart, 1858, p.18.
work has been laid, as it is by them that its rapidly increasing advantages will be principally enjoyed.9

In 1858, the Society finally received practical recognition of its claims, gaining a grant of £3000, conditional on a further £1300 being raised.10 By the next year, however, the Government had decided that it was unable to grant suitable land and offered the Society rooms under the Supreme Court instead. Despite its continued appeals, the Royal Society was forced to move under the Court in 1861, effectively ending the calls for a National Tasmanian Museum.11 Another example of the desire to assert the individual autonomy of the colony, is in a brief report on the Tasmanian Museum in 1894, where it comments on the museum being ‘made national by Act of Parliament in the session of 1885’, where what really had happened was the museum had been given to the Colonial Government of Tasmania by the Royal Society.12

**Federation and the new ‘National’ Capital**

The period leading up to Federation and through to the First World War saw four distinct proposals for a comprehensive national museum, representative of all the colonies, including the first recognition that the history of the Australian ‘nation’ should comprise part of such a museum. The first was by the New South Wales Premier Henry Parkes, who in 1887, as part of the celebrations to mark the centenary of colonial settlement, launched an architectural competition for the design of a Memorial State House. Sometimes known as a National Palace, it was to be Sydney’s Centennial Park’s ‘crowning glory’ intended ‘for the education of the soul of citizenship’.13 Parkes is somewhat responsible for a new era of historical writing in Australia, as to mark the

9 ibid.
10 Royal Society of Tasmania, *Report ... for the year 1858*, Hobart, 1859, p.18. The Tasmanian proposal is also significant as it was based on the relatively recent phenomenon of using visitor numbers as an indication of the museum’s performance as an institution for public instruction, demonstrating, for example, the jump in visitor numbers from 1,096 in 1855 to 6,014 in 1859. See Royal Society of Tasmania, *Report ... for the year 1859*, Hobart, 1860, p.21.
11 One of the reasons for this failure was that the appeals had been directed to the Governor Henry Fox Young, who had several years earlier withdrawn from active politics as a result of being criticised by the Colonial Office - for restricting the Legislative Council’s right of inquiry into the management of the convict department. See McShane, ‘Building…’, p.77, and Young, Sir Henry Edward Fox, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 6, 1851-1890, pp.452-253.
centenary celebrations his government funded the transcription of original sources in London and a new official history of Australia. Consequently, the National Palace was to consist of a ‘repository for historical manuscripts, a gallery for statuary and works of art, and a mausoleum’. As Eric Irvin has described, there was to be:

A Museum … where shall be deposited, as they can be collected, all books, documents, maps, printed or written matter, and reliques as may be illustrative of the historical, material, and industrial stages of the Colony’s progress, and of the various aboriginal races of Australia, their customs, languages, and ethnological characteristics.

Authorised, but not begun in time for the celebrations, the building unfortunately never took shape. The project had been controversial from the beginning, and at any rate almost all the designs proposed were too costly. By the time Parkes was replaced as Premier in 1891, the project had been completely buried.

This emphasis on ‘paper’ material within museums is another illustration of the continuing neglect of actual historical material objects, discussed in Chapter Two. Another example is a proposal put forward in Sydney for a Federation Arch in 1901, to mark the arrival of Federation. Designed along similar lines to Parkes’ celebratory idea of a museum containing historical records, a temporary arch had already been constructed and it was now suggested this be replaced with a permanent archway memorial. Like its predecessor, the proposal failed, but it is worth noting the proposed historical component of the Arch. As the Sydney Mail described at the time:

It is proposed to make the arch completely represent the whole of the federal history, and the arch will exhibit portraits in bronze of the most prominent of the promoters of the federal union … the arch will contain five spacious rooms, the smallest of which will be 18ft by 20ft, with a staircase and lift approach, and can be utilised for the purpose of a museum of historical records and curios.

---

15 Martin, Henry Parkes, p.370.
16 E. Irvin, Sydney as it might have been, Sydney, 1974, p.55.
17 ibid., pp.65-66.
18 ibid., p.79.
Once Federation was achieved, it is perhaps not surprising that proposals began to swing towards the establishment of a national museum in the planned new national capital. The first of these was suggested by Arthur Woodward, Director of the Art Department at the School of Mines in Bendigo. In a paper presented to the Library Association of Australia’s Third General Meeting in 1902, he proposed a museum, to be sited wherever the new federal capital was to be, consisting of ‘departments of Archaeology, Paintings, Prints and Drawings, and a Library’ as well as ‘an Australian and natural history department’. Woodward also noted the rivalry that existed, and would continue to exist, between the state museums, and subsequently declared:

Unless the spirit of magnanimity and patriotism dominates the people of Australia, and those who represent them on the management of such institutions, and those who are in possession of rare and choice specimens, I fail to see how it can ever be possible for a National Museum of Australia to become possessed of a great number of articles, particularly of articles that have an Australian historic interest. The natural home for the latter, now that we are one nation with one destiny, surely would seem to be a National Museum of Australia.

One final scheme put forward in this period was that of Walter Burley Griffin in his design for the national capital, which had been chosen to be Canberra in 1908. Griffin’s design reconciled the ‘city beautiful’ and ‘garden city’ concepts, two independent architectural movements that had little in common. As part of a recreational area on the northern side of the lake, he planned ‘Public Gardens including Zoo, Museums, Theater, Stadium, Casino, Opera, Plant House, Gymnasia and Baths’.

---

19 A.T. Woodward, ‘A Plea for a National Museum’, in Library Association of Australia, Transactions and Proceedings at the Third General Meeting, held at Melbourne, April 1902, Melbourne, 1902, p.94. Interestingly, Woodward proposed that the museum should be called the National Museum of Australia – the only time that name is really mentioned until the mid-1980s
20 ibid., p.93.
21 Canberra was chosen in 1908, but it was not until 1927 that it became the seat of Government. Until then, the Federal Parliament sat in Melbourne.
22 The ‘city beautiful’ movement had had its genesis in the United States and was primarily concerned to correct the lack of civic design in city building. The movement had been dramatised and given direction by a ‘Great White City’ exhibition in Chicago, Griffin’s home city, in 1893. The ‘garden city’ concept came from England and was born in the 1890s out of concern for the housing conditions of the working people. See National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), The Future Canberra, Sydney, 1965, p.13.
23 Australian Archives Commonwealth Record Series (hereafter AA CRS), A1818/2, Federal Capital Design No. 29 by Walter Burley Griffin, Original Report, Copy A.
They were to be the actual ‘showplaces of the city’, and the museums were to be of natural history, archaeology, plastic arts and the graphic arts.

Australian history did not feature directly in Griffin’s design, though as McShane points out, archives and relics were to be stored in the Capital Monument proposed for Capital Hill. At the same time, some argue his entire plan was geared towards the nurturing of a distinctive national type. Christopher Vernon, for example, points towards Griffin’s determination to cultivate native plants and trees in the design, and to name suburbs and streets in Canberra after Australian fauna. At any rate, like its predecessors, Griffin’s plan for a type of Australian national museum was soon given up, largely due to the following years of war and economic crisis.

The Inter-War Years – History, Zoology and Ethnology

The period after the First World War saw a number of proposals for the establishment of national museums in Australia. The diverse nature of these proposals indicate the developing character of museums in Australia, as the traditional emphasis on natural history was increasingly challenged by the ‘new’ fields of history and ethnology. It was also a period when these proposals began to gain a wider measure of support and to a certain extent success. The first of these was the Australian War Memorial, established in 1919, ‘as a storehouse for the records of the war, a museum for its relics, and a temple in which to honour its victims’. Though it did not officially open in Canberra until 1941, the Australian War Memorial was the first true Australian national museum as well as the first attempt in a museum to materialise Australian history.

25 AA CRS, A1818/2, Federal Capital Design…
26 McShane, ‘Building…’, p.79.
28 Fischer, *Canberra*, p.30. Griffin’s main ideas which remained are the major elements of the road network and the emphasis on the perspective effect of avenue, axis and vista.
30 Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, pp.139-140.
The Australian War Memorial was examined in an earlier chapter, so there is little need to discuss it in any detail again here. It is worth highlighting, however, that its founder C.E.W. Bean, in proposing a museum and memorial to those who died in the Great War, also proposed another national museum, effectively a museum of human history:

There will be a national museum also – a museum which will trace the history of our race from the dim ages when it began to loom up in history somewhere in the Danish flats and around the lakes of Ireland – then through the Roman period and the Middle Ages of England – and so on to our time. This and other buildings will be in the federal capital; possibly a University of Australia.31

This proposal did not lead to anything, but it is important to recognise the significance of the Australian War Memorial itself. Through the Memorial, Australia was now seen as having a material history worth preserving and also upon which to distinguish a separate nation. This history remained one which was enmeshed in the longer histories of Europe, but it was now possible to identify Australia as having played an individual part in these histories. The First World War provided a basis upon which non-indigenous Australians could create a national ideal, which relied on a ‘real’ history, similar to those histories upon which the nations in Europe were built.

Despite clearly being a national institution though, the Memorial was not representative of the nation in the way a national museum is expected to be today. Tony Bennett has described how ‘the nation is curiously de-centred in the Memorial in the sense that its major references are constantly to Australia’s participation in a history taking place elsewhere – in Europe and the Middle East’.32 Many of the collections were, and continue to be, illustrative of Australia’s connection with Europe rather than as a separate nation. For example, William Longstaff’s painting The Menin Gate at Midnight, referring to the Menin Gate dedicated to those Commonwealth soldiers whose bodies could not be recovered for burial, can be seen as continuing to reflect a colonial attachment to the Empire. Equally the Memorial can not be seen as a ‘museum of Australia’ as its collections were limited in their scope, largely relating to the country’s involvement in conflict, with little attention paid to actual Australian society.

32 Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, p.140.
During the 1920s, there were two other proposals for national museums. The first of these was for a National Museum of Zoology, the only one for which a building was actually constructed – illustrating the continuing prevalence of natural history as the prominent function of museums. It was pioneered by Dr William Colin MacKenzie, a Professor of Anatomy at the University of Melbourne and the founder of Healesville Sanctuary. MacKenzie’s experience in orthopaedics and treating war wounds had convinced him of the need of studying the comparative anatomy of Australian fauna in order to apply it to medical science. Hence, returning to Melbourne in 1918, after three years in England, MacKenzie took residency in a house in St. Kilda Road, converting part of it into a laboratory and museum, which from 1919 he called the Australian Institute of Anatomical Research.33

In 1923, MacKenzie offered the large collection of specimens he had amassed to the Australian Government, and in October 1924 the National Museum of Zoology came into existence by the Zoological Museum Agreement Act 1924.34 The National Museum was to consist of MacKenzie’s collection, with MacKenzie himself as the first Director. Once funds were available it was to be housed in Canberra, but in the meantime was to remain in Melbourne and Healesville.35 In discussing the Agreement Act, MacKenzie had highlighted the scientific importance of preserving ‘zoological’ specimens:

we recognise that many of our animals that were common twenty years ago are becoming increasingly rare, and within a short period of time will have completely disappeared, never to be recalled … the most urgent plea for the preservation of our fauna, viz., its importance for a correct understanding of the human body in health and disease.36

Through the Agreement Act, land had also been reserved in Canberra for the establishment of the National Museum of Zoology, and in 1925, a notice was erected on

---

34 AA CRS, A1928/1 695/2, Australian Institute of Anatomy. Transfer of the control and administration to the Department of Health.
35 MacKenzie had been building up Healesville since 1920. It officially opened to the public as the Sir Colin MacKenzie Sanctuary in 1934, and Healesville exists today as one of the pre-eminent wildlife sanctuaries in Australia to see native fauna.
the site declaring the museum to be ‘the only one of its kind in the world’.37 MacKenzie himself described the site as ‘a magnificent one’,38 but unfortunately the museum had a low priority in the Canberra building programme, and site development was non-existent until the museum’s control was transferred from the Department of Home and Territories to the Department of Health in 1928.39 Building was finally completed in 1930 and the museum opened in 1931 under the different name of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, renamed by the *Australian Institute of Anatomy Act 1931*.40

By the time the Institute opened, MacKenzie had gathered a small staff of six, including a histologist, osteologist and taxidermist. There was also a single curator, but as Margaret Anderson and Andrew Reeves have pointed out, the other staff took precedence and the transfer between departments in 1928 can be seen as the end of MacKenzie’s attempt to establish a national museum.41 The Institute effectively became purely a body of scientific research and study.

Nevertheless, at times there were suggestions to broaden its scope. In 1927, for example, the Historical Society of Victoria suggested to the Federal Capital Commission that the Federal Government purchase a collection of Australian tokens and currency of the late Dr Yelland of Victoria for the museum. Not surprisingly, the reply was that it did not lie within the scope of the National Museum of Zoology, and a Mr. Binns, the Assistant Librarian at Parliament House, actually affirmed that he knew of no Commonwealth body that would be interested in the collection.42 Some of the lectures presented by the Institute, however, did go beyond the scope of medical science. For instance, the Institute received an amount of £402 from Chinese residents in Australia ‘for the purpose of arranging an annual lecture to improve the cultural relationship between Australia and China’. It also received an amount of £607 from

---

37 AA CRS, A1928/1 695/3 Section 1, National Museum of Australian Anatomy, reservation of site at Canberra and transfer to Canberra. Secretary, Home and Territories Department, to Acting Secretary, Federal Capital Commission
40 AA CRS, A432/86 1931/1837, Australian Institute of Anatomy Bill. MacKenzie had suggested it should be called the National Institute of Anatomy. See AA CRS, A1928/1 695/2, Australian Institute of Anatomy. Transfer of the control and administration to the Department of Health.
41 Anderson & Reeves, ‘Contested Identities…’, p.95.
42 AA CRS, A1/15 1929/8574, Proposed exhibits: National Museum of Zoology. The Secretary, Department of Home and Territories, to the Hon. Secretary, Historical Society of Victoria, 8th February 1927.
Miss C. MacKenzie for an annual lecture dealing not only with the history of medical science but the history of man.\footnote{AA CRS, A432/86 1934/1812, Agreement with Donors.}

The other proposal for a national museum in Canberra during the 1920s was for a national museum of ethnology, a discipline that had been growing in stature in both museums and universities since the turn of the century. This was largely due to the commitment of Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, the Chair of the new Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. He was especially motivated by the potential of studying the Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and by his belief that they would soon disappear.\footnote{See for example A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes, Melbourne, 1931, and Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses, London, 1952.} In 1927, Radcliffe-Brown submitted a proposal to the Minister for Home Affairs and Territories, highlighting his particular concern over ‘the rapidly disappearing peoples and cultures of Australia’,\footnote{AA CRS, A1/15 1932/514, National Museum Canberra – Establishment of. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown to G.B. Cooke, 19\textsuperscript{th} March 1928.} and the need for a museum to prevent what little material there was being sent to Europe or America:

If such an ethnological museum is ever to be established at all some steps must be taken immediately. Every year it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain specimens illustrating the life and cultures of the Australasian peoples. The native people themselves are dying out or are ceasing to make or use the things they formerly had. Moreover there is at the present time a very great demand for such specimens in Europe and America, so that any which are available quickly find their way to museums in those continents. Every delay, therefore, will add considerably to the difficulty and cost of making a representative collection.\footnote{AA CRS, A458 AJ120/6, Federal Territory National Museum of Ethnology. Professor A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, ‘The Need for a National Museum of Ethnology’, August 1927.}

The proposed museum was initially to focus on the indigenous people of Australia, Melanesia and Polynesia, but as Radcliffe-Brown wrote, ‘it might ultimately be expanded to cover all peoples and ages of the world, as any complete museum of ethnology must do, and so illustrate the whole history of civilisation’.\footnote{AA CRS, A1/15 1932/514, National Museum Canberra – Establishment of. Memorandum on The Need for a National Museum of Ethnology.} The proposal at first found strong support within the Government, aided by Radcliffe-Brown’s connections to the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Australian National Research
Council’s ‘hearty endorsement’.48 Significantly, in initial Cabinet discussions in 1927, the idea of a national museum was widened so that it served ‘as a repository not only for articles of ethnological interest, but also for articles of historic interest and articles Australian in character and of considerable intrinsic value’.49 This illustrates an early realisation of the need to preserve historical artefacts, including those Australian in nature. A Cabinet Paper went on to discuss suitable exhibits already in the Commonwealth’s possession, such as ‘the last coach used by Messrs. Cobb & Co., the compass used by the late David Lindsay in all of his explorations in Australia, the inkwell, mallet, pen and plans used in connection with the first auction sale of leases at Canberra’.50

In September 1927, Cabinet affirmed the principle of the establishment of such a museum in Canberra.51 The Government, however, had also yet to properly sort out the situation with the National Museum of Zoology. To clear up the matter the Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, appointed a committee of inquiry headed by A.C.D. Rivett, the Chief Executive of the new Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). In the subsequent report in 1928, the recommendation again went back to the emphasis on a museum of natural history. Nevertheless, the report was enthusiastic about the long-term possibilities of a broader museum, to be called the Commonwealth Museum, and referring to the Institute of Anatomy stated:

such a place might very well be constituted as the first unit in the Commonwealth Museum, self-contained and with its own Keeper or Curator, but destined in course of time to take its place in the group constituting the whole Museum.52

The Rivett Committee’s report took a long-range view of the development of a museum of ethnology or history, emphasising collection development rather than an immediate building plan. In fact it stressed the recommendation ‘that steps be taken at once to

48 ibid. A.J. Gibson, Secretary of the Australian National Research Council to the Prime Minister, S.M. Bruce, 29th February 1928.
51 AA CRS, A6006/5 1927/09/06, Suggested Establishment of National Museum at Canberra, 6th September 1927.
ensure systematic collection’ of material, particularly that which ‘is likely to become extinct or rare as the years pass’.\textsuperscript{53} It is quite possible, had this advice been taken, that museums more recently would not have such a deficiency of historic material. As it was, having given support to the Institute of Anatomy, the Commonwealth Government seems to have ignored all other suggestions.

Another point regarding the Rivett Committee’s report worth highlighting, is that of its choice of name for a museum. The reason for the selection of Commonwealth Museum was that it ‘expresses just what the museum is designed to be, and avoids possibility of confusion with existing institutions already described as “National” or “Australian”’.\textsuperscript{54} In 1929, the report was circulated for comment to museums and societies around the country. Both Directors of Tasmania’s two main museums, and the Royal Society of Tasmania, criticised the choice of Commonwealth Museum, and highlighted the outdated use of both ‘National’ and ‘Australian’ by Melbourne and Sydney. The Royal Society of Tasmania felt:

\begin{quote}
that such a name would be useless outside Australia, and that as it is hoped that the Canberra institution will be world famous in the future, such a title as ‘The Australian National Museum' should be given to it. The time appears to have arrived when the name ‘Australian Museum’ for the Sydney institution should be altered to ‘The New South Wales Museum’, and ‘The National Museum’ at Melbourne altered to ‘The Victorian Museum’ as both the above suggested titles are far more appropriate than the ones at present in use, and would clear the way for a more satisfactory title for the Commonwealth Museum at Canberra, which latter institution should certainly have the word ‘Australian’ incorporated in its title.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

The call for a National Museum of Ethnology therefore failed, but it is significant as it provoked the first real discussion concerning a comprehensive national museum in Australia. As to the reasons why it failed in comparison to MacKenzie’s museum of zoology, McShane points to the difference in personal connections. He notes that it is possible MacKenzie treated Prime Minister Bruce in a London hospital during the

\textsuperscript{53} ibid., p.6.
\textsuperscript{54} ibid., p.2.
\textsuperscript{55} AA CRS, A458 AJ120/6, Federal Territory, National Museum of Ethnology. Secretary, Royal Society of Tasmania, to the Assistant Secretary, Prime Ministers Department, 8th August 1929. For a summary of
war. In contrast, a letter from the renowned anthropologist A.C. Haddon to the Ministry for Home and Territories may have hurt Radcliffe-Brown’s bid. Haddon wrote that starting a museum in Canberra ‘would be a great mistake’ and instead they should ‘strengthen the Sydney Museum as the centre of anthropological introduction’. Whatever the reasons, the two proposals are important, both in raising awareness over the possibilities of a comprehensive national museum, and in illustrating the growing belief that ministerial agencies could shape society from above, by creating an evolutionary process which could aid ‘the emergence of “a new nation”’.

**Social History and Aboriginal ‘History’**

During the 1930s, due to depression and the outbreak of war, discussion of a national museum generally disappeared, and it was not until the 1950s that interest again emerged, along with new and different kinds of museums opening around the world as the post-colonial era arrived. In 1955, for example, Professor M.L. Oliphant, President of the Australian Academy of Science, wrote to the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, requesting that the Institute of Anatomy be returned to its original purpose that had been outlined in the Rivett Report, as ‘the nucleus of an Australian National Museum’. He also asked that land in its neighbourhood be reserved for the establishment ‘of a national museums centre similar to the museums in South Kensington and the British Museum’. Unfortunately, the request was generally ignored by both the Prime Minister and the Director-General of Health, who insisted that the Institute should continue with its present tasks.

During the post-war period, growing historical ferment began to see local history museums opening everywhere and, significantly, 1955 also saw the first proposal to...
establish a National Museum of Social History, to be located in Sydney. In a paper presented to the Royal Australian Historical Society, Eric W. Dunlop, a Senior Lecturer in History at the Teachers’ College in Armidale, began by illustrating the absence of history in Australian museums:

Of our leading museums two are purely technological, one zoological, and the other a museum of classical antiquities; so that, although our city is in the 168th year of its history, and has a museum dating back nearly 130 years, it still has no major historical museum.61

Dunlop went on to acknowledge the growing number of historical and folk museums around the world, which have ‘proved an exciting and unexpected attraction to the general public, and is undoubtedly helping to develop a sense of historical perspective and a love of the past in people’.62 In regards to Australia, he highlighted Vaucluse House as being one of the few examples, but of representing a very small, and not very typical part of Australian history. Instead, he pointed to York Castle Museum in England, as presenting a ‘pretty complete picture of various aspects of the daily life and work of ordinary men and women of bygone times’.63 Dunlop accepted it was likely that these types of museums would at first develop locally in Australia, but argued:

there is an urgent need to found a national museum in Sydney in which a serious attempt is made to portray the national social story. … Its value to schools would be ever so much richer than that of the small local museums, as there would be no phase of our social history which it could not illustrate. Similarly, its situation would ensure that it would reach the majority of the public, as well as attracting more tourists than would otherwise be possible.64

The types of museum that Dunlop was discussing were generally what are today often known as folk museums, comprising miscellaneous collections of everyday life, rather than exhibitions designed around the broader and more ordered definitions of social history which are used in museums at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

62 ibid., p.175.
63 ibid., p.176.
64 ibid., pp.184-185.
Nevertheless, his proposal is significant, as it is one of the first to clearly put forward the case for a national museum of Australian history.

The interest in a broadly-based national museum in Canberra was revived by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) in 1958, when its report to the Government discussed the use of Capital Hill, and suggested that ‘the area should be devoted to a National Centre which would have as its theme the development of Australia and its contribution to civilisation’. The idea was for a series of pavilions each dedicated to a particular aspect of Australian culture, illustrating ‘the history, natural resources and economic development of the country and its territories; its native life and customs … and other significant features of the Australian way of life’.

This proposal was given further endorsement by the establishment of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1961, whose first Principal, A.D. Trendall, set about attracting the interest of the Government. The National Centre was conceived by the NCDC ‘as being symbolic of Federation’, and ‘an integral part of the Parliamentary Triangle’. In addition, comparing it to the Australian War Memorial, the Commission believed ‘the National Centre would attract even greater sentiment and could develop as a symbol of the nation’. However, in an attempt to get it approved, by 1962, both the NCDC and the Institute of Aboriginal Studies had reduced the proposal to two main buildings, to hold Aboriginal Art and a selection of paintings from the National Collection. Reports from NCDC continued to discuss a National Centre consisting of a series of major museums accommodating the Australia of both pre and post 1788, but significantly they had stopped pushing for them.

---

66 ibid.
69 AA CRS, A463/32 1966/4745, Establishment of a National Centre, Capital Hill, Canberra. R.B. Lansdown, Secretary & Manager NCDC, to the Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department, 21st December 1961.
In any case, Government support for an expansive National Centre was always difficult. In 1962, for example, the Secretary of the Prime Minister’s Department wrote, ‘it is not to be assumed that the Government will approve it … there are issues of public presentation and timing, apart from the issues of design and finance’.72 One thing that was agreed upon, was that a National Gallery of Australian Art should be the first building planned and built. To this end, Robert Menzies took a ‘Gallery only’ plan to Cabinet in May 1965.73 The plan was accepted and by the end of 1965, any plans for a National Centre, and consequently national museums of history, were abandoned.

One final model for a national museum was that proposed by Professor W.E.H. Stanner in 1965, when he suggested a Gallery of Southern Man in an article in the Canberra Times. Though once again not acted upon, the proposal is important not only because it shows a changing view of the role of a national museum, but because it illustrates the evolving function of museums in Australia as a whole. Stanner envisaged a museum in a modern sense – not consisting purely of rows of traditional glass cases and artefacts:

Let me make it clear what the Gallery would not be. … No rows of dull exhibits. No glass-cases of curiosities. No skulls and skeletons. No labelled snippets of this fact and that. No twilight gloom and sepulchral calm. It would be a world away from anything of the kind. Certainly, it would be a place of scrupulous and exact learning, open to all the scholars of the world. But at the same time it would be, perhaps even primarily, a place of animate display where the public mind and heart could both be stimulated.74

Stanner’s article is especially significant, however, because it was an early academic challenge to the conventional representation of indigenous peoples, anticipating John Mulvaney’s later opposition to traditional European claims. When Mulvaney declared in 1969, ‘The discoverers, explorers and colonists of the three million square miles which are Australia, were its Aborigines’, it effectively changed the face of Australian historical writing.75 Whereas in the past the indigenous population was regarded as primitive, without history, and comprising part of the natural history of Australia, there

---

72 AA CRS, A463/32 1966/4745, Establishment of a National Centre, Capital Hill, Canberra. Memorandum, E.J. Bunting, Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department to J.F. Nimmo, Department Secretary, 16th August 1962.
was a growing recognition of their triumph in conquering the harsh environment of Australia, and their subsequent place in the human history of the continent. Stanner’s article, though often ignored, can in many ways be seen as an indication of how museums, and particularly a national museum, were going to develop during the succeeding decades. He laid out a model for a museum, which put the indigenous population firmly in the forefront of Australian history, rather than as a prologue to it:

Everyone loves a good story, and one of the world’s best stories could be told about Australia. Told properly, and continually filled out by new discoveries, it could appeal to every generation afresh. It has nothing to do with Cook or Parkes; with Sturt or Leichhardt; with the Colonies or Federation; with rum, wool or gold; with Eureka or Anzac. Its subject is older, grander and more full of meaning than any of them. It is the story of the discovery, mastery and enrichment of the continent by the aborigines, and it makes one of the most splendid tales of its kind that any country in the world can offer.76

A Museum of Australia

The period after 1970 saw the route towards a national museum rapidly change, and finally saw the establishment of an Australian national museum. The 1970s brought with them a significant increase in interest in the re-development and establishment of national museums around the world. To a large extent this was due to the formation of new independent nations, and especially in the case of museum development, due to the new challenges to traditional ideas of national identity, brought about for example, by increased migration and the acknowledgement of indigenous cultures.

It was only a matter of time before attention again turned towards a national museum in Australia. At the official opening of a Museums Association of Australia seminar in 1971, H.B.S. Gullett highlighted the great need for ‘an Australian “Mount Vernon” as we are singularly short of our own history. To remedy this lack should be a national duty and strong pressure is needed on the Commonwealth Government to bring about a solution.’77 Also in 1971, the Council of the Museums Association, at its General

76 Stanner, ‘Gallery of…’.
Meeting, resolved to pressure the Government for the establishment of a ‘Museum of Australian History and Culture’. A letter was subsequently sent to the Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, emphasising the urgent need for such a museum. The Minister replied, however, ‘that while there was generally support for the concept, construction of such a museum would have to take its turn in the programme of Public Works and he could not see any prospect of an early commencement’.78

The situation began to change once the Labor Party under Gough Whitlam came to power in 1972. Whitlam himself had a strong commitment to the arts in general, and acknowledged that vast areas of the Australian national heritage ‘had deteriorated or been lost entirely’.79 He had also been influenced to an extent by Robert Boswell who, when Deputy High Commissioner in London in the late 1960s, had urged Whitlam to push for the establishment of an equivalent of the Smithsonian Institution in Canberra.80 Consequently, the Whitlam Government established the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections in 1974, under the chairmanship of Peter Pigott, to look at ‘museums and collections nationwide in Australia and to make recommendations for a national program aimed at realising certain objectives’.81

There is little need to examine in detail the recommendations of the Pigott Report, as these were discussed in Chapter Three, except to reiterate its proposals for a Museum of Australia in Canberra:

Essentially a museum of man and the Australian environment, it should consist of three themes or sections, each linked intellectually and physically to the other at appropriate points. We believe that one theme should embrace the environment... Another theme or section should cover Aboriginal history stretching over some 40,000 years. A third linked theme should cover the history of the Europeans in Australia.82

78 ‘Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Museums Association of Australia’, published in Kalori: Quarterly Newsletter, no. 45, February 1973, p.38. Following this, Mr Willis, Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, suggested that as the Commonwealth had purchased Billabong Park, a small historical and transport museum in Canberra, that this museum could form the nucleus of a new national historical or colonial museum. Nothing appears to have come of the idea.
80 ibid., p.574.
In proposing a museum focusing on Aboriginal history rather than anthropology, on the Australian environment, and on ‘Australia’s recent history’,83 the report was suggesting that museums could be receptive to differing versions of the past. Central to the report’s three main themes, ‘Aboriginal man in Australia; European man in Australia; and the Australian environment’,84 was the interaction between them. As McShane points out, this suggests ‘a concern to find points of unity between black and white history in Australia’,85 and can be interpreted as a legacy of Stanner’s proposal for a Gallery of Southern Man. McShane continues: ‘At no other time in Australia has a public institution been established on the basis of an argument about Australian history.’86

The publication of the Pigott Report provided the impetus supporters of a national museum needed, and the Federal Government began to slowly respond to the suggestion of a Museum of Australia in Canberra. Finally, in an address to the Museums Association of Australia conference in early 1979, the Minister for Home Affairs and the Capital Territory, R.J. Ellicott, declared that he ‘would strongly support the establishment of a Museum of Australia in Canberra’. He went on to say, ‘it is inevitable that a National Museum will be established in our National Capital and I believe it is really only economic factors that will delay its development and construction’.87 Ellicott introduced the Museum of Australia Bill in early 1980, and in the Second Reading, emphasised the traditional lack of Australian history in museums and its importance in providing the basis for national identity. Consequently, the new museum would be unique from the other major museums in Australia:

This Bill provides for the establishment of a national museum of Australian history. Its establishment will fill a gap in the array of institutions charged with the preservation of our cultural heritage and will demonstrate to the world the pride that we have in our country. As a nation we have been somewhat diffident in expressing an interest in our history and our culture. … This museum will provide that opportunity and will, I hope, prove to be a national focus for all Australians.88

83 ibid., para.12.9.
84 ibid., para.2.11.
85 McShane, ‘Building…’, p.84.
86 ibid.
The museum Ellicott proposed was almost entirely along the lines of that recommended five years earlier in the Pigott Report, emphasising the importance of the three themes, and he went on to echo the Pigott Report by saying that these should not be three separate themes, but must be ‘inter-related and complement each other’. He also illustrated the changing museology of the time by insisting that the indigenous peoples should develop the Aboriginal Gallery themselves, so that ‘in effect, Aboriginal people are invited to explain to the world their history and the richness of their culture’.89

All parties unanimously supported the Bill, and a Museum of Australia was finally established. However, it took over fifteen more years for any physical construction to begin, despite Australia having been an independent nation for 79 years, and despite the calls for an Australian national museum stretching back into the nineteenth century. Ironically, during the debate on the 1980 Bill, Barry Cohen stated that the Labor opposition wanted an assurance that the museum would not be ‘quietly shelved or postponed to some distant date in the future’.90 Yet, it is the Labor Party which perhaps hold much of the blame for the many delays and problems that have befallen the National Museum since 1980.

The National Museum of Australia – Early Developments and Political Turmoil

The Museum of Australia Act 1980 initiated steps to appoint a Director of the museum and the preparation of an acquisitions policy. It also provided for the appointment of an interim council with a brief to report to the Government within two years on the location, establishment and development of the Museum of Australia, including a program of construction and costs.91 An inquiry was soon underway, with the Interim Council joining with the NCDC to investigate the suitability of twelve possible sites – including the Acton Peninsula where the new museum is situated today. In June 1982, the Interim Council held a conference on Australian History in Canberra to provide a professional basis for their recommendations, and in December published their report entitled The Plan for the Development of the Museum of Australia. Shortly afterwards, in March 1984, the NCDC published the site inquiry’s conclusions in which

---

Yarramundi Reach, the same site recommended by the Pigott Report, was seen to be ‘the most suitable location for the Museum of Australia’. The Interim Council had endorsed the recommendation and, in an attempt ‘to make a break with the accepted tradition of museum buildings, to build a truly modern museum’, envisaged ‘a mixture of low-profile buildings, courts and open spaces; where buildings do not dominate their environment but blend with it, and are designed to suit the Australian themes reflected in their contents’.

The Interim Council’s vision for a Museum of Australia was close to that proposed in 1975, in that all the galleries should be inter-related and that it was to be ‘a museum about Australia; a museum with which every Australian can identify. It will tell of the past, present and future of our nation – the only nation which spans a continent. It will tell the history of nature as well as the history of the Australian people.’ It is worth commenting here on the name of the museum. The ‘Museum of Australia’ was initially proposed mainly because of the recognition that the two largest State museums, the Australian Museum and the National Museum of Victoria, both had continent-wide names and that the use of ‘Australian’ and ‘National’ in the title of the new museum might cause confusion. Controversy had surrounded the proposed name since 1975 however, with many proponents arguing that a museum designed to truly encompass the entire natural and human environment of the nation should be entitled in some way as National. J.M. Powell at Monash University, saw the name Museum of Australia as being ‘scarcely proper’ for a museum which was for the first time to fully allow for the creative participation of geographers and other specialist academics, who had traditionally been excluded from the museum sphere. The name was finally changed to the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in 1985 by the Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (No. 2) 1985, in order to conform ‘with the naming policy of other national cultural institutions such as the National Library of Australia’ and to ‘reduce confusion with the Australian Museum in New South Wales’.

---

95 Powell, ‘A proposed…’, p.293.
The Council’s report laid out a concept for a ‘living’ museum to be developed over seven years, recommending an appropriate opening date as being 1990: ‘a date close enough to the end of the Bicentenary year to sustain the momentum of that event during the intervening year’.\(^9^7\) The suggestion for this moderate development was largely due to the recognition of the difficult economic climate at the time. Minimal initial costs were proposed for 1983 and 1984, with most of the expenditure used to create new jobs, including employment of Aboriginal Australians, and to begin the development of an extensive acquisitions policy.\(^9^8\) However, despite the recommendation for the gradual evolution of the NMA for an opening in 1990, successive governments in the 1980s deferred any construction of permanent facilities. Then, in 1988, following a review into the Commonwealth’s involvement in the museum sector, the Labor Government agreed to shelve the construction of a museum for at least another five years.

The Council’s report in 1982, nevertheless, succeeded in raising the NMA’s profile and was responsible for initiating, if not a physical presence, its development in other aspects, including the formation of a solid staff base and the extensive development of collections. In terms of management, Dr Don McMichael was appointed as the first Director in February 1984, while Andrew Reeves, an archivist and labour historian, joined the NMA as its first Curator in June of the same year.\(^9^9\) Shortly after his appointment, in a paper presented to the Museums Association of Australia, McMichael acknowledged the impact that the establishment of the NMA would have ‘on museums generally and museological professions in particular, in Australia’.\(^1^0^0\) He went on to highlight that museums had traditionally lacked the foresight to collect contemporary historical materials, and that at the new museum ‘we see ourselves as having a responsibility to try and collect contemporary material’.\(^1^0^1\)

The most consequential way in which the NMA began to develop during the 1980s, was through the building of its collections. In the context of this thesis, this is particularly...
pertinent in the case of the National Historical Collection. The 1982 report emphasised that the National Historical Collection existed ‘more in name than in fact’, and was ‘a disparate and uncoordinated collection of historical material in the possession of the Commonwealth Government’. It then went on to propose an acquisitions policy which, for the first time in an Australian museum, put the emphasis firmly on Australian history since 1788. Attention was also to be paid to the collecting of material culture in fields traditionally ignored by museums, such as social history, ‘especially domestic, workplace, sport, entertainment’, the political development of the Australian nation, and the history of ethnic populations. It emphasised that objects related to particular events or actions by notable persons should be balanced by ordinary objects of daily life, and that it would ‘avoid overemphasising a dominant or powerful culture at the expense of peripheral cultures’.

As a consequence, collecting for the NMA began in earnest and has continued ever since. This can be seen in the attempts to fulfil one of the main points of the NMA’s Charter, that it ‘will reflect the development of the Australian nation in all its cultural diversity’. Representing a clear commitment to a pluralistic view of Australian history, this has been a major component of the museum’s research and collecting programs. The realisation had emerged that in order to represent the nation properly as a national museum, it was necessary to collect and portray the experience of all Australians, past and present, rather than a single homogeneous historical view as practised throughout many of the major museums’ histories. As Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki, an advisor to the NMA and member of the Interim Council, has explained, a ‘National Museum with a strong commitment to ethnic heritage collections will thrive to the extent that Australians recognise it for what it is – one of the manifestations of the common heritage of us all’.

---

103 It also made clear that undue emphasis should not be put on objects made or used before 1900, recognising that objects made in recent years were of equal importance. See Museum of Australia, Interim Council, Report, p.70. There was also separate emphasis on the development of the collections on Aboriginal History and Natural History.
104 ibid., p.70.
105 ibid., p.5.
By 1986, it was estimated that the NMA held nearly 200,000 objects, either on loan or in its repositories. Despite still being small compared to the collections of the major state museums, the number is impressive considering the time-scale and that collections in 1980 were largely made up of the National Ethnographic Collection, consisting of around 20,000 objects, of which only about 1,000 were of Australian origin.

In 1983, Bob Hawke’s Labor Government had agreed in principle to the concept presented by the Interim Council, and indeed had set aside some land at Yarramundi, but had given no timetable for the NMA’s construction or completion. Hence, notwithstanding the opening of a visitor centre on the Yarramundi site in 1986, allowing public access to limited aspects of the collection, the Government’s decision to defer any construction for a further five years in 1988 seemed to indicate that a permanent home for the NMA to house and exhibit its collections was still a distant dream.

The decision did revive advocates for the museum and renew calls for the construction of a permanent building. The Coalition opposition declared their commitment to the NMA in September 1988, with an Arts Policy stating:

The Coalition Parties are committed to the Museum of Australia and wish to see it built and grow to be a pre-eminent national collecting institution and significant tourist attraction for the A.C.T. We will give a clear financial commitment to the Museum for the next five year period, redefine its future building programme and require it to stress its particular role in relation to the preservation of our Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The early 1990s saw a number of calls for the construction of a museum, including by the NMA’s Acting Director, Kaye Dal Bon, who saw it as providing a unique

---

109 See D. O’Reilly, ‘Warehouse of dreams’, *The Bulletin*, 26th July 1988, pp.36-41. The decision to defer was largely due to the economic climate at the time. In fact, it is quite possible that any future possibility of a permanent museum building might have been scrapped altogether had it not been for around $20 million spent on planning and developing the collections since 1980. For some discussion on the significant impact the decision had on the National Museum, including the effects it might have on staff and the existing collections, see the debate by the Estimates Committee, ‘Department of the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories: Program 7 – Cultural heritage and Information: Subprogram 7.7 – National Museum of Australia’, 18th October 1998. Available at the Australian Parliamentary website, www.aph.gov.au.
opportunity to push ‘outwards the boundaries of a museum experience’. Margaret Anderson also saw the continued need for a ‘people’s museum’, that could give ‘a vision of Australian history and culture: which can explore Australian myths rather than imperial myths: which can reflect on the diversity of experience which has built Australian culture’. Similarly, Donald Horne envisaged a national museum as ‘an essential part of Australia’s nation building’, through which:

We could be reminded of chauvinist stereotypes of a manufactured single identity. But we could also be encouraged to look at things that would remind us of some of the ways in which we are different from each other – in region, in religion, in social class, in gender, in ethnicity, in attitudes – and this could be the most realistic of all ways in which we could wonder about ourselves as Australians, especially if we could also contemplate the coherence and resilience of our society as well.

During the early 1990s, the NMA itself continued to develop its functions and intellectual framework in the hope that it might soon become a physical reality. The publication of *Understanding Our Country*, for instance, laid out the museum’s objectives, stressing that it would be a vital stimulus to an understanding of the nation, ‘providing essential clues to answering the great question: Who are we?’ In 1993, the museum’s situation finally seemed to be improving when, in its *Distinctly Australian* statement, the Labor Government at last appeared to pledge support for its development:

Labor will proceed with the development of the National Museum of Australia, with a Commonwealth contribution of $26 million over four years. … In partnership with other national, state, regional and local collecting institutions, the museum will address issues of national concern from a national perspective. Concurrently, over four years,
there will be a staged development of the museum’s site at Yarramundi including exhibition, education and conservation facilities.\textsuperscript{115}

In the August 1993 Budget, the Keating Government subsequently committed $3 million for preliminary design work on a national museum at Yarramundi Reach and pledged $26 million towards its construction, conditional on the private sector providing the remainder of the anticipated $60 million total cost. The Budget Papers the same year restated this ‘in-principle agreement’, while also emphasising the importance of collecting material on topics such as women – ‘neglected by historical researchers and under-represented in its collections’.\textsuperscript{116}

The main outcome of this was that the process of choosing an architectural firm to design the NMA on the Yarramundi site was initiated.\textsuperscript{117} The problems were not over however, and in November 1993, everything was again put on hold over new uncertainty over the Yarramundi site. The National Capital Planning Authority had rejected a proposal for a private-sector housing development on the Yarramundi site, which had been intended to help raise some of the necessary private-sector funding. Instead, attention was re-directed towards the Acton Peninsula, for the first time since the planning survey in 1982, with a concept that saw a combination of the museum development and private-sector housing.\textsuperscript{118}

The idea of shifting any potential museum development from Yarramundi provoked a range of views, from those who saw it as an ideal site to those, like Professor Ralph Elliott, who believed it would ‘be crazy to put the National Museum on Acton Peninsula’.\textsuperscript{119} At any rate, during the next year the arguments became largely superfluous as the Government moved to change the entire concept of the NMA. The main opposition to the three inter-related gallery idea, which had existed since the 1975 Pigott Report, came from no less than the Prime Minister, Paul Keating.

\textsuperscript{118} I. Davis, ‘Moves to shift museum site to Acton’, \textit{Canberra Times}, 25\textsuperscript{th} October 1993, p.1.
In June 1993, a two-day forum was held by the NMA. Concerned with the presentation of Australia in museums, it produced a discussion paper in which it emphasised the ‘extraordinary indifference to the establishment of a national museum, so that Australians have no museum where they can go and think seriously about themselves, and visitors have nowhere which offers them a comprehensive presentation of the society they are visiting’.  

Early the following year, Jack Thompson, President of the Friends of the National Museum of Australia, urged the Prime Minister to give his official sanction to the museum, otherwise the raising of the necessary funds from private sources would be impossible. He also added that if there was not a museum or gallery of Aboriginal art by 2000, ‘it would show that Australians were either too ashamed or not adult enough to acknowledge the true and extraordinary history of the country’s indigenous peoples’.

Despite these pleas, at the opening of the new National Portrait Gallery in the Old Parliament House in March 1994, Keating expressed his own attitude towards the construction of a new museum:

> It can always be said, and often with irresistible logic and passion, that we need one more gallery or museum. One more place to put our heritage on show. It may have reached the ears of some of you that I have sometimes resisted this logic and this passion. It is true. I have not always been persuaded that another huge and hugely expensive building on the banks of Burley Griffin ranked high among the things we need for a better life … I have become a convert to the National Portrait gallery. The more so because it is not going to be left sitting in Canberra locked up in yet another massive mausoleum.

Keating did not envisage the new National Portrait Gallery as being a conventional museum, or ‘mausoleum’, as the works on display were all on loan from public and private collections, so it was opening up works rarely seen elsewhere, and because it would offer all its exhibitions for loan to other venues throughout the country. However, the Prime Minister’s reference to a new national museum being yet another ‘mausoleum’ surprised many, as the vision for the NMA had always been quite the

---

121 ‘Actor tells PM to stand up for museum’, *Canberra Times*, 27th January 1994, p.4.
opposite. The original concept, for example, envisaged a museum where the buildings were neither large nor monumental, where much of the museum was based outside, and where the displays were moving, interactive, and designed to portray living Australians. Keating’s opposition to the museum was evident as early as 1991 however, when he expressed his feeling that: ‘I think Australia is getting museumed-out. There’s so many of them and I think we’re running the risk of not doing any of them well.”

In 1994 and 1995, debate surrounding the NMA was brisk, and indeed Keating’s policy almost changed the direction of the museum’s development for good. In August 1994, the Centenary of Federation Advisory Committee, chaired by Joan Kirner, recommended a number of national infrastructure projects to be completed by 2001, including the ‘National Museum proposed by the Government of the ACT and many community organisations’. At the beginning of October, however, the Arts Minister Michael Lee put forward a plan whereby the entire museum would be abandoned and its Aboriginal collection transferred to the South Australian Museum. In the face of angry opposition from Aboriginal groups and supporters of the NMA the proposal was soon rejected, but there continued to be considerable concern that the Government might still scale down the concept for the museum, with many of the collections going to other institutions and travelling exhibitions.

It was not long before the confusion surrounding the NMA’s future was resolved when, in October 1994, the Government released its cultural policy statement Creative Nation, which effectively abandoned the three-gallery concept that had been the basis for the museum since its foundation. The statement saw the NMA’s central role as providing ‘Australians with a range of static and travelling exhibitions and education programs including CD based multi-media and broadband services’, as well as developing interactive multi-media resources, electronic exhibitions and pilot information databases’. Of the original plan of three permanent inter-related galleries only the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia remained, to be co-located with the Australian Institute

---

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in a new building on the Acton Peninsula. \(^{127}\) The Government’s decision attracted widespread criticism. \(^{128}\) As the editorial of the *Canberra Times* described:

The Government has chosen to ignore the pleas of the Aboriginal community and all supporters of the museum that it retain its original role which incorporated the settlement of all Australians, Aboriginal and otherwise, on the continent itself. Instead, it has chosen to separate the Aboriginal component in the planning of a so-called Gallery of Aboriginal Australia and so deny the symbolic integration of Aboriginal and later settlers implied in the original concept. This was a serious mistake and we have not heard the last of it … All it really means is that the saga of the NMA continues, despite the best (or worst) efforts of Paul Keating and Michael Lee.\(^{129}\)

The 1975 Pigott Report had emphasised that to ‘open the museum with only an Aboriginal section or an Environment section would endanger or destroy the concept’.\(^{130}\) Unsurprisingly, prominent historian John Mulvaney, long-time advocate of the NMA and member of the Pigott Inquiry, fiercely criticised *Creative Nation* and the decision to build a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia alone, declaring that the ‘cultural diversity of modern Australia merited better than a version of cultural apartheid’: \(^{131}\)

> Whatever merits the *Creative Nation* policy statement possesses, the dismemberment of the National Museum seriously undermines the Government’s claims to encourage both the expression of national identity and to foster reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians. … Australia now will have the dubious honour of being the only major country without a national museum in its national capital.\(^{132}\)


\(^{131}\) J. Mulvaney, ‘Dismembered museum deserved better’, *Canberra Times*, 19\(^{th}\) October 1994, p.4.

\(^{132}\) ibid. For further discussion concerning the criticism surrounding *Creative Nation*, see A. Bennie, ‘Wanted: a home for our history’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28\(^{th}\) November 1994, p.17; A. Bennie, ‘More to museum than meets the eye’, *Age*, 29\(^{th}\) November 1994, p.20; and D. Griffin, ‘Why should our national museum be languishing?’, *Age*, 20\(^{th}\) March 1995, p.18.
Despite the controversy, it seemed that the future of the NMA had been decided. In April 1995, it was announced that the Commonwealth and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) had agreed to a land swap, exchanging the Commonwealth’s Kingston foreshore on Lake Burley Griffin for the ACT’s Acton Peninsula. According to the Minister of Arts, the deal would go a long way to fulfilling the commitments announced in Creative Nation, and that the Commonwealth Government would ‘clear the site of existing buildings and provide up to $3 million for infrastructure work for the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia’. Then, in July, the National Capital Planning Authority began calling for expressions of interest in designing both the Gallery and AIATSIS.

The Labor Government’s policy of abandoning the tripartite museum concept had begun to be implemented. Further confirmation came in August, with the publication of the National Museum’s Corporate Plan for 1995 to 1998. Laying out the plan for the development of the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia on Acton, it envisaged the use of Old Parliament House and the Sydney’s former Customs House to hold exhibitions of social history and form part of the National Museum’s outreach program. The editorial of the Canberra Times reflected widespread feeling towards the plan:

The grand vision and concept of the Museum of Australia is suffering the death of a thousand cuts … This week, publication of the museum’s 1995-98 Corporate Plan seems to accept that Yarramundi is to be abandoned. Instead, the museum will concentrate on travelling exhibitions, creating electronic products to deliver knowledge of the museum’s collection to the nation, and the political museum at Old Parliament House. It is a misguided emphasis. These are desirable adjuncts to a museum; they are not the real thing. … It seems the original vision will have to wait until there is a new prime minister. In the meantime, any pre-emptive plans to put the Aboriginal gallery on Acton should be shelved.

The publication of the Corporate Plan re-ignited the public debate surrounding the NMA and the separation of Aboriginal and non-indigenous heritage. The Friends of the

---

National Museum of Australia, for example, renewed their calls for the construction of the entire museum at Yarramundi. Vice-President Winnifred Rosser declared that they had ‘taken off the gloves’ in the battle, and criticised Paul Keating’s ‘tokenism’ in separating the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia from the National Museum: ‘He is effectively saying its ok to have a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, but the rest of the National Museum of Australia has no value in our history.’ Des Griffin, the President of Museums Australia, was equally ferocious in his criticism, especially over the separation of the Aboriginal Gallery, the basing of social history in Old Parliament House, and the apparent total abandonment of the environment gallery.

It is quite outrageous to exclude Aboriginal culture from a national museum. That’s appalling, because it misses an obvious opportunity for reconciliation … And putting Australia’s social history in the old Parliament House misses the point that history is really made by the mums and dads, by ordinary Australians. In making this decision, the Government has acted against its own policies for reconciliation, One Nation, understanding of the environment and the cultural links between Aboriginal and other Australians.

Aboriginal Australians also made it clear that they felt the move to build a separate Gallery of Aboriginal Australia was a step back from reconciliation. Political activist Norma Flint declared: ‘We do not see the provision of an Aboriginal ghetto on Acton Peninsula as reconciliation. We love the concept of the inclusion of the museum at Yarramundi Reach, and see that as a much better example of reconciliation.’ Others also rejoined the calls for the three-gallery museum at Yarramundi. Jerzy Zubrzycki, for instance, stressed the unique opportunity Yarramundi Reach could provide for the nation, while noting that Australia belonged to a tiny minority of countries that did not have the ‘political will, pride and resources’ to fund a national museum.

The furore surrounding the Corporate Plan and *Creative Nation* led to the issue of the NMA becoming an important, if not central, factor in Federal election policies in 1996. In January, Keating reaffirmed his commitment to a separate Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, pledging $12 million over three years to extend exhibition areas at Old Parliament House for the National Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and the Australian Archives; allowing ‘the museum to develop exhibitions which are specifically designed to explore Australia’s social, political and constitutional history’.\(^{141}\) In a new development, Keating also announced that there would be a national competition to design a facility at Yarramundi, which would focus on environmental history ‘in conjunction with bodies such as the CSIRO, the Australian Heritage Commission and Greening Australia’.\(^{142}\) This new facility however, though part of the National Museum ‘network’ like the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, was essentially also to be a separate entity, and it is probable that had the Labor Government been returned to power in 1996, Australia would still be no closer to gaining a single unified national museum.

As it was, the Federal Coalition was elected to form the government in 1996, pledging the construction of a three-themed national museum. Before moving to examine this policy, it is important to briefly reflect on the attitudes of the Coalition and Labor parties towards history, as these highlight the highly sensitive political nature and role in society of both the NMA and Australian history during the 1990s. In hindsight, for instance, it is perhaps surprising that it was the Coalition who finally committed to a fully integrative museum along the lines of that proposed in 1975. Keating is generally seen to have been far more interested in history, using it throughout his ministry for political manipulation and to push forward his designs for a reconciled and multicultural Australia. As Graeme Davison has described, possibly ‘no modern Australian prime minister has uttered the word “history” as frequently as Paul Keating’:

> At Kokoda, where he kissed the ground on which the Diggers died, at Redfern, where he sought a historic act of reconciliation with Aborigines, at Winton where he reflected on ‘Waltzing Matilda’ and the class struggle, at Canberra’s National War Memorial, where he presided over the burial of the Unknown Australian Soldier, and at Corowa,


\(^{142}\) ibid.
site of the 1893 Federal conference, where he pledged himself to the cause of an Australian republic, Keating sought to place himself in the path of history.\textsuperscript{143}

In contrast, John Howard, the leader of the Coalition and Prime Minister since 1996, sought to promote more traditional notions of history. Where Keating tried to install a critical view of Australian history, Howard, unashamedly a monarchist and conservative leader, essentially tried to promote a unified Australia by dismissing the ugly realities of the past such as the stolen generations of Aboriginal children, emphasising instead what white Australians had achieved during their history. This is perhaps no better illustrated than by Howard’s stance on Aboriginal history, and his continual refusal to offer a formal apology to the Aboriginal population for the injustices enacted on them since European settlement. It is perhaps strange, therefore, that the Keating Government stood against a unified national museum of history, which even Aboriginal groups saw as a tool for reconciliation, while conversely Howard supported the building of a museum designed to address all aspects of Australian history, which inevitably would critically address some of the ‘unpleasant’ aspects of history which he often tried to overlook.

To a large extent, the reason for the Coalition support for the NMA in 1996 can be attributed simply to the need to offer an alternative position to Labor. Indeed, this is implied in their policy where it is highlighted that their commitment to the museum is ‘in stark contrast to our political opponents’.\textsuperscript{144} However, this support for the National Museum was also a mark of consistency. It had been a Coalition Government which had established the Museum of Australia in 1980 and only once since then, in 1994, had the party failed to include this commitment within its arts policy.

\section*{A Firm Commitment}

It is fortunate for the fate of the museum, therefore, that the Howard Coalition was elected to Government in March 1996. Their Arts policy stated:

\begin{quote}
The Coalition is committed to the construction of a fully-fledged national Museum in Canberra. We will provide $15.5 million over three years for this purpose. This is in
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{143} G. Davison, \textit{The Use and Abuse of Australian History}, St. Leonards, 2000, pp.2-3.  \\
\end{flushright}
stark contrast to our political opponents who promised to build a National Museum before the 1993 election and then reneged on their promise.\textsuperscript{145}

The Coalition’s policy sought to re-unify the NMA on its original Canberra site at Yarramundi, pledging an initial $1.5 million for initial site investigation, followed by $7 million in each of the two subsequent years to build a ‘modest’ museum.\textsuperscript{146} Senator Richard Alston, the Coalition’s arts spokesperson, rejected the plan for a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia on Acton emphasising that a unified museum was ‘an important part of the reconciliation process to integrate Aboriginal history into the mainstream of Australian history’.\textsuperscript{147} Winnifred Rosser, who had been scathing in her criticism of the 1995-1998 Corporate Plan, welcomed the proposal by saying ‘it is what the friends have been fighting for all these years’, and made it clear that the modesty of the proposal gave her more faith that it might come to fruition: ‘If they said they were promising $65 to $100 million to build it, I’d think, “Hang on, this is real pork barrelling”. $1.5 million to start on the site – that is a beginning.’\textsuperscript{148}

The Coalition’s policies, however, also received their fair share of criticism. The new ACT Labor Senator Kate Lundy, for example, felt that the amount of money proposed would only be able to build a ‘glorified barn’ and that $150 million was a more realistic figure,\textsuperscript{149} while the Arts Editor of the \textit{Canberra Times}, Robert Macklin, also questioned the need for another site investigation:

> For $15.5 million these days you get a bit of site clearing, a couple of well appointed out-houses and maybe a barbecue. And the first year’s funding, $1.5 million, is for ‘site investigation’. Now if any site in Australia has been thoroughly investigated it’s Yarramundi Reach. It’s had more investigations than Whitewater and every time it’s come up trumps.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{145} ibid. Also see Liberal Party of Australia & the National Party of Australia, \textit{For Art’s Sake, A Fair Go!}, Canberra, 1996.
\textsuperscript{147} H. Musa, ‘Libs promise $15m for national museum’, \textit{Canberra Times}, 16\textsuperscript{th} February 1996, p.8.
\textsuperscript{149} R. Peake, ‘Museum money will buy a barn: Lundy’, \textit{Canberra Times}, 27\textsuperscript{th} May 1996, p.3.
A pertinent point perhaps, but regardless of the criticism, the election of the Coalition Government to power seemed to signal a new era for the NMA. In August 1996, the Canberra press hailed the appointment of Jim Service, a prominent arts patron and businessman, as head of the Museum Council, and the reappointment of Dr William Jonas as Director, as representing ‘the first positive moves for the development of the museum in almost half a decade’. In the August 1996 Budget, the decision to return to a unified museum concept seemed to be confirmed by the cancellation of its proposed presence in Sydney’s Custom House. At the same time, the $1.5 million was officially allocated ‘for the establishment of, and the provision of research facilities and administrative support services for, the Advisory Committee on New Facilities for the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’.

Despite Yarramundi Reach being the Coalition’s ‘preferred’ site, the new Advisory Committee was also to consider the possible sites of Acton Peninsula, Kings Park, and the Parliamentary zone foreshores, between the National Science and Technology Centre and the High Court. Subsequently, the committee concluded that Acton, by offering the ‘most advantages’, was the first choice for the new National Museum, followed closely by Yarramundi. Though recognised as a highly desirable site with the most potential for further expansion, Yarramundi was not considered to be as attractive to possible sponsors, while the fact that it was the site furthest from the City and other cultural institutions would mean that it would ‘not easily attract visitors other than those who are specifically interested in visiting the NMA’. The central position of Acton, on the other hand, was seen as advantageous both in terms of attracting sponsorship and visitors, while the total costs of the project were seen to be

---

151 Editorial, ‘Howard committed to museum’, *Canberra Times*, 18th August 1996, p.8. Jonas had originally been appointed Director under the Labor Government, but had been unable to take up the post due to ill-health.
156 ibid., p.8.
substantially less than at Yarramundi. On the presentation of the Committee’s report, Prime Minister John Howard subsequently announced in December 1996 that the Federal Government would immediately provide $750,000 so that design work could begin for the NMA on Acton Peninsula. Acknowledging the long debate over the site, Howard declared: ‘Not everyone will agree with the recommendation of the committee or with the government’s decision. But I think the essence here is to get on with it. To make decisions and move forward.’ Senator Alston, the Minister of Arts, also commented on the decision:

After thirteen years of procrastination, hot air and attempts to gazump the establishment of the National Museum, this Government has moved quickly to secure the Museum’s future … This is an exciting development for Canberra and the whole country. It’s time we had a National Museum of Australia where all the stories of our nation are told and our unique culture mix is explored.

After over twenty years of lobbying for a national museum to be built at Yarramundi, it is not surprising that the Government’s decision of Acton as the final site again aroused criticism from various commentators. John Mulvaney, in particular, considered that the museum’s potential had been ‘diminished’. While commending the ‘adoption of the tripartite environmental, indigenous and latecomer themes’, he pointed to the 1982 Interim Council’s report which envisaged a site that allowed ‘for centuries of expansion, exterior exhibitions, cultural performance areas and sympathetic landscaping’. David Ride, another member of the 1982 Interim Council, also questioned the development of the NMA on Acton, by considering how the original concept ‘requiring broad acres, native vegetation and open vistas, can be accommodated in a contained site (that could be as small as 11ha), limited by heritage listed buildings and plantings’.

The Advisory Committee’s report, nevertheless, marked the first real moves towards the construction of a three-themed museum. After its publication, moves towards the NMA becoming a physical presence on Acton Peninsula came about more rapidly. In March

---

161 D. Ride, ‘Economic reasoning is difficult to understand’, *Canberra Times*, 4th January 1997, p.10.
1997, for instance, the land swap agreement between the Commonwealth and the ACT Government was confirmed, exchanging the Acton Peninsula for the Kingston foreshore. An ongoing Commonwealth Government commitment to fund the construction of the National Museum was also announced, the indicative cost of which was seen to be $133 million, to be provided through the newly established Federation Fund. The following month saw the launch of a design competition to find an architect for the museum, which was to open on the 1 January 2001 ‘as the flagship of the Commonwealth’s contribution to the Centenary of Federation celebrations’.

The National Museum of Australia finally seemed to be moving from an idea to physical reality. In October, Ashton Raggett McDougall of Melbourne was announced as the winning design team, out of seventy-six entries, and the plan was subsequently referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration. Then, in the 1998 Budget, the Government confirmed the allocation of total funding of $151.9 million for the project, to be met mainly from the Federation Fund, comprising $133 million for capital works and $18.9 million for one-off establishment costs. Finally, early in July 1998, following the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Parliament approved the proposal and authorised the plan to proceed, with construction scheduled to commence in October 1998.
Conclusion

After over twenty years of debate over the form of the National Museum of Australia, its physical presence finally became a reality, with construction officially beginning on the 8th March 1999.\(^{169}\) In many ways, especially in terms of the implementation of the three integrated themes, the museum was to follow the lines proposed by the original report of the Interim Council in 1982. The Director of the NMA, Dr William Jonas, in reporting to the Joint Committee on Public Works in December 1997, laid out how he envisioned the National Museum, reflecting many of the new ideas and developments that had been pervading museums in recent years:

The National Museum of Australia is a social history museum. … What we are interested in and what we are charged with doing is telling the wonderful story of Australia. We are telling that through three themes; the social history of the last 200 or so years; indigenous peoples’ history and cultures, and people’s relationship with the environment. We want to tell that story by integrating those three themes and using whatever methods are at our disposal to best tell those stories, remembering that, as a museum, objects and collections of objects are still our primary way of telling those stories. We are going to tell those stories and make them accessible to as many of Australia’s population as we can through exhibits of objects, using all of the various forms of technology which are now at our disposal.\(^{170}\)

The fact that in some respects the new museum was not to follow the original plan, principally in terms of the site and the use of large open spaces, is not surprising, especially after twenty years of controversial debate. To some extent, this was due to the general changes and professionalisation within the museum sector that were explored in the Chapter Three. The decision to build the NMA at Acton rather than Yarramundi, for example, was due largely to economic considerations. This was not just because of the cost of construction, but also because of the need to be ‘visible’ and positioned centrally within Canberra in order to attract the greatest number of visitors, illustrating a global


trend where museums increasingly find themselves having to compete with other heritage and tourist ‘attractions’. The choice of the smaller site of Acton was also determined to some extent by the growing emphasis on technology and communications media in museums, the idea being that the museum could reach far more people through these new interpretative methods.\textsuperscript{171}

In November 1998, despite construction having been approved and about to begin, John Mulvaney again spoke out against the new plans for the NMA. Suggesting it had become a Disneyland tourist facility, he said: ‘Their idea is to tell the story of Australia. The idea we had [in 1975 and 1982] is that there was no such single story’\textsuperscript{172} This is an important final point that should be made. Opening in 2001, as a flagship for the Centenary of Federation, there was the danger that the National Museum would inevitably succumb to representing an accepted version of Australia’s past, one which was based around familiar icons and myths, that essentially tells the visitor what it means to be Australian, whether it be an outcome of overcoming the environment, a product of war, or as part of a multicultural society. This would run counter to the original concept proposed in 1975 and 1982, as well as the diverse traditions of museum proposals since the nineteenth century that this entire chapter has identified.

The most significant aspect, nevertheless, is perhaps that the National Museum finally became a physical reality at all. The ultimate establishment of a museum based on the inter-relation of the environment, Aboriginal history, and Australia’s history since 1788, reflects the diverse traditions of these developing museum proposals, as well as the important role of history and national identity in Australia at the end of the twentieth-century. The National Museum of Australia has the potential of successfully representing the Australian nation and people if, rather than explaining, it probes and explores the many contested interpretations of Australian ‘identity’. As the later discussion shows, however, debate and controversy continues to surround the NMA since its opening early in 2001, especially over its representations of the non-indigenous population’s history and ‘problematic’ national identity.

\textsuperscript{171} At the same time, proposals for a smaller museum than that planned for Yarramundi had been reinforced by a number of theme-specific museums with a national focus opening up since the late 1980s, such as those concerned with migration, maritime history and motor transport.
\textsuperscript{172} M. Hogarth, ‘New row erupts over museum’, \textit{Age}, 9\textsuperscript{th} November 1998, p.6.
CHAPTER FIVE

The National Museum of New Zealand: A Brief History,

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa opened in Wellington in February 1998. Unlike the National Museum of Australia, this was not an entirely new institution, as New Zealand had a national museum since the early days of European settlement. Originally named the Colonial Museum in 1865, it became the Dominion Museum in 1907 before officially becoming the National Museum in 1973.

This chapter traces the history of the National Museum, from its foundation in 1865 until 1992, when the New Zealand Government made a firm commitment to a new museum. Focusing on the development of the museum’s collections, and especially the gradual moves to incorporate New Zealand’s history into its brief during the twentieth century, it provides insight into how and why the priorities behind the collections have changed over the years, and contributes to an understanding of the conceptual path the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa chose to follow in the 1990s. It is also illustrative of the major changes that museums in New Zealand, as a whole, have been through during the last century and a half. In some respects these mirror developments in Australia, and the changing nature of proposals for an Australian national museum, as the focus of New Zealand’s national museum shifted from geology and natural history, to ethnology, and finally to history. The development of the museum, especially from the early 1980s, was beset by political squabbles much like those which surrounded the National Museum of Australia, again highlighting the growing role of history and museums in late twentieth-century society. Despite these similarities, however, there are also noticeable differences in the evolution of the national museums in the two countries, not least that New Zealand history found a role in the national museum far earlier than in Australia.
The Early Years

Interest in the study of science and art was evident in New Zealand from the early years of European settlement, and as a result a museum of sorts had come into existence in Wellington as early as 1851, when Walter Buller, an early New Zealand naturalist, formed a collection on behalf of the New Zealand Society in a room in the Provincial Government Offices. The Society was short-lived however, and despite an attempt to revive it in 1859, it was not until the mid-1860s that serious interest in the establishment of a museum in the national capital was expressed. This was largely due to a desire in New Zealand to survey the mineral resources of the newly settled country, particularly for gold, coal and iron. This resulted in the appointment, by several Provincial Governments, of scientists to conduct geological surveys. The most significant of these was the appointment of Dr James Hector, as Director of the Provincial Geological Survey in Otago in 1862. Hector’s interest was predominantly geology, and in Otago he began to form collections of rocks, minerals and natural history materials to illustrate the natural resources of the Province.

For several years, pressure had been mounting on the General Government in Wellington to also establish a Geological Survey, and in 1864, the services of Hector were engaged to form a New Zealand Geological Survey, in an agreement that included the establishment of a museum. After this, moves towards the erection of a suitable museum progressed reasonably rapidly. The Colonial Museum opened to the public in December 1865, in a building behind the grounds of Parliament Buildings in what was to become known as Museum Street. Richard Dell has attributed this sudden rate of establishment, ‘a speed which was never again to be seen in this context’, to a move by the General Government, to establish ‘as many of its agencies as possible in permanent quarters in Wellington to prevent the capital being shifted back to Auckland’.

---

2 New Zealand was divided into provinces until 1876.
The museum was popular from its inception, with the number of visitors increasing from 3,000 in 1866-67 to 10,000 in 1870-71, and to 15,000 in 1877-78. However, the museum building was unsatisfactory from the outset, with significant structural problems and overcrowding. Consequently, Hector began a tradition, followed by successive museum directors until the 1980s, of complaining to the government about the lack of space and campaigning for improvements. Hector was actually successful in 1875, when a new wing and gallery was added to the building. The problems did not disappear though, as in addition to public displays, the museum and New Zealand Institute also involved an analytical Laboratory, an Astrological Survey, the Geological Survey, a Meteorological Station, the Patent Office, and the Wellington Botanic Garden. In the late nineteenth century, these agencies were gradually transferred to other government departments, such as Mines, but by then the museum had become easily susceptible to wind and rain damage and hopelessly overcrowded and disorganised. A report by an English museum expert, F.E. Bather, in 1894, was particularly uncomplimentary about the Colonial Museum. In regard to the lack of space, for example, Bather remarked: ‘At some distant period there seems to have been an attempt to keep the geological specimens in one room, the zoological in another, and the ethnological in a third; but now specimens are simply placed where room can be best made for them’. In contrast to favourable reviews of the Auckland and Christchurch museums, he was also especially scathing of the general organisation and arrangement of the museum:

One of the best-known fossiliferous beds in New Zealand is known as the Curiosity Shop bed, and one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the colony appears to be the scientific lecture interposed with stereopticon views and comic anecdotes. It seems as though, in its endeavour to merit the name ‘Colonial’, this Museum has taken these two features as its models. Even in the cases these things are badly arranged, and the labels, if found at all, are often attached to the wrong specimens.

---


6 The New Zealand Institute was formed by the *New Zealand Institute Act 1967*.


8 ibid., p.208.
The initial museum collections largely consisted of material from Hector’s Otago collections, and the collections from the earlier short-lived New Zealand Society. In the first report of the Colonial Museum and Laboratory in 1866, Hector summarised the contents of the collections. Consisting of around 14,000 items, well over 9,000 of which were geological, there were also 1,811 natural history specimens. These consisted of ‘miscellaneous collections of woods, fibres, wools, Native implements, weapons, dresses, &c.’, thereby indicative of the common practice of categorising Maori culture with natural history, a practice the museum continued for many years to come.9

In the same report, Hector outlined his plans for the development of the museum, through which he foresaw the Colonial Museum as a central scientific museum that could assist local and provincial museums around the country: ‘a method which would prevent their lapsing, as is too frequently the case, into unmeaning collections of curiosities’.10 Hector also envisaged his museum as broadly covering natural history and Maori material culture, but he was foremost a geologist, and by the end of the nineteenth century, the Colonial Museum had developed largely into a geological museum.

The Early Twentieth Century – Ethnology and History

At the turn of the century, however, there was considerable discussion regarding the recording of Maori history and culture. This was partly in response to the anticipated demise of the indigenous peoples, and partly because of a growing recognition that significant collections had been exported to Europe and the Americas. This culminated in the passing of the *Maori Antiquities Act 1901*, which forbade the export of Maori relics and other articles of historical or scientific value or interest relating to New Zealand.11 Hence, when a replacement Director was sought after Hector’s retirement in 1903, it was desired that the appointee would seek to secure a representative collection illustrative of the Maori race. To this end, the appointment went to Augustus Hamilton,

---

9 J. Hector, ‘Memorandum concerning the Colonial Museum’, published in the *Appendices to the Journal of the New Zealand House of Representatives*, D. No. 9, 1866, p.4.
10 ibid., p.3.
11 Dell, ‘The First Hundred…’, p.100.
who had made his name in the 1880s establishing the museum of the Hawke’s Bay Philosophical Institute with collections made from the local Maori community.\(^1\)

Hamilton had also been involved, since 1901, in proposals for a National Maori Museum to be incorporated as part of the Colonial Museum.\(^1\) Once Director, he continued to campaign for such a museum, although despite considerable support from Maori and Pakeha it never came to fruition.\(^1\) Nevertheless, as one of the first full-time ethnologists in New Zealand, Hamilton set about collecting ‘a representative series of specimens of Maori art and workmanship’.\(^1\) He also altered the arrangement of the museum, so that Maori art dominated the main hall, the north wing concentrated on New Zealand natural history, while the south wing held the original geological collections.\(^1\) Hamilton’s other achievement was the securing of a post in the museum in 1910 for Elsdon Best, who was to become one of the greatest authorities on Maori culture in New Zealand. This was no mean feat, as at the age of 54, Best was not eligible for a permanent position. He was employed as an ‘extra clerk’, and Hamilton and his successors succeeded in retaining his services until Best’s death in 1931.\(^1\) Best helped establish the study of ethnology in New Zealand museums, and his books for many years set the benchmark for the study of the Maori, particularly their social customs and beliefs.\(^1\)

During his tenure as Director, from 1903 until his death in 1914, Hamilton effectively changed the function of the museum from that of a geological museum to one of natural history and ethnology. He also turned the focus of the museum firmly towards being representative of New Zealand itself, in contrast to the often common practice of

\(^{12}\) D.R. Simmons, ‘Anthropology in New Zealand Museums’, *AGMANZ News*, vol. 15, no. 3, September 1984, p.2. Also see R. Fea & E. Pishief, *Culture of Collecting: 60 Years of the Hawke’s Bay Museum*, Napier, 1996, pp.7-16. This museum was a precursor for the Hawke’s Bay Museum that exists today, founded in 1936.


\(^{14}\) Illustrating this support, was a gift to the Government of a large Maori house for the proposed museum, from the Maori people of the Wairarapa region.

\(^{15}\) H. Hamilton, *Colonial Museum*, p.16.

\(^{16}\) ibid., p.20.

\(^{17}\) Dell, *Dominion Museum*, p.12.

\(^{18}\) Some of the most famous of Elsdon Best’s works include *The Maori*, Wellington, 1924; *The Maori as he was: a brief account of Maori life as it was in pre-European days*, Wellington, 1924; *The Maori Division of Time*, Wellington, 1922; *The Maori school of learning: its objects methods and ceremonial*, Wellington, 1923; and *Some aspects of Maori myth and religion*, Wellington, 1922.
colonial museums of collecting and displaying foreign specimens and artefacts. In 1907, for instance, when New Zealand became a Dominion, Hamilton suggested that the new name for the museum should be either the National Museum or the New Zealand Museum. Although the Government chose in December to call it the Dominion Museum, this illustrates his desire to become representative of the nation. In 1912, Hamilton laid out his collection aims for the museum in a memorandum to the Minister of Internal Affairs. These also had a distinctive national focus, including ‘a collection illustrating all the branches of Maori Ethnology’, as well as a ‘collection illustrating the Ethnology of the Pacific’ and New Zealand natural history.

Augustus Hamilton died in 1914 and was succeeded by James Allen Thomson, the first native-born New Zealander to control the museum. In 1915, Thomson published an extensive report, the first to be produced for many years, ‘as a review of the present conditions of the museum collections and activities’. Thomson’s report gave a general evaluation of the museum, including sections on the Library, collections and departmental reports. It was to an extent revolutionary in stressing the need for a definite museum policy, and laid out an outline of one. In doing so, Thomson criticised the museum for not being ‘national’ enough:

It is generally admitted in the community that the Dominion Museum does not occupy the position that it should as a national museum. So far as natural history is concerned, its collections are surpassed in all but a few departments by one or more of the provincial museums … The primary industries of agriculture, forestry, and mining are scarcely represented by exhibits or by material that could be made up into exhibits if space permitted. The reason for this state of affairs lies largely in the lack of a well-founded policy steadily pursued.

Thomson went on to detail what he considered were the major fields in which the museum should develop, under headings such as Ethnology and Ethnography, Zoology,

---

19 Small numbers of foreign ethnological items, for example, had gradually been acquired by the Colonial Museum in the nineteenth century, and these collections did continue to slowly grow during the twentieth century. Asian and Native American items, for example, were often acquired as part of other collections, such as Maori and Pacific. See R. Livingstone, Foreign Ethnology Collections in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, MA thesis, Massey University, 1996, esp. pp.32-55.
22 ibid., p.9.
Geology, Technology and Fine Art. He also argued for the creation of a Dominion Scientific, Art and Historical Library, to be formed by bringing together the collections of the old Colonial Museum Library, the Wellington Philosophical Society, the Parliament Library and the library of Victoria College.\(^{23}\)

Of particular significance was Thomson naming ‘New Zealand History’ as one of the major fields in which the museum should develop. This was the first deliberate statement by the Dominion Museum about the importance of historical collections. However, reflecting the early historical collections highlighted in Chapter Two, the emphasis was on collecting early historical papers, rather than objects: ‘Any specimens, manuscripts, log-books, old newspapers, photographs, prints, or pictures which illustrate early New Zealand history are manifestly within the scope of the museum collections’.\(^{24}\)

Thomson’s suggestions for the incorporation of New Zealand history into the museum were not ignored. The first meeting in January 1916 of the Board of Science and Art, which had controlled the museum since the *Science and Art Act 1913*, resolved that a new museum building would contain ‘an Ethnology Section, a Natural History Section, the Dominion Art Gallery, and a Dominion Library, which amongst other things would contain the New Zealand Historical Collection’.\(^{25}\) After this, moves towards a National Historical Collection progressed quite rapidly, with a public appeal for materials issued in February 1917. As Thomson wrote in his Annual Report for 1917, ‘The answers to the appeal prove the existence of a widespread feeling that a National Historical Collection is both needed and desired.’\(^{26}\) By the following year, over 800 items had been collected, ‘including early books, newspapers, maps, views, and portraits, autographs, letters, account books, and diaries’.\(^{27}\) The collection continued to consist largely of paper material however, and consequently the National Historical Collection was transferred in 1920 to the Alexander Turnbull Library, which had been formed in 1918.\(^{28}\) The museum did retain responsibility for any actual objects, and these

\(^{23}\) ibid., pp.13-17.
\(^{24}\) ibid., p.13.
\(^{27}\) ibid., *1918*, p.2.
\(^{28}\) ibid., *1920*, p.1.
collections slowly grew, but it was not for many years that the importance of historical collections within the museum was again discussed.

**New Premises**

Like his predecessors, Thomson also endeavoured to secure new premises for the museum, but with no greater success. Successive governments had agreed in principal that a new building was necessary for both the museum, National Art Gallery and the possible erection of a National War Memorial, but few proposals were made official.\(^{29}\)

The first move towards a new building eventually came about in 1924, when the Government agreed to give a subsidy of £75,000 for the erection of a building housing both the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum, provided that a similar amount was provided by public subscription. As Dell has pointed out, this provoked protest from Wellington, which complained that the Government should pay the full cost, and from other provincial centres,\(^{30}\) who protested that they received little if any public funding – criticism which continues to surround the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa even today. The Government subsidy was soon increased to £100,000, but other than this there was little progress over the next few years, largely due to contention over a suitable site and delay over the selection of a Board of Trustees who could set about seeking donations from the public.

It was not until 1928, after Thomson had died and W.R.B. Oliver had succeeded him as Director, that a new museum building began to look a definite possibility. George Troup, the new Mayor of Wellington, managed to launch a public appeal in 1928, and £93,450 had been raised by 1929, effectively securing the subsidy offered by the Government.\(^{31}\) Consequently, a site on Mount Cook was reserved and the Government authorised the appointment of a temporary Board of Trustees, while further monies were approved for the erection of a War Memorial Carillon of Bells and a Hall of

\(^{29}\) The origins of the National Art Gallery lay in the Fine Arts Association of New Zealand which had been founded in 1882, and which later merged into the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. The Academy erected an art gallery on land granted by the Government in Whitmore Street, opening to the public as a Free Art Gallery in 1906. Though enlarged in 1916, the art gallery, like the museum, was always hopelessly overcrowded.

\(^{30}\) Dell, *Dominion Museum*, p.16.

\(^{31}\) Some of the prominent donors to the public appeal included Wellington City Council, the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, the Wellington Harbour Board, the Bank of New Zealand and the Union
Memories. The National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum Act was passed in 1930, initiating the National Art Gallery, Dominion Museum and War Memorial Carillon Scheme on the Mount Cook site. A Board of Trustees was officially established, as were separate committees for the management of the Dominion Museum and Art Gallery. Construction finally began in March 1933, with the Foundation Stone being laid by the Governor-General of New Zealand, Lord Bledisloe, on 14 April 1934. In his speech, Bledisloe acknowledged that this was ‘the realisation of a long-felt desire to see the capital city furnished with a National Art Gallery and a Dominion Museum worthy both of it and of its artistic and scientific treasures’, while also explaining:

New Zealand is unquestionably ripe for a great advance in the general cultural progress of her people, and I can conceive of no more practical or fruitful method of signalising and stimulating such maturity than the establishment of an up-to-date National Museum and Picture Gallery, generously and prudently equipped and administered with catholicity of outlook and comprehensiveness of educative ambit.

The new Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery finally opened to the public on 1 August 1936, exhibiting ‘collections of ethnological, biological, and geological specimens, together with smaller series illustrating ceramics, New Zealand history, postage stamps, astronomy, and meteorology’. Significantly though, the section on New Zealand history consisted almost entirely of ‘a long series of historical pictures showing the development of New Zealand’. Actual objects were generally absent, except for the occasional display of items such as a model of Captain Cook’s ship Endeavour, or Cook’s communion cup and case.
Built during the Depression of the 1930s, the new building was never actually finished, construction being halted with around two-thirds of the structure completed. As a result, offices and laboratories replaced galleries that had been planned for the lower floor.\(^{38}\) Nevertheless, for a short time at least, the space provided was adequate, with display areas comprising almost an entire floor. However, the facilities of the new Museum were not to be enjoyed for long. As the war in the Pacific gathered momentum, the building was taken for defence purposes, becoming the South Pacific Operations Headquarters for the United States and New Zealand forces.\(^{39}\) On the 8\(^{th}\) June 1942, the Dominion Museum was closed to the public, a state it was to remain in for seven years.

**The Rise of Colonial History**

The museum reopened to the public on 29 September 1949, under the control of Dr Roger Falla, formerly the Director of the Canterbury Museum, who had replaced Oliver as Director on his retirement in 1947. The 1950s saw a new era for the museum both in the size and scope of its collections. This was firstly due to a period of unprecedented ethnographic and natural history collecting and an increased emphasis on scientific research. Staff began field collecting from all over New Zealand, as well as more distant areas such as Fiji, New Caledonia, Norfolk Island, the Chathams, the Campbell Islands, Macquarie Island and the Antarctic.\(^{40}\) Consequently, it was not long before the size of the collections, combined with an increase of staff, were again putting pressure on the limited size and resources of the museum.\(^{41}\) This, combined with rumours that the museum building might even collapse, led to a renewal of calls for more space and renovation.\(^{42}\)

In terms of identity, this increased collecting around the Pacific region can be attributed in part to a gradual move after the Second World War to position New Zealand as a Pacific country. This regional geographical approach was in contrast to Australia, whose ethnological and burgeoning historical collections rarely extended into the Asia-

\(^{40}\) Dell, *Dominion Museum*, p.22.
Pacific region, illustrative of the traditional links with Britain and Europe and the prevalent insecurity over Australia’s proximity to Asia.\footnote{Discussed in Chapter One.}

Also in the 1950s, was the beginning of more deliberate and widespread collecting of New Zealand history since European settlement – indicative of the general widening of historical consciousness that was taking place around the world. The informal collecting of historical artefacts had continued gradually since the development of the National Historical Collection in the 1910s. In 1950, the Annual Report of the Dominion Museum stated that an unofficial historical and technological section, consisting of ‘bygones’ of value, seemed to have separated from ethnology, and that the growth of such collections ‘has caused the committee to discuss future policy’.\footnote{National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum, \textit{Annual Report ... 1950}, Wellington, 1950, p.6.} After this, the museum’s collections of articles relating to New Zealand’s history seem to have steadily increased, though this was in a generally haphazard manner, especially as there were no staff dedicated to either their collection or preservation. As the Annual Report of 1952 described:

> Numerous and often bulky articles which are of value historically and technologically are being offered in increasing numbers, and most of them accepted. The stimulus to this growth is largely external, for the Museum staff is for the most part trained in and assigned to other lines of professional work in natural science and ethnology.\footnote{ibid., ... \textit{1952}, p.6.}

By 1954, despite no one member of staff being able ‘to give full time to the work of this section’, some progress had been made in classifying the collections ‘of historical drawings, paintings, and photographic prints, with special attention to early Wellington’.\footnote{ibid., ... \textit{1954}, p.7.} Consequently, in December, the first temporary exhibition of early colonial history in New Zealand was opened at the museum: ‘The resources of the Alexander Turnbull Library and National Archives were made available, and private owners lent articles of interest, including furniture’.\footnote{ibid., ... \textit{1955}, p.7.} The exhibition ‘was well attended’, and the collection and temporary display of historical artefacts seemed to be established in the Dominion Museum. It was not yet regarded as an important part of the museum’s role, however, despite the appointment of a Mr S. Northcote Bade as an
honorary curator of cultural history in 1958. By the following year it looked as if the collection of Pakeha history was going to have to be forsaken: ‘It has become increasingly clear that, unless adequate exhibition space can be added to the museum or found elsewhere in the near future, the accumulation of historical and technological material will have to be abandoned’.

Whether this was an empty threat on the part of the Board of Trustees, expressed in the Annual Report for the benefit of the perennial call for more space and funds, is unclear. Whatever the case, the ‘rather miscellaneous collections’ under the heading of history and technology were there to stay, and it was acknowledged that they must continue to grow ‘unless potentially valuable material is to be rejected and lost for all time’.

It is important to emphasise though, that these collections continued to concentrate only on nineteenth-century New Zealand history, and often more specifically on the very early colonial period. This reflected the development of ‘colonial streets’ in the Auckland and Canterbury museums, each constructed to represent particular periods in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the collections largely consisted of furniture, technology, or other applied arts, which had belonged to significant figures from the past. At the same time, when some direction in the historical collecting was applied, it was often to put its focus on the Wellington region, so that the museum played the role of a provincial rather than a national museum. Ultimately, the historical collections in the Dominion Museum were hardly representative of the country and certainly not indicative of the wider population.

Nevertheless, it is significant that by the 1960s, New Zealand’s history since European settlement was beginning to form quite a substantial part of the museum’s collections. For example, in order to celebrate the centennial of the museum in 1965, Richard Dell, who replaced Roger Falla as Director in 1966, wrote his extensive ‘The First Hundred Years of the Dominion Museum’, which due to funding was unfortunately reduced to a pamphlet for publication. As well as detailing the general history of the Colonial and

---

48 ibid., ... 1958, p.15. For the couple of years previous to this, most of the historical work had been done by the Taxidermist, C.J. Lindsay. See Annual Report ... 1957, p.16.
49 ibid., ... 1959, p.17.
50 ibid., ... 1963, p.21.
51 The complete manuscript does exist, however, in various libraries such as the Te Aka Matua Library at the Museum of New Zealand, and Massey University’s library in Palmerston North.
Dominion Museum, Dell also summarised the collections as they stood in 1965. In one section, he grouped historical collections under a number of headings: ‘Early New Zealand history’, which included items such as those associated with Captain Cook, ‘Period Costume and Textile Collection’, ‘Firearms’, ‘Technology’, a ‘Photographic Collection’ and ‘Other Historical Collections’, which included items such as furniture, household fittings and other material relating to early colonial history.\(^52\)

By 1967, colonial history had been accepted as a ‘proper field for the museum to enter’, a gallery began to be planned the following year, and in April 1968 the first Curator of Colonial History was employed by the museum.\(^53\) The first to hold the position was D.P. Millar, who had a background in the art, culture and technology of the period. The Annual Report in 1969 described the significance of the appointment:

> Mr. Millar’s appointment as Curator of Colonial History broke new ground as regards the Museum’s interests, and indeed is the first fulltime professional appointment in this field for any major New Zealand museum. The Museum had been aware for some years that interest in the early days of European settlement was growing fast … There was little precedent to follow in making an appointment, but a strong feeling that such a person should be a historian with an interest in the material culture of the times rather than a person with a specialised interest in one aspect of the culture or technology of the period 1840 to 1890.\(^54\)

A Colonial History Gallery eventually opened in 1969, the major display being a Colonial House representing ‘a simple weatherboard dwelling that a Wellington settler might have built in the 1840s’.\(^55\) Other exhibits included sections on early navigators and Victorian technology, as well as period rooms displaying the Elgar collection of European furniture. After this the Gallery hardly changed, though during the 1970s the museum continued to collect a growing number of historical artefacts.

\(^{52}\) Dell, ‘The First Hundred…’, pp.221-227. In regards to the ‘technology’ section, it is worth pointing out that Dell does stress that the ‘Dominion Museum has not deliberately pursued a policy of building up collections in the field of technology’, pp.225-226. He refers to the new Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) that had recently been established in Auckland, as being the only specialist museum in New Zealand which can care for such material, and consequently the Dominion Museum has pursued a caretaker policy towards technological specimens, providing they do not pose too many problems of storage or restoration.


\(^{54}\) ibid., *… 1969*, pp.24-25.

\(^{55}\) ibid., p.21.
It was not until the early 1980s, that the Colonial History Gallery underwent serious renovation, as the beginning of a planned multi-million dollar facelift of the entire museum intended: ‘to turn the place into a co-ordinated effort, telling the story of New Zealand from its formation on the earth’s crust through its colonisation by plants and animals and finally people’. However, this still did not include the history of New Zealanders in the twentieth century. The Gallery reopened in April 1982, showing examples of early European settlement and the activities of settlers in New Zealand like that of the previous gallery, under similar area headings such as ‘Early Exploration’, ‘Early Wellington’, the ‘Colonial Cottage’ and the Elgar collection.

The ‘National’ Museum in the 1970s and early 1980s – Problems Emerge

Since the late 1960s, the museum had been increasing its calls for more funding, due to the lack of space and staff shortages. In February 1968 for example, the AGMANZ Newsletter commented that the Dominion Museum, ‘due to inadequate accommodation and insufficient funding, is unable to fulfil its function as the National Museum of New Zealand. It is shocking that New Zealand’s only museum directly financed by the government should have such depleted staff and inadequate facilities.’ Equally, there was continued criticism that the museum did not concentrate enough on its role as a national museum, but rather served the ‘role of the Wellington Provincial Museum’.

The 1970s, therefore, saw the museum press forward once more for increased funding and extensions to the back of the existing building. Their calls appeared more valid with the passing of the National Art Gallery, Museum and War Memorial Act 1972, changing the name of the museum from Dominion to National, and giving official recognition to the national nature of the institution. The Act reconstituted the Board of Trustees and gave the Museum Management Council new status as a ‘National Museum Council’. It laid out the functions of the Board, which included: ‘To acquire, preserve, act as a

---

58 AGMANZ Newsletter, no. 38, February 1968, p.10.
national repository for, and display collections of material principally concerning New Zealand and the Pacific, relating to plants, animals, ethnology, and the history of man’; ‘To conduct related research…’; and to ‘co-operate with and assist other public museums and allied organisations…’.  

Apart from standardising its role, however, the Act did little to aid the cause of the museum. The problems of space, and especially staff, were then exacerbated in 1975 with the passing of the Antiquities Act 1975. The Act gave a new definition to what was an ‘antiquity’, and prohibited the export of such antiquities without Government permission. As the Annual Report of the National Museum in 1975 described, these antiquities were now to include ‘Maori artefacts made before 1902, historical European chattels and works of art over 60 years old, type specimens of animals and plants, bones, or feathers, etc., of the moa or other vertebrates “generally believed to be extinct”, and parts of shipwrecks of historical importance more than 60 years old’. All artefacts, bought or sold, were to be registered by an authorised public museum, which the National Museum was one of only four, before the artefact records were forwarded to the National Museum to form the basis of a central register. The Act, therefore, significantly added to the role and responsibilities of the museum, heightening the continuing problems of space, staff and funding shortages.

It was not until 1980 that it seemed progress was at last being made, when the Cabinet Works committee approved the preparation of drawings for a 7,100 square metre new three-storey wing, to house office, research and storage facilities. All that was needed was cabinet permission before building on the NZ$9.6 million extension could begin. However, problems again arose that disrupted any further moves forward. In 1982, an Ad Hoc Committee was set up by Cabinet, charged with finding appropriate ways of celebrating the 1990 Sesquicentennial of New Zealand. An early consideration was the concept of a new National Art Gallery, which appealed more to the Committee as it would be a very public project, suitable for a national celebration, as opposed to the proposed back of house museum extension. Subsequently, in September 1983, Cabinet

60 National Art Gallery, Museum, and War Memorial Act 1972, 1972, no. 11, Section 11 (c).
decided to divert the funds marked for the museum to the construction of a new National Art Gallery in Molesworth Street, delaying any development of the National Museum indefinitely. In fact, the Department of Internal Affairs made it quite clear that the extensions would be ‘dead’ until well after 1990. It is worth pointing out that the National Art Gallery project was also put on hold in 1984, after it was realised that a previous government had reserved the Molesworth Street site for a new High Court. The Government’s decision to delay any museum development provoked strong public criticism. As the Editorial of the Evening Post declared, referring to the period since the existing building opened in 1936:

It has taken only 47 years to betray a trust … Shocking conditions are threatening artefacts worth, commercially, $180 million. Although the repository of the priceless symbols of our cultural soul, the museum suffers because of some strange bookkeeping. A planned $9 million extension isn’t going ahead now, but because of this ‘saving’ our heritage is to slowly rot away. Because we won’t spend this to protect an ‘investment’ of $180 million, this generation’s legacy may be a landscape littered with ‘think-big’ projects, but its history gone. Who will thank us for that?

Te Maori and New Beginnings

It did not take until 1990, however, for the museum’s situation to again come under scrutiny. In 1984, a Caucus Committee was convened under the chairmanship of the Hon. Bill Jefferies MP, with an initial brief to referee between the competing claims of the National Art Gallery and lawyers for the Molesworth Street site, and then to enquire into alternative sites. Through its enquiries, the committee also uncovered the injustices done to the museum, and was particularly critical of the large amount of funds and work that had been wasted by putting its development off. Consequently, the committee recommended to Cabinet that the High Court should take the Molesworth Street site, while a new Pacific cultural complex should be built on the Wellington

---

64 This effectively wasted about 10 years and NZ$900,000 in planning. See D. Sturm, ‘$1.3m ‘wasted’ by cancelling arts projects’, Evening Post, 19th December 1985, p.3.
67 During 1984, in fact, the Ministry of Works began considering various buildings near the museum in Buckle Street, which could possibly be leased for storage. See ‘Museum staff to cope with building chaos’, Evening Post, 30th January 1984, and ‘Museum eyes extra space’, Dominion, 2nd March 1984.
68 I am indebted to the Rt. Hon. Jonathon Hunt MP, Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, for clarifying the issues surrounding this 1984 Caucus Committee.
waterfront, to continue the co-existence of the National Museum and National Art Gallery, and to emphasise New Zealand’s ‘Pacific heritage and identity’.

The recommendation marked a new era in the evolution of the National Museum and had a significant impact on various proposals for its development. This was strengthened by the impact that the exhibition ‘Te Maori’ had throughout New Zealand, by increasing the respect of the Pakeha majority towards Maori culture and enhancing pride amongst Maori people themselves. Indeed, the National Museum, which had actually revamped its Maori displays in 1984 in an attempt to display Maori culture as ‘living’ rather than as from another time, and had appointed its first Maori advisor for Maoritanga, was one of the first institutions to acknowledge the impact of ‘Te Maori’:

The Te Maori Exhibition has changed forever the perceived reason for New Zealand museums to hold, study, and display Maori objects. No longer can the uninformed public hold the stereotypic idea that Maori culture is ‘collected’ by natural history museums as part of an academic and majority-culture fascination with things primitive, quaint, tribal, exotic.

‘Te Maori’ affected the development of the National Museum after 1984 in two important ways. First, the realisation of Maori culture as constituting a vital part of the heritage and identity of the nation positioned the National Museum as an important component of bicultural nation formation. Secondly, it showed that Maori art could be a popular drawing card for overseas visitors, and so it was inevitable, if only for commercial reasons, that it held an important place in any future museum development.

The combination of ‘Te Maori’ and the recommendation of the Caucus committee for a Pacific cultural centre led to a number of different suggestions for new national institutions during 1985. For example, James Mack, the Director of Dowse Art Museum, agreed in principle to the idea of a Pacific Cultural Centre, as long as it had a distinctly national focus and put Maori culture to the fore. Sidney Mead, a Professor of Maori at Victoria University in Wellington, envisaged a national museum and gallery

---

69 Report of Caucus Committee 1985, quoted in Baker, ‘The Museum of New Zealand…’, p.6. The site discussed was actually that where Te Papa stands today.
system broken down into five constituent parts: a National Museum of Natural History, a National Museum of Anthropology, a National Museum of New Zealand Art, a National Museum of Pacific Art, and a National Centre of Maori Culture. On the other hand, Richard Cassels at the Manawatu Museum in Palmerston North put forward three different options, based on the assumption that the present building would be supplemented by an adjoining new structure. The first of these was to follow the idea, circulating for many years, of separating the National Museum and National Art Gallery, giving each their own separate spaces. The second option was to redraw the philosophical dividing lines between the museum and art gallery. Broadening the concept of an art gallery, it would create ‘a museum of fine pieces to amaze us, drawn from all our cultural heritages’, along with ‘a museum of ordinary objects that tell us very important things we should know about – a sort of museum of history, society, folk-culture and nature’. The third suggestion Cassels offered is that which is most like the Museum of New Zealand that exists today. He visualised the unification of the National Museum and National Art Gallery and then, assuming that due to space they had to split into two, a National Museum of the Human Heritage on one hand, and a National Museum of Natural Heritage on the other. Cassels imagined that in the new National Museum of Human Heritage, ‘the academic disciplines of history, anthropology and art history would clash creatively with the reality of New Zealand’s people today’.

The realisation by the Government Caucus committee that the museum and art gallery were suffering from grossly inadequate facilities, along with the impact of ‘Te Maori’, began stirring up considerable discourse over their future development. At the same time, by late 1984, Robert Muldoon’s Labour Government was in power and had begun issuing new policies in the general area of heritage and the arts, policies which stressed the expression of a New Zealand identity. Consequently, on 20th May 1985, Cabinet affirmed in principle the commitment to construct a Pacific Cultural Centre, and commissioned a Project Development Team to develop the parameters and a more specific definition for the project.

---

75 ibid.
76 See Chapter Three for discussion of the development of government policy.
The subsequent report of the Development Team, *Nga Taonga o Te Motu – Treasures of the Nation*, was published in December 1985, and can be seen to mark the beginnings of the new Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. The Report illustrated the various strands of thought that were achieving increased currency throughout the 1980s. It highlighted, for instance, the challenges that had emerged in recent years to question traditional ideas of history and identity:

This is a period in which traditionally held views of New Zealand history are being scrutinised and, inevitably, reassessed. For many New Zealanders this process is a disturbing one. … This process of re-assessment is to be encouraged as an essential part of the nation’s growth towards maturity, however much it might bring temporary discomfort to some.77

It also acknowledged that any new institution should be bicultural in nature:

From the outset the Project Development Team recognised that any redeveloped National Museum system and its associated collections should be a unifying structure that would help to bring all of the cultures of New Zealand closer together. As a consequence, the Team’s deliberations, consultations and investigations were conducted on the basis of a full and equal partnership between the two main cultures of New Zealand.78

*Treasures of the Nation* also managed to nationalise Maori culture, and recognised its potential by stating the importance ‘Te Maori’ had in ‘identifying our culture’ and ‘enhancing its relevance to all New Zealanders’.79 Further, it highlighted the commercial possibilities the exhibition had opened up by stating that museums

‘do act as a significant trigger in tourist destination choices. … After Te Maori … it is clear that in the United States of America, at least, New Zealand now figures among those nations which are seen to create and house important treasures of world art’.80

78 ibid.,p.2.
79 ibid., p.7.
80 ibid., p.10.
Moreover it acknowledged that a national museum must have its primary concern and focus on ‘New Zealand – its physical and cultural origins; its place in the Pacific and in the wider world’.\textsuperscript{81} This, combined with the bicultural influence, led the Project Development Team to conclude that a Pacific Cultural Centre would be too misleading, and that to recognise the two main cultures in New Zealand the new institution should be called the National Museum of New Zealand – Te Marae Taonga o Aotearoa (the marae of treasures of Aotearoa).\textsuperscript{82}

The \textit{Treasures of the Nation} report, acknowledging that the collections ‘are increasingly at risk and increasingly inaccessible to the people whose heritage and culture they represent’, laid out a concept for a new museum on a site in Herd Street.\textsuperscript{83} The concept revolved around the idea of a single institution that contained within it three separate components, each with a good deal of curatorial autonomy.\textsuperscript{84} The three components were to include the National Art Museum, which was essentially the current National Art Gallery but with a broadened scope, and Te Whare Taonga Tangata Whenua, a new museum institution devoted to Maori and Pacific art and culture. The third component was to be the National Museum of Human Society and the Natural Environment, a broadly based museum covering all aspects of the history of the peoples of New Zealand, whether they be Pakeha, Maori or any other culture. Though controlled separately, the three different components were not conceived as distinctly independent, rather they were to be seen as ‘windows’ through which ‘interactions between different cultures can be revealed and the relationship between mankind and the natural world defined’.\textsuperscript{85} The document emphasised the integration of the three themes:

> The components of the new National Museum will be so linked and integrated that their displays will be experienced by the public as a continuum and not as a number of separate exhibits. The visitor will pass from one experience to the other with little indication of curatorial division, except for the changing focus and emphasis of the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{81} ibid., p.8.  
\textsuperscript{82} Marae – meeting place.  
\textsuperscript{83} Project Development Team, \textit{Treasures of the Nation}, p.15 & 17. This is actually where the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa now is, though its common address is Cable Street.  
\textsuperscript{85} Project Development Team, \textit{Treasures of the Nation}, p.13.}
exhibitions. Indeed, there will undoubtedly be times when the National Museum as a whole will examine a single important theme throughout its various halls.\textsuperscript{86}

The concept, therefore, proposed an entirely new national museum. It was based on a far more innovative programme than ever before, and was indicative of many of the modern trends permeating museums and society that have already been identified, and that were evident not just in New Zealand but around the world. As the \textit{Evening Post} discussed, this ‘was related to growing nationalism within New Zealand, more regard being paid to the country’s pre-European heritage, and a trend overseas to put museums and galleries in one complex’.\textsuperscript{87} The proposal recommended that the complex be developed by the year 2000 at a cost of NZ$179.2 million, though the National Art Museum component was to be the priority as it was initially supposed to be built in time for the 1990 celebration.

Back within the actual National Museum, between 1985 and 1990, moves had gradually been made to implement some of the new ideas circulating museum society in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{88} In terms of history for example, a new Cultural Heritage Division was established, within which was a Department of History and Technology that related ‘to the history of European settlement in New Zealand, and the differing ways of life in New Zealand from the time of earliest colonial settlement almost to the present day’.\textsuperscript{89} This was the first recognition of the need to be representative of more recent histories and cultures as well as those from a more distant past. The museum also made moves to become more bicultural in its organisation – through more extensive liaison with Maori communities and the adoption of alternative Maori names for its display galleries.\textsuperscript{90} In 1988, the National Museum Council adopted a mission statement that included a declaration that the ‘National Museum operates on the basis of a full and equal partnership between the two main cultures of Aotearoa/New Zealand’.\textsuperscript{91} The same statement also included a policy in which the museum made it clear that they were supposed to be representative of the nation: ‘to share the museum’s accumulated

\textsuperscript{86} ibid., p.14.
\textsuperscript{87} ‘Museum “will need public money”’, \textit{Evening Post}, 11\textsuperscript{th} December 1985.
\textsuperscript{88} The museum had also finally attained more storage space in a building in Taranaki Street in 1986. See Baker, ‘The Museum of New Zealand…’, p.6.
\textsuperscript{90} ibid., … 1988, p.24.
\textsuperscript{91} ibid., … 1989, p.24.
knowledge on the natural environment and cultural history of our country in a stimulating and accurate way for the benefit of all New Zealanders’.92

Meanwhile, planning for the new museum was beginning to progress in earnest. In April 1986, the Labour Government had agreed in principle to the construction of the new complex on the Wellington waterfront and initial funding, for the selection of architectural and design teams, was approved the following year. In May 1988, a new Project Development Board was established, chaired by former Prime Minister Sir Wallace Rowling, and in July the Government made the first major step towards building the new museum by signing an agreement giving it the option to buy the Wellington waterfront site.93 The Board set about developing and refining the 1985 concept for a new museum, largely through consultations with interested individuals, groups and communities, with the goal being ‘the completion and acceptance of a clearly articulated and widely understood statement of missions, roles, activities and relationships for the new Museum of New Zealand – Te Marae Taonga o Aotearoa’.94

One important outcome of the consultations was disagreement over the name of the new institution, especially as the Maori component had been initially agreed on with little consultation with Maori people.95 Consequently, in December 1988, a new name, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (literally translated to mean ‘repository of precious things’), was adopted ‘to honour the two main cultures of New Zealand in the spirit of the Treaty of Waitangi’.96 In April 1989, the Project Development Board then officially adopted a concept for the new museum, its preamble stating:

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa will be a national museum that powerfully expresses the total culture of New Zealand. It will express the bicultural nature of the country, recognising the mana and significance of each of the two mainstreams of tradition and cultural heritage and providing the means for each to

---

92 ibid., p.20.
contribute effectively to a statement of the nation’s identity. The Museum through all its activities and programmes will strive to be a source of pride for all New Zealanders.97

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) was to be quite different from that which was proposed in 1985, in that all aspects of the museum were to be based around a tripartite concept presenting the important strands of New Zealand – past, present and future. The first of these strands, and the one that the other two would base themselves around, was ‘Papatuanuku – the earth on which we all live’, comprising the country’s natural history: land, flora and fauna. The second strand represented the Maori, ‘Tangata Whenua – those who belong to the land by right of first discovery’, while the final strand, ‘Tangata Tiriti – those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty’, would look at the cultural identity of the more recent settlers of New Zealand, including their art, multicultural heritages, history and relationship with the land.98 The establishment of Te Papa on this tripartite concept was an important indication of how the museum was going to develop in the succeeding years. It is also comparable with the National Museum of Australia, and its inter-relation of the three themes of the environment, Aboriginal history, and Australian history, and as the proceeding chapters will more fully illustrate, these concepts are integral to how the museums now represent notions of history and identity.

The 1989 concept report also envisaged a new organisation that brought together five major functions into one institution, administered by a chief executive responsible to a Board of Directors. There was to be a Department of Environment, within the concept of Papatuanuku, a Department of Maori Art and History within the concept of Tangata Whenua, a Department of Art, to replace the National Art Gallery, and a Department of History within the concept of Tangata Tiriti, which would focus on New Zealand’s social, cultural and material history as well as that of Pacific Islander people. Finally, a Department of National Services would be established, to assist other museums, galleries and organisations with training, exhibitions and so forth.99 In curatorial matters

98 ibid., pp.4-5. These three strands have remained largely unchanged as the concept behind Te Papa.
the departments would remain generally separate, while still allowing for some integration. The Wellington art critic, John Roberts, said of the proposed structure:

This ambitious structure is, so far as I am aware, unique in attempting to cover so much of the museological field in an organisational plan that clearly demands interdepartmental collaboration. It will be an unprecedented task for the overall director to make it work.\textsuperscript{100}

A New Museum?

Once the concept had been agreed upon, moves towards the actual construction of a new museum seemed to progress faster than ever. In February 1990, the Government finally gave the green light to Te Papa, by pledging NZ$223 million over the next nine years. At a ceremony unveiling the foundation stone, Margaret Austin, the Minister of Internal Affairs, described the project as ‘one of the most exciting developments in New Zealand’s history, with the Government’s prime objective being to create an institution that will be a source of pride for all New Zealanders’.\textsuperscript{101} She also stressed that the new museum would not be a ‘Wellington’ museum, ‘but will acknowledge the value of regionally held objects and collections of national importance and will establish a partnership with other museums and galleries all around the country’.\textsuperscript{102}

In May 1990, the architect for the new museum, Jasmax, was announced after a year long nation-wide competition. Celebrating the developments, the \textit{Dominion} commented on how ideas for the museum had, since 1985, ‘developed in a way that catches up the maturing insights of New Zealand’s 150\textsuperscript{th} year as a nation’.\textsuperscript{103} Soon afterwards, Sir Wallace Rowling, the Chairman of the Project Development Board, described how the new institution would not be a traditional museum:

The very soul of the nation will be exposed. It will in its own way be a living, vibrant, exciting theatre which houses not only the nation’s treasures from the past, but within

\textsuperscript{100} J. Roberts, ‘Roberts Report – a talk given by John Roberts on the \textit{Concert} programme, 25\textsuperscript{th} June 1990’, Transcript in the Te Aka Matua Library.
\textsuperscript{101} Quoted in Department of Internal Affairs, \textit{Internal Affairs – Te Tari Taiwhenua, a newsletter for staff and friends of the Department}, vol. 1, no. 16, 12\textsuperscript{th} March 1990, p.1.
\textsuperscript{102} Quoted in ‘Museum of New Zealand gets go-ahead’, \textit{Oamaru Mail}, 5\textsuperscript{th} February 1990.
\textsuperscript{103} ‘A cultural flagship’, \textit{Dominion}, 30\textsuperscript{th} May 1990, p.14.
which the present will be evolving in a great range of human activity and expression. Performing artists, craftsfolk, hands-on experiments for the curious of all ages, the latest in Imax cinema, opportunities for a variety of public functions, and so the list goes on.\textsuperscript{104}

It seemed that finally New Zealand was going to achieve a new national museum, based around the new theories of museology that had been developing over the last decade or two. However, the difficulties were not over yet. During the late 1980s, for instance, the existing National Museum had not been developing as rapidly as the ideas for its new home. Despite evidently moving towards biculturalism, for instance, it did not seem to have significantly implemented some of its other new policies, such as the incorporation of the history of New Zealand since European settlement up to the present day. In describing the collections of the National Museum in a directory in 1991, Keith Thomson illustrated the continued emphasis of older colonial history: ‘Collections cover natural history and ethnology of New Zealand and adjacent Pacific areas and to a lesser extent the rest of the Pacific and the world; European history in New Zealand up to about 1914’.\textsuperscript{105} Brian Priestley also highlighted the shortcomings of Pakeha history in the museum:

\begin{quote}
The Colonial Gallery … is a mess. The best exhibits are some rooms of English furniture, from the colonial period, and Victorian dresses. But if you feel a national museum should also try to portray the struggles and achievements of pioneers and settlers … the Colonial Gallery doesn’t begin to do a good job.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

At any rate, the Government commitment in early 1990 did not signal an end to the problems and debate surrounding the construction of a new museum. In fact in the years since 1990, reflecting the sensitive and political role of history and identity in the late twentieth century, Te Papa has found itself delayed, and almost shelved, and beset by criticism over its site and its design, over being allegedly either Euro-centric or Maori-centric, and more recently over its exhibition content and display methods. In many ways, the National Museum’s problems had only just begun.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{104} W. Rowling, ‘Museum of NZ for cultural focus’, \textit{Otago Daily Times}, 30\textsuperscript{th} August 1990.
\textsuperscript{106} B. Priestley, ‘National Museum a dead end…’, \textit{The Star} (Christchurch), 14\textsuperscript{th} September 1991.
\end{flushright}
Despite the Labour Government’s support, it was immediately clear that any early start towards the building of the new museum would be delayed by the National Party’s refusal to endorse the project until after the election later in 1991. The Opposition’s two main gripes were the cost of the project and the failure of the Government to involve them in the initial planning, and their reluctance to commit to the museum was confirmed by the release of their Arts Policy in September, through which the National Party reserved the right ‘to review the scale and the timing of this proposal in the light of current economic circumstances’. The landslide election of the National Party to office, therefore, seemed likely to once again threaten the future of the NZ$264 million project, with the new Minister of Internal Affairs announcing: ‘We will have to assess the financial position in detail. But there is no doubt at the moment that it is hard to see how the project could in any way be continued as the Labour Government had arranged’.

The new Government’s unwillingness to commit to Te Papa was contributed to by the emergence of two new proposals which, had they succeeded, would have effectively destroyed the entire philosophical, national and bicultural concept that the new museum had been based upon since 1985. The first of these proposals was an offer of free land to the Government by the Palmerston North City Council, in an attempt to lure the proposed museum away from the capital. The suggestion received little consideration however, and even less currency.

The second proposal though, received widespread media coverage and was seen as a viable cost-cutting plan, to at least make sure that a new museum in some form went ahead. Designed by architect Ian Athfield and put forward by development company Mainzeal in April 1991, the plan was to convert a former Post Office building on Waterloo Quay in Wellington. Removing several floors from the building and surrounding it grandly with pillars, in order to create a ‘Parthenon-like national museum’, the plan was to cost up to NZ$110 million, which included the NZ$50

---

million already spent on planning the museum, compared with the projected NZ$264 million cost of the proposed waterfront site.\textsuperscript{110}

Not surprisingly, the Post Office proposal was strongly opposed by Te Papa’s Project Development Board who had been planning the new purpose-built museum for so long. Sir Wallace Rowling described the plan as ‘utter nonsense’ that had ‘not been thought through by anyone’, while National Maori Congress Chairman Apirana Mahuika described it as an example of ‘ monocultural arrogance’, as Mainzeal had apparently not consulted Maori groups.\textsuperscript{111} Graeme Shadwell, Te Papa’s Project Director, said that should this cheaper option be adopted ‘the Government would have to abandon the whole concept of the museum and the years of consultation that have gone into developing it’.\textsuperscript{112}

At any rate, in May 1991, due to the economic climate and their own indecision over its future, the Government decided to defer construction of the new museum until at least July 1993. Due to the amount already spent however, the design and project management services were to continue; the Government recognising that the project ‘should proceed if at all possible’.\textsuperscript{113} Subsequently, in November 1991, the museum published its Corporate Plan for the next two years, stating its main mission outcomes as ‘Passing on to future generations the heritage of New Zealand’, and ‘Extending understanding of New Zealand’s cultures, society and natural history’.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{Conclusion}

The worst fears of museum supporters were not realised and a year later, due to further pressure and support from the press and the museum’s many supporters, the National Government finally gave the go-ahead for the construction of the new Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, built to the Jasmax design, on the Wellington waterfront site. Hailed by Sir Wallace Rowling as a decision that showed ‘courage and vision’,\textsuperscript{115}


\textsuperscript{111} M. Munro, ‘Thumbs down for cheaper museum’, \textit{Dominion}, 21\textsuperscript{st} August 1992, p.7.

\textsuperscript{112} L. Murphy, ‘Mixed feelings on new museum plan’, \textit{Evening Post}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} April 1991.


\textsuperscript{115} R. Olsen, ‘Turning vision into reality’, \textit{Evening Post}, 27\textsuperscript{th} May 1992, p.5.
The project was to proceed at a total cost of NZ$280.6 million. Construction was to start in July 1993 employing approximately 1000 people, with the opening of the new museum scheduled for 1998. In a press statement on 26 May 1992, the Minister of Cultural Affairs declared:

The Museum of New Zealand will incorporate the National Art Gallery and National Museum. It is to be a purpose designed complex sited on the Wellington waterfront, and represents a lasting solution to the rehousing of the remaining national heritage collection. It will be a symbol of national pride expressing the bicultural nature of the country … The Museum of New Zealand is the most important project envisaged for the cultural sector, and I believe it makes a powerful statement about this nation’s past and future identity.¹¹⁶

A new national museum for New Zealand was finally a reality. Scheduled to open in early 1998, it was based around the three concepts of Papatuanuku, Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti. In this way, Te Papa can be considered as the culmination both of the long development of the National Museum and of 150 years of museum-making in New Zealand, as emphasis has slowly shifted from natural history towards the amalgamation of this with the representation of the human heritage of New Zealand in its own right, whenever or whatever it might be. It can also be seen, as can the National Museum of Australia, as an outcome of the global repositioning of museums, particularly national museums, as they have shifted from being collections and research-centred to being more accountable, collaborative and representative of the publics in which they exist. In light of the proceeding discussion of their designs and subsequent representations of history and identity, the two museums can be regarded, both with praise and criticism, as being models for the new museological trends that have developed during the last two decades, and indicative of the important and complex nature of national identity in these post-colonial societies.

CHAPTER SIX

The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa – Design and Outcomes, Success and Failure.

During the 1990s, both Australia and New Zealand finally achieved new national museums. Construction of a new museum in New Zealand was given the green light in May 1992, and in July the National Museum and National Gallery merged together, as the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act came into effect. Building began in July 1993. In July 1998, the National Museum of Australia (NMA) was given approval to proceed. Later that month, the local Ngunnawal people performed a smoking ceremony to cleanse and purify the site on Acton Peninsula,¹ and construction officially began in March 1999.²

Whereas during the preceding years both national museums had focused on building their collections, they now had to concentrate on developing the concepts and framework for the permanent exhibitions of the new institutions. This chapter provides a broad overview of the intellectual and built environment of the two new museums, focusing on the factors that can be seen as significantly shaping their final opening exhibitions, and particularly their representation of histories.

Reflected at the heart of both institutions were the issues that had been building in importance over the prior decades. In particular, the need to be representative of the cultural identity of both the indigenous populations and more recent settlers is central to both the NMA and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). Both museums were primarily established as instruments of national identity, structured around concepts integrating the three themes of the land and environment, indigenous

¹ Necessary because of the sickness and death that occurred in the Canberra hospital that previously occupied the site. See ‘Smoking ceremony – a cleansing process’, in Elements: update of Acton Peninsula construction project – National Museum of Australia and Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, August 2000, p.2, National Museum of Australia (NMA) Research Library.
² The NMA used a method of project alliancing, a world first for a building project of this size, that aimed to deliver a cost-effective outcome in a set period through the project owner and contractors sharing risks and rewards. The project owner in this case was the Commonwealth. For more on this, see
history, and non-indigenous history, with even their architecture designed to reflect ideas of the nation. Whilst there are various similar developments in both museums there are also notable differences, and consequently this chapter to a certain extent looks individually at the two museums. Te Papa differs in one important respect, in that it integrates New Zealand’s national art collection within many of its exhibitions. An understanding of the intellectual framework of both museums is essential in order to appreciate how they attempt to convey notions of nation and national identity.

The discussion also explores the exhibitions at the time of the museums’ respective openings in 1998 and 2001 – and especially the public reaction and controversy they have provoked – to provide a background to the non-indigenous history exhibitions that will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Seven. This reflects debates concerning museological developments around the world, as well as the specific social and political situation in Australia and New Zealand and the difficulties involved in defining national identities at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Conflict and tension are conspicuous in the reaction to the two national museums, both in the years before and after their opening, and are in many ways indicative of their prominent position as national museums, as well as illustrating the perceived success and failure of the museums in representing different segments of society.

Indigenous Representation

The experiences of the indigenous populations are fundamental to any understanding of post-colonial settler identity, especially as non-indigenous people increasingly have to come to terms with the legacies of colonialism. The political and social climate that exists in Australia and New Zealand, particularly in terms of the prominence given to indigenous rights and history, effects the museums in all their operations. The architecture and almost half of the galleries of each museum are concentrated on indigenous culture. Biculturalism in New Zealand, for example, permeates every aspect

---


3 On a broad level too, many non-indigenous people include aspects of indigenous culture within their own identifying symbols and ideas of ‘Australia’ and ‘New Zealand’, such as the kuru on Air New Zealand – a fern leaf commonly used in Maori art.
of Te Papa’s mission, concept and development, from its establishment as a ‘bicultural museum’ by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992.

As explored in Chapter One, concerning broader debates about nationality and nation, it is the indigenous pressure in the political and cultural arena that has led to many of the cracks appearing in non-indigenous national identity. The greater awareness of indigenous people within the history and identity of both Australia and New Zealand has led to some insecurity over non-indigenous people’s own place and role in society. This is apparent in debates surrounding both museums, with claims that the emphasis on Aboriginal and Maori history and culture has created an imbalance between indigenous and non-indigenous representations. This in turn has led to a perception among some critics that the role of the non-indigenous majority is being marginalised or ignored in the identity of the nation.

From its establishment, Te Papa made it a point to attempt to follow its bicultural policy strictly, especially by ensuring that Maori history was no longer marginalised or told from a European point of view. As early as 1990, the National Museum’s Assistant Director James Mack, stressed ‘we would like to become Maori-centric instead of Euro-centric’.4 Criticism concerning this ‘Maori-centric’ policy emerged when the museum opened an exhibition in November 1992, entitled Voices He Putahitanga: A Social History of New Zealand Aotearoa.

Voices was the first attempt to adapt the new museum policy of combining the disciplines of all departments within one exhibition, integrating materials from natural history, colonial history, Maori culture and European art collections. As Rosemary McLeod has said, the exhibition ‘was designed to follow policy to the letter’.5 Costing NZ$1.4 million and headed by a curatorial team of four men and four women, of whom four were Maori and four Pakeha, it was designed as a prototype for the large-scale, multi-media exhibitions planned for Te Papa’s opening in 1998. Aiming to move clearly away from traditional museum practice, it put the focus squarely on Maori representation, as well as incorporating women’s stories and making the interpretative material suggestive rather than explanatory: offering ‘a collision of voices, perspectives

---

5 R. McLeod, ‘The Mighty MoNZ – Artless at Heart?’, North & South, October 1994, p.79.
and values’.\(^6\) In this sense, the exhibition was an early move towards the post-modern interpretation that figures strongly in Te Papa today, as instead of offering a single story or viewpoint, the exhibition presented a multitude of different stories and views, encouraging visitors to actively debate and consider different ideas.

*Voices* was received with condemnation almost from its opening, the main criticism surrounding the over-representation of Maori culture. In March 1993, it was reported that many Maori staff at the museum had been barraged with racist comments, while entries in the visitors’ book included items such as ‘bring back the interesting exhibitions, there’s more to life than Maoris’, ‘where has New Zealand’s museum gone, it’s now the Maori museum’, and ‘filled with Maori junk, it’s a kiss and make up to the natives’\(^7\). In a damning report early in 1994, two Wellington art consultants, Mary and Jim Barr, stated that the exhibition failed to develop a bicultural model and the exhibition polarised Pakeha and Maoris. They described *Voices* as failing ‘at all levels to come to grips with the Pakeha contribution to New Zealand or the relations between the two cultures as anything but destructive and exploitive’\(^8\). Other non-Maori museum professionals around the country echoed the discontent. James Mack said the exhibition was a failure and should be abandoned, while Dunedin Public Art Gallery Director John McCormack called it flawed\(^9\). An article in the *Evening Post* summarised the general feeling towards the exhibition:

The experimental Voices exhibition at the National Museum is promoted as providing a new perspective on Maori and Pakeha history. Putting it charitably, its format is peculiar. … The museum’s corporate plan aims at biculturalism, but the $1.4 million exhibition polarises the races. Some of its judgements are highly subjective, if not offensive. Maori are shown to have introduced kumara [sweet potato], but the Pakeha contribution is represented by rabbit pelts. Questioning of Voices is doubly important, given the exhibition is designed as a prototype for the new Museum of NZ due to open on the waterfront in 1998. … The unsatisfactory echoes of Voices should not be lost on the new museum\(^10\).

\(^9\) ibid. By this point, James Mack was no longer employed by the museum.
In response to the criticism, the museum commissioned its own independent peer review. The subsequent report stated that while *Voices* should stay open, it should be significantly revamped. Perhaps surprisingly, the report was as critical of the Maori presentation as that of the Pakeha, declaring that the exhibition did not tell a clear and connected story and the standard of written Maori was unsatisfactory. The museum immediately moved to act on the report, undertaking a NZ$50,000 refit, while re-emphasising that *Voices* ‘was only ever intended to be used as a laboratory for ideas for the new museum’.11 When the exhibition reopened, however, it continued to be surrounded by controversy.12

Throughout the development process, critics of Te Papa were more vocal and apparent than the supporters. It also came under constant attack over its cost and central government funding, particularly from Aucklanders pointing to their larger population and tourist base as being good reason for greater funding for the Auckland Museum, and even reason for New Zealand’s flagship museum to be situated there.13 The museum, though, did move to defend its position. In regards to *Voices*, Sir Wallace Rowling, Chairman of the Project Development Board, accused the critics of ignoring ‘the ground-breaking work done … or how much had been learnt’,14 while Chief Executive Cheryll Sotheran hailed the exhibition as a success as an ‘experimental exhibition’.15 The controversy surrounding the representation of Maori culture over that of European, however, was not only confined to the *Voices* exhibition but encompassed the perceived activities of the entire museum, and indeed this criticism has been ongoing. Of particular concern to many, was the decision to take the Elgar collection of European colonial furniture off display and into storage, prompting one reader of *The Dominion* to write that he considered the Elgar collection as ‘part of my cultural heritage, just as the museum’s fine collection of Maori taonga is part of the cultural

---

15 ‘Revamped exhibition…’.
heritage of this country’s tangata whenua’. The museum did attempt to alleviate some concerns, by appointing specialists such as Jock Phillips, the Government’s Chief Historian, to develop the Pakeha history exhibits – described by Cheryll Sotheran as an appointment of someone ‘abundantly qualified to produce something both authoritative and lively’. Sotheran also spoke out in response to accusations that the museum was ‘Maori-centric’, declaring: ‘we certainly represent the European, British and all the other culture diversity of New Zealand very, very fully’. Nevertheless, disquiet over the perceived marginalisation of all things European surrounded Te Papa throughout the 1990s, indicative of the insecurity surrounding non-indigenous national identity, and illustrated by an editorial in The Dominion in 1996:

For all their assurances, it becomes clearer by the day that the $280 million taxpayer-funded museum should be renamed the Maori and Pacific Islands Museum of New Zealand. Vast spaces are devoted to the Maori and Polynesian view at the expense of the European perspective. Old favourites such as the Elgar collection on European migration, which have delighted generations of children, are to be stored or broken up. … The problem is the overwhelming predominance of the Polynesian theme, to the virtual exclusion of things European, in spite of the overwhelming more significant influence of later migration.

Alongside this debate over the representation of Pakeha culture, there was also continuing concern amongst Maori over the representation of their own culture. Despite Te Papa’s commitment to both biculturalism and the involvement of Maori people, concerns were being raised over how this was being achieved. In 1994, for example, noted academic Nicholas Thomas considered that Te Papa’s bicultural approach essentially construed ‘Maoriness in terms of its difference from Pakeha’. Thomas noted that by emphasising aspects such as the environmental nature of Maori culture, which was perceived to be missing in Pakeha society, Te Papa was potentially marginalising most Maori who lived in towns and cities. Paul Tapsell, in his 1998 thesis ‘Taonga: A

---

16 D. MacLennan, Letter to the Editor, Dominion, 5th February 1996. The Elgar collection had been one of the first ‘historical’ collections displayed in the National Museum, and had been on show since the 1960s.
18 ‘Museum will balance cultures, MPs told’, Waikato Times (Hamilton), 2nd April 1996.
tribal response to museums’, also details problems concerning the museum’s development of biculturalism, as well as many of the concerns of various Maori tribes over issues such as the name of the institution. Tapsell highlights the confusion that arose over the governing concept of *mana taonga*, which Te Papa claimed to be an inclusive concept that allowed tribal groups and cultures from around New Zealand to interact with and make decisions over museum-held taonga. However, this created confusion especially over the particular rights and role of the *tangata whenua*, the tribe Te Ati Awa in Wellington, on whose land the museum actually stood. The phrase *mana taonga* had no cultural precedent. Nor did the name *tongarewa*, which was a conversion of the name *kuru tonga rerewa*, and as Tapsell describes, by using such expressions the museum ‘paternally affirmed its nationhood role of educating wider New Zealand about what it thinks it means to be Maori’. The debate concerning the Maori development of the museum, therefore, was largely concerned with the way it was adapting to its role as a bicultural institution, unlike the criticism over the way Pakeha history was being represented.

There were similar concerns and insecurities, albeit to a lesser extent, in regards to the NMA over its representation of both non-indigenous and indigenous history. This was especially the case once the museum opened. Unlike Te Papa, during the development stages most of this concern arose from the National Museum Council. The Council’s role had traditionally been to make the major decisions regarding the museum, rather than get involved in the day-to-day administration and development. A few months before the NMA’s opening, however, at least one member of the Museum Council effectively created an ideological struggle within the museum, over how Australia tells its stories and how those who have shaped the nation are represented.

In October 2000, David Barnett, Prime Minister John Howard’s biographer who had been on the Council since early 1999, wrote a five-page memo to the chairman, Tony Staley. Barnett essentially saw the NMA, like Te Papa, as focusing too much on

---


22 Broadly, this was the name of ancient taonga; a mythical greenstone that was prized for its incredible power and beauty.

indigenous history in its effort to acknowledge past injustices, to the extent that it marginalised and even insulted the contribution of non-indigenous settlers to the nation. Objecting to the labelling and presentation of a range of the proposed exhibits, describing some as ‘Marxist rubbish’ and ‘claptrap’, he accused the museum of reworking ‘Australian history into political correctness’. In effect, Barnett wanted the museum to exhibit ‘a tidier past’ with less emphasis on controversial aspects of Australia’s history such as the Aboriginal ‘stolen generations’, the exhibition of which he described as ‘a victim episode … there is no balance here’. Barnett wanted the NMA to follow a more traditional style of representation:

The exhibits invite ridicule, but worse than that, they can invite outrage. … I would have thought a national museum in the national capital might have managed interesting exhibits dealing with the founding fathers and telling us who past prime ministers have been and something about them without being egregious.

On a general level, this type of outspoken criticism evidently brings into question the role and influence of the Museum Council, especially when members are seen to be closely affiliated with a particular government standpoint. In this case Barnett could be seen to be representing the Howard Government’s line of not dwelling on so-called ‘black-armband history’, particularly in terms of Aboriginal affairs, focusing instead on the present rather than the past. On another level, Barnett’s desire to present a more celebratory, ‘feel-good’, and static interpretation of history clearly runs counter to the entire philosophy of developing a challenging and entertaining museum, and of encouraging debate and presenting Australia in all its diversity, which must of course include different and sometimes conflicting views.

In any case, in response to David Barnett’s memo, Tony Staley consulted respected historian Graeme Davison at Monash University, who determined that the

---

26 The Barnett Memo, Sydney Morning Herald website.
27 Howard’s stance on history was discussed in Chapter Four. Briefly, a monarchist and conservative leader, Howard essentially tried to promote a unified Australia by dismissing the ugly realities of the past such as the stolen generations of Aboriginal children, emphasising instead what Australians have achieved during their history. This is perhaps best illustrated in his attitude to Aboriginal history, and his
overwhelming majority of the labels were satisfactory and based on sound scholarship. Davison also stated that it was not ‘the role of council to be intervening in the detailed execution of policy’, and that if the museum was to create every exhibit and label to ‘be acceptable to every visitor then the result will be a very bland museum’. 

Consequently, despite David Barnett’s concerns, the museum opened in 2001 with its exhibitions and labelling unchanged from those developed by the exhibition teams.

Therefore, while the discussion in this chapter and the next focuses on non-indigenous history and identity, the exhibition of indigenous experiences is crucial to the framing of these identities. As these debates show, it creates insecurity over how the non-indigenous populations are being represented as part of the nation. As will also be evident, this influence pervades every aspect of the museums’ developments, contributing to the challenge the museums confront in being ‘national’, and illustrating the problematic nature of non-indigenous national identity.

**Intellectual Framework**

Since its formal establishment in 1980, the NMA’s primary intellectual framework has rested upon the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage, Australian history and society since 1788, and peoples’ interaction with the Australian environment. During the 1990s, this concept gradually began to be developed further, and in March 1997 the NMA produced a five-year corporate plan that identified the objectives and strategies necessary for museum programs, which would be ‘illuminating for Australia and the world what it means to be Australian’.

---


30 As early as 1992, for example, a report titled *Rediscovering Australia* put forward some possible interpretative approaches that could be used, including an inter-related approach, where each theme was integrated to provide insight on the others. See BIS Shrapnel, Museum Studies Unit, Sydney University and Horwarth Services, *Rediscovering Australia: report on the strategic plan for the National Museum of Australia. Prepared for the Council for the National Museum of Australia, 1st June 1992*, Canberra, 1992, NMA Research Library.

Also in 1997, the museum produced its first public statement about programs to be presented in the new building on Acton Peninsula. Laying out the concepts behind the museum development, the statement elaborated on the multidisciplinary and integrated nature of the museum organisation, whereby the three main themes are ‘embedded in the staff organisation of the Museum, and find expression in every program the Museum undertakes’:

The National Museum’s integrated view of the three themes places the activities of humans in the context of Australian environments and examines Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures alongside and together with examinations of Australian histories. Indigenous knowledge and spiritual understandings of the country will be placed alongside non-Aboriginal scholarship. The Museum will present the voices of different cultural groups and promote a range of interpretations of Australian history. The interdisciplinary approach will create a new productive dialogue and fresh perspectives about the history of Australia.\(^\text{32}\)

One of the principal concepts behind the NMA’s development was an exploration of Australian national identity, and there was always recognition of the problems involved with attempting to construct any single interpretation of identity: ‘we are not trying to tell the story of Australia’.\(^\text{33}\) The museum emphasised it aimed to represent the nation’s diversity, recognising that this diversity undermined attempts ‘at creating a seamless characterisation of national identity’, while also acknowledging that ‘this diversity also provides a rich opportunity for the museum to explore the variety of forms of expression of identity over time and in different locations’.\(^\text{34}\)

In the immediate years prior to its opening, the NMA sought to further develop the integration of different disciplines, by identifying primary topics that would intersect to best create an understanding of Australian history, society and environments. In March 1999, the document *Defining Ourselves* was produced, laying out the NMA’s vision of

---


\(^\text{33}\) NMA, *Updated Concept Paper*, p.3.

‘exploring the past, illuminating the present and imagining the future’.\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Defining Ourselves} put forward the three overlapping themes of Land, Nation and People – themes that would exist throughout the NMA, and which would be touched upon regularly by many of the different exhibits.

These themes were based on the idea that ‘Australianess’ was most often defined through a relationship with Australia as a land, as a nation, or as a group of people.\textsuperscript{36} ‘Land’, for example, was described as interpreting the frames of reference through which Australians have perceived the Australian environment, how they have used and misused the productive capabilities of the land, and how the Australian environment has shaped human settlement and society. Through the theme of ‘Nation’, the NMA would provide a forum for the consideration of national identity by interpreting the forms, symbols and ideas of nationhood, and identifying popular perceptions and expressions of national identity, whilst through ‘People’ lived experience would be focused upon, as a way of bringing historical personae, events and movements to life:

The Museum seeks to present history in a democratic light so that ordinary and extraordinary Australians, rich and poor, indigenous and settler, colonist and recent arrival, bush and town dweller are represented. Our aim is that every visitor will find elements of their own inheritance and life experience in the Museum.\textsuperscript{37}

While these themes were not to be presented specifically or individually, they would also not be dealt with in a chronological manner. The entire museum was designed thematically, based around the concepts inherent in the inter-related themes, making it easier to tell cross-disciplinary stories. To achieve this, the NMA was designed around a combination of traditional object-rich exhibits and the use of innovative multi-media experiences. Media and technology were used, to ‘enhance stories, to personalise the museum visit, and to tell a much larger story than the physical space permits’.\textsuperscript{38}


\textsuperscript{36} NMA, \textit{Conceptual Design – 100\% Submission, 21\textsuperscript{st} January 1999}, NMA Research Library.

\textsuperscript{37} NMA, \textit{Defining Ourselves}.

\textsuperscript{38} NMA, \textit{Conceptual Design – 100\% Submission}. 
Defining Ourselves also re-emphasised the idea of ‘identities’, rather than any one single interpretation of identity, arguing that some of the exhibits must be confrontational over aspects of the past. In other words, despite clearly being a museum celebrating Australia as a nation, the NMA was careful not to take this so far that it glossed over crucial aspects of history: ‘Rather than avoiding controversy … [the museum] must be more adept at channelling public discourse into productive and authoritative explorations that challenge curators and other museum staff to address questions that are meaningful to the public.’

In terms of its intellectual framework, it is important to finally highlight that the NMA, in being a forum for the nation, was designed as a ‘national museum of social history’: social history being defined in the broadest terms as the interaction of people’s lives and the factors affecting those lives. Many of the concepts upon which the museum is based reflect the changes in museology and historiography that had been occurring during the two previous decades. Significantly, for example, the NMA highlighted its multi-disciplinary approach of combining ‘traditional’ history, such as economic and political history, with the ‘new’ social histories developed since the 1970s such as migration and urban history, along with ‘the more recent innovations of environmental history and personal history’. The museum also emphasised the relevance of the past to contemporary and future circumstances, represented in the new institution’s logo of ‘Yesterday Tomorrow’ and the vision ‘exploring the past, illuminating the present and imagining the future’, and prominence was put upon the importance of more recent contemporary history in contributing to an understanding of the nation. Consequently, on opening in March 2001, the NMA and all its exhibitions were geared towards representing aspects of Australia’s diverse history and society, from its earliest indigenous origins up to and including the present day. As the official guidebook describes: ‘The exhibitions interpret the past, but always with the future in view. The museum is a dynamic place, where Australians can look back on where they have been, and muse and debate on where they are headed.’

---

39 ibid.
Te Papa also revolves around three conceptual areas: Papatuanuku – the earth on which we all live, Tangata Whenua – those who belong to the land by right of discovery, and Tangata Tiriti – those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty of Waitangi. The integrated nature of different themes and disciplines, however, aided by the positioning of the museum as a bicultural institution, can be seen to have a far more prominent and influential role in the organisation of Te Papa as a whole than in the NMA. The integration of the national art collection with the museum in New Zealand, in particular, can be seen to affect the entire philosophical and management structure of Te Papa.

Before the passing of the 1992 Act, the National Museum and National Art Gallery had been managed entirely separately, with individual Directors and Boards of Trustees. Their subsequent amalgamation signified, as Ian Wedde has described, that they no longer had ‘totally separate identities, both in the management sense and in the cultural one’, forcing widespread changes to their organisational structures. Accordingly, four new departments were created to have a high degree of inter-departmental and interdisciplinary collaboration: departments of History, of Art, of Maori History and Art, and of the Natural Environment. Jane Archibald, writing for The Press in 1994, explained what this would mean in terms of the museum’s exhibitions:

The new museum is a combination of the former National Art Gallery and National Museum. Instead of segregating Maori and pakeha art and history, and consigning history and art to separate areas, all will be integrated into one in the new museum. An artefact may be placed alongside a piece of fine art if it helps to explain an element of the New Zealand story.

The integration of the collections created an entirely different museum environment. New staff positions were introduced, such as marketers, project advisors and human resource advisors, in order to make the institution more commercially viable and able to fend for itself in the marketplace, while team based cross-department planning took the place of highly specialised or departmentalised approaches. As discussed later, this wide-scale amalgamation of the activities of traditionally separate professional activities...

---

provoked, and indeed continues to provoke, considerable controversy amongst both museum professionals and the public, largely due to a perception that it is to the detriment of the museum’s role in scholarship, while also undermining the relevance of the collections. Similar controversy has surrounded the NMA, as the traditional curators became program managers and administrators with reduced management of the actual collections.

The inter-relation of the three conceptual areas within the actual exhibitions had been proposed as early as 1990, in an initial conceptual plan prepared by the American exhibition designer Ralph Appelbaum. It was envisaged that each section of the new museum would be representative of *Papatuanuku*, Maori and Pakeha settlers. The Natural Environment ‘zone’, for example, was to be located within the concept of *Papatuanuku* and subject to an ongoing exploration of both Maori and Pakeha relationships to the land.° In regards to the areas devoted to the human history of New Zealand, the concept developers also kept in line with this new interdisciplinary and unified collection mandate:

> The three zones devoted to human studies – Maori Art and History, History, and Art – located on the upper level where the boundaries between them can remain fluid and encourage the exploration of cross disciplinary topics … [can facilitate] an area of dialogue … between Maori Art and History and the History Zone to provide for an extended presentation of New Zealand’s bicultural history.45

This integrated concept has effectively remained the basis for the entire museum ever since and has been central to its role of ‘a museum about national identity’.46 In 1994, Rodney Wilson, Director of the Auckland Museum, explained clearly what the integration of previously separate collections could achieve:

> The integration of previously separate displays is an unconventional museum attitude, and, doubtless, will be challenged by some conservative museologists. In simple terms,

---

what it means is that artefacts from different curatorial disciplines may be combined to enrich and extend the stories being told in the different displays. In some areas the integration will be less intensive than in others, but conceptually, where adjoining displays approach each other, increased integration could lead to almost seamless transitions from subject to subject.47

The principle of biculturalism permeated everything. Even the title of the museum, with its English and Maori components, reflected the aim that the museum would genuinely represent New Zealand’s distinctive bicultural partnership, while the 1992 Act recognised the aims, aspirations and employment requirements of the Maori people, as well as the ‘need for substantial involvement of Maori people as employees of the Board’.48 As discussed in Chapter Five, the National Museum had been gradually implementing bicultural policies since the Te Maori exhibition in the mid 1980s. Its Corporate Plan for 1993–1994 went further to state: ‘We will be a bicultural museum … The Museum’s mission determines that a partnership with Maori is essential.’49 Thereupon, Maori artist Cliff Whiting was appointed as Te Papa’s first Director of Maori Art and History in June 1993,50 and in May 1994 the Museum Board agreed that the principles of the Treaty as developed by the Waitangi Tribunal should form the basis on which the museum developed its bicultural policy.51 The museum subsequently produced a policy that stated that the museum would be ‘a national museum that powerfully expresses the total culture of New Zealand’, and emphasised ‘the development of a bicultural museum which celebrates the mana [authority/prestige] of the two mainstreams of tradition and cultural heritage’.52 Shortly afterwards, a language policy was also adopted where it was recognised that te reo Maori (the Maori language) was an official language of New Zealand, and consequently should be promoted in corporate documents, exhibitions and directional guides.53

52 MoNZTPT, Bicultural Policy, 1997, Te Aka Matua Library. The policy also included representation of both Maori and Pakeha interests on the Museum Board.
The intellectual frameworks of both the NMA and Te Papa, therefore, were based on similar concepts. Foremost, they were to explore national identity through the integration of indigenous history and culture, non-indigenous history, and the environment. The integration of these themes, however, was never straightforward, and the problems that this aroused should be considered in order to appreciate how these museums sought to represent the nation.

The debates that arose in both museums concerning the prominence of indigenous history and a subsequent perceived marginalisation of non-indigenous history were discussed earlier, reflecting the complex and problematic nature of post-colonial society. Other problems and controversy also emerged during the development stages that are important in illustrating what people perceive national museums to symbolise, as well as the political and public nature and role of museums in Australia and New Zealand. Much of this controversy is also indicative of the museum developments identified in previous chapters, most obvious through the use of new museological techniques in the NMA and Te Papa, which also highlights the growing contentious debate over the changing functions of museums.

The debate surrounding Te Papa has always been more vocal than the NMA. The main reason for this is most likely that Te Papa’s development took place over a longer period. Critics had six years, between 1992 and 1998, to review and question the designs and programs of the new museum. In contrast, opening in 2001 after construction was finally approved in 1998, there was little time for publication of the NMA’s proposed programs and subsequent reflection and censure. Yet on opening, the debate surrounding Te Papa continued to be far more prominent than the NMA. This can be attributed to a number of factors. As later discussed, for instance, Te Papa is regarded by many as an ‘extreme’ example of new museology; its theme-park type attractions drawing a great deal of scrutiny, especially over their perceived threat to the intellectual integrity of the museum. In contrast, the NMA’s displays were generally considered more moderate and conventional, allowing less room for criticism of ‘new’ techniques. The debate can also be credited to the particularly problematic and sensitive bicultural nature of New Zealand. Finally, an important factor might simply be that a national museum had existed in New Zealand for over a century, and consequently there were greater expectations and comparisons to be made once Te Papa opened. This is in
contrast to Australia, where the eventual establishment of a national museum after over two hundred years of European settlement was in itself seen as an achievement.

**Restructuring and Complications – Scholarship and Entertainment**

There are a number of internal factors that emerged during the development of both museums that can be seen to have had a direct influence on the final opening exhibitions: factors that succeeded in generating notable problems and controversy. For the NMA, this was to an extent due to the tight time frame. When compared to other recent major museum developments such as Te Papa, and the Melbourne Museum and the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, which took six and eight years respectively, the National Museum of Australia was evidently under considerable pressure from the start.

In order to advance the development process, in 1997 the NMA had brought in the American firm of Ralph Appelbaum Associates. Professional museum designers who had worked on museums around the world, including playing a major part in Te Papa’s design, they were employed to work out a way to get from a standing start to a national museum in such a short period of time. Appelbaum’s idea for the quick development of the museum was to base it around multi-media and the mass display of objects with standing interpretation.\(^{54}\) They envisaged a type of ‘subway experience’, through which visitors would progress through a narrow entrance onto a mezzanine level overlooking a large area filled with objects. Apart from a number of safety problems that emerged, the entire rationale was problematic in that the development of large-scale multi-media exhibits could take considerable time, while the mass display of objects would likely cause problems in terms of conservation.\(^{55}\) Market research had also shown potential visitors wanted ‘objects with stories’ – not just multi-media or stand-alone objects.

---


55 Thanks to Mike Smith, former head of the Land and People Program and now head of Research and Development at the NMA, for clarifying the issues surrounding Appelbaum’s involvement in the museum’s development.
At any rate, Appelbaum soon left the development process largely due to their tender being too expensive. They were replaced by the American design consortium Anway who, after an initial outcry over the reliance on foreign rather than Australian expertise, brought fresh ideas and outside views on how best to represent the nation.\(^{56}\) Both Anway and Appelbaum, however, were at times accused of ignoring the ideas of the museum’s curators. As the museum was organised by theme rather than individual discipline, in order to make it easier to tell cross-disciplinary stories, specialist curators effectively became exhibition administrators. Designated program managers, with little contact with the actual collections which came under the control of a separate collection management division, this contributed to a growing perception that the museum was neglecting its role of research and scholarship.\(^{57}\)

Criticism concerning the neglect of research and scholarship has been even more outspoken in regards to Te Papa, largely because of the extensive organisational restructuring that took place since 1992. The decision to have every department and exhibition run by a multi-disciplinary team was seen as diluting the voices of scholars and experts, to the extent that the museum would ‘be no more than a “Disneyland” experience that offers little in the way of scholarship or education’.\(^{58}\) By amalgamating the different disciplines, Te Papa was seen as concentrating more on the development of exhibitions than on traditional roles of scholarship, as staff were moved away from their specialist areas into positions of administration and management. As a consequence of the restructuring, in October 1993 the museum’s most senior scientist, Dr Alan Baker, left the museum after his job as head of the natural environment department was abolished, prompting the Wellington \textit{City Voice} to highlight that ‘there are now no scientists in the senior management of the museum’.\(^{59}\) The perceived neglect of research was a problem, especially as one of the main functions of the museum, under the 1992 Act, was to ‘conduct research into any matter relating to its collections or associated areas of interest’.\(^{60}\) The criticism prompted a review in early 1994, looking at the role of scholarship in Te Papa. Published in July as \textit{An Agenda for Scholarship}, its findings

\(^{56}\) Mike Smith, Personal Interview, 27\textsuperscript{th} June 2001.
\(^{57}\) These problems have begun to be addressed more recently with the appointment of Mike Smith as Director of Research and Development, aiming to ensure a steady influx of new ideas at the museum.
\(^{60}\) \textit{Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992}, Section 7, p.3.
strongly condemned the general insufficient quantity and quality of scholarship and research in the museum.\textsuperscript{61} The report found, for example, that only two areas of the museum, natural sciences and archaeology, had a scale of research appropriate for a national museum, and even there it was functioning at only a basic level due to staff cuts. In terms of Pakeha history, Rosemary McLeod summarised the report’s findings:

The general history department of the museum has a complete lack of research going on; European history has been virtually neglected. ‘The material culture of the Pakeha is profoundly underrepresented … such that the museum is neither fulfilling its fundamental statutory function … nor is it capable of representing Pakeha history and culture,’ says the report.\textsuperscript{62}

The report provided impetus for the museum to examine its priorities, and in 1996 a new research strategy was developed entitled \textit{Speaking with Authority}.\textsuperscript{63} At the same time, Chief Executive Cheryll Sotheran spoke out in defence of the museum’s role in scholarship, promising that underpinning each of the multi-disciplinary opening exhibitions would be ‘a rigorous scholarship which, together with leading-edge display techniques, will make us world leaders’.\textsuperscript{64} Ken Gorbey, Director of Museum Projects, also spoke out against those critical of the ‘Disneyland’ approach, accusing them of failing to grasp the relevance of modern technologies and their possibilities, in enhancing the emotional impact of exhibits and modernising the museum experience.\textsuperscript{65}

The problems with scholarship and the criticism of its focus on entertainment stemmed from Te Papa’s aim to be customer focussed, commercially viable, entertaining and, essentially, ‘un-museum like’. The museum’s vision statement clearly laid out its position, stating that ‘it encompasses the vision of a competitive, commercially responsive customer focused organisation that occupies a leading role in the national

\textsuperscript{61} MoNZTPT, \textit{An Agenda for Scholarship: scholarship and research in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa}, Wellington, 1994.
\textsuperscript{62} McLeod, ‘The Mighty MoNZ…’, p.78. Also see S. Collins, “Disneyland” plans alarm scientists’, \textit{City Voice}, 4\textsuperscript{th} August 1994.
\textsuperscript{63} MoNZTPT, \textit{Speaking with Authority: scholarship and matauranga at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa – a strategy}, Wellington, 1996. The report recognised that the institution was undergoing huge changes, and defined four themes that would help focus research in the future: Becoming Aotearoa New Zealand – the natural forces that created New Zealand; the peopling of New Zealand – the \textit{tangata whenua} and \textit{tangata tiriti} and their interactions; life in New Zealand; and the museum serving the community – research undertaken in order to serve the community better.
\textsuperscript{64} Sotheran, ‘Show and tell…’, p.9.
\textsuperscript{65} MacLennan, ‘Museum Scene…’, p.6.
and global recreation and leisure market place’. Indicative of the growing need for museums to be competitive in the market place, it is a vision that has continued to provoke controversy, although it was most prominent at the museum’s opening, especially over its treatment of art and the inclusion of virtual-reality rides.

Further fuelling the criticism was the decision to drop the title ‘museum’ altogether from the institution's name in order to give it a completely new brand identity. In a desire to challenge the image of dusty objects in glass cases that the word ‘museum’ traditionally implied, the museum announced in 1997 that its new brand name would simply be ‘Te Papa’, meaning ‘Our Place’, while its visual identity would be a stylised thumbprint. In a media release, Sotheran explained: ‘Our Place refers to New Zealand and is friendly and informal and is a phrase which all New Zealanders are familiar with. It can also refer to our place in the world, our place in the Pacific, our place in time.’

The new brand, unsurprisingly, aroused much commentary and criticism mainly over the obvious move towards becoming a fully-fledged commercial business very different from a traditional museum. Mary Varnham for the Evening Post, highlighted the museum’s desire ‘to join the latest American business craze and become a themed leisure brand’, while the same paper’s editorial described the thumbprint logo as ‘a clunker’.

The restructuring of both Te Papa and the NMA in line with their conceptual plans therefore, aroused considerable debate. Such debate is particularly significant in discussions of ‘nation’, as they highlight a strong concern over how museums are representing their communities, their public, and their national identity. The furore surrounding the adoption of both ‘Te Papa’ and the thumbprint, for example, illustrates the concern not only over how the museum is ‘marketing’ itself to New Zealanders, but also over how it is representing New Zealand to the world.

---

68 There was also confusion over the meaning of ‘Te Papa’. For more on this see Tapsell, Taonga…, especially Appendix Six, pp.291-299.
69 M. Varnham, ‘Our Place burned by a brand of the 70s’, Evening Post, 24th April 1997, p.6.
Architecture

One of the most contentious issues that has surrounded both museums throughout their recent histories is their architectural design. It is worth briefly exploring this if only to illustrate again the prominent position these museums are perceived to hold as representing the nation. The architecture of both the NMA and Te Papa attempt to convey many of the intellectual concepts evident within the actual museums’ programs. For example, dominated by an orange arch-like band that symbolically describes a pathway through the site to align with Uluru in Australia’s centre, the concept behind the NMA’s design is that it embodies the ‘vitality of Australia’s evolving society’ and enables the nation’s stories to be told with vigour and imagination. The architectural design also tries to avoid representing any single traditional image, largely being based on the museum’s philosophy of presenting the stories of Australia, and acknowledging the diverse stories that exist. As architect Howard Raggatt has explained, it is based on the idea ‘that this museum, as a social history museum, is a sort of tangle of stories’.

Most significantly, in terms of the role they are perceived to hold as representatives of the nation, both the NMA and Te Papa have been regarded as not being ‘monumental’ enough to be national museums. Concerning the NMA, this debate emerged from continuing criticism over the choice of Acton Peninsula for the museum. By this point, of course, the site of Acton had already been decided upon, largely due to the cost and potential to attract the greatest number of visitors, while the increased use of multimedia and other modern technology aided arguments that claimed a larger museum was

---

73 See Chapter Four. For example, John Mulvaney continued to raise concerns about the size of the museum and the lack of potential for expansion, while Peter Pigott, who has chaired the famous 1975 inquiry that led to the establishment of the museum, also declared the site to be far too small, though he did envisage it would receive higher visitation than any other Australian museum. See D.J. Mulvaney to Wilson Tuckey, Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Public Works, in Commonwealth of Australia, Joint Parliamentary Committee on Public Works: New facilities for the National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (Hansard), 13th March 1998, pp.507-509, and R. Macklin, ‘Despite flaws, mastermind tips bright future for national museum’, Canberra Times, 25th November 2000, p.1. Also see Radio 2CN, ‘Afternoon with Rod Quinn’, Panel Discussion on the National Museum, with John Mulvaney, Linda Young, Bill Jonas, Leon Perossean and Geoffrey Bolton, 11th February 1999, Transcript in NMA Departmental File, 98/0433, NMA on Acton: Content Development Phase – Content Framework Documents, NMA Research Library.
not necessary. The controversy was fuelled throughout the building’s design process, however, by budgetary constraints that reduced the museum’s exhibition space, by criticism from the Institute of Architects, and by unfortunate incidents such as the accidental death of a child during the demolition of the old Canberra hospital on the Acton site.\(^{74}\)

The situation did not markedly improve when the winning architects, Ashton Raggatt McDougall, published their design. The architectural brief had emphasised that the museum should be a non-monumental building without, for example, a grand entrance with a great sweeping staircase like that of many traditional museums.\(^{75}\) However, it is this anti-monumental nature of the final design that has received the most coverage and criticism, especially when compared with other new major museums around the world, such as the new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. The post-modern approach of the orange ‘Uluru line’, has been compared to something that belongs in a theme park,\(^{76}\) while Stephen Frith, Professor of Architecture at the University of Canberra, has declared the design ‘a major monument to lost opportunity’ and laments: ‘The capacity of buildings to embody the hopes and experience of a people is itself mocked in the National Museum’.\(^{77}\) Tim Bonyhady, an art and environmental historian at the Australian National University, has also described the building as ‘mediocre at best’ and goes so far as to say: ‘Perhaps no other major Australian public building attempts such crass symbolism.’\(^{78}\)

Ashton Raggatt McDougall are known for their pastiche of other architectural designs. After opening, accusations emerged that Howard Raggatt copied parts from Daniel Libeskind’s design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, in a symbolic attempt to draw parallels between the treatment of the Jews by the Nazis and the effects of white settlement on Australian Aborigines. This caused a good deal of furore, contributing

\(^{74}\) The Institute of Architects claimed that the initial design competition did not satisfy the requirements of the international architectural profession. For more on various aspects of the controversy surrounding the design process, see C. Jackson, ‘Museum revamp row’, \textit{Canberra Times}, 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1998, pp.1-2, F. Brenchley, ‘The Curse of the National Museum’, \textit{The Bulletin}, 29\textsuperscript{th} April 1999, pp.50-51, and T. Bonyhady, ‘Lost in the loop’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} March 2001.


\(^{77}\) S. Frith, ‘A monument to lost opportunity’, \textit{Canberra Times}, 20\textsuperscript{th} March 2001.

\(^{78}\) Bonyhady, ‘Lost in the loop’. 
especially to debates over intellectual property, and the ‘politically-correct’ nature and role of the national museum.\textsuperscript{79} There was also evidence that Raggatt had used aspects of other buildings, including Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoie at Poissy near Paris. Such pastiche naturally raises questions over the role of the museum, including its architecture, and its position as a focal point for the nation’s identity. As Stephen Frith has asked: ‘What do the Villa Savoie and the Holocaust Museum unique to Berlin have to do with the story of Australia?’\textsuperscript{80}

Te Papa has also been surrounded with controversy in regards to its architecture. Chapter Five briefly explored the debate over the site and initial plans that was initiated once Jasmax was selected as the winning architect in 1990. Such debate continued throughout the 1990s, both before and after Te Papa’s opening, to the extent that one commentator surmised in 1998 that ‘the impressive number of visitors to Te Papa is, perhaps, exceeded only by those with an opinion of its architecture’.\textsuperscript{81}

The plan for the new museum was publicly released as early as May 1992 and, like the NMA, was designed to convey the intellectual concepts behind the entire museum. While the NMA’s design aimed to reflect the diversity of stories that made up Australia, Te Papa’s architectural design was based on the biculturalism that existed throughout New Zealand’s society. As architect Pete Bossley explained, it was based around ‘a bicultural gesture comprising two sections, one Maori and one European, linked together. The Maori section was more traditional in style and faced over the water. The European section echoed the grid patterns of streets.’\textsuperscript{82} It immediately drew mixed views and considerable criticism, much of it reflecting, like the NMA, a concern that a national museum should be a ‘monumental’ representation of the country. For example, the Wellington press reported it had received public opinions ranging from ‘it looks like a toilet’, to ‘it looks like a mouse exercise tunnel you’d find inside a cage’.\textsuperscript{83} The \textit{New Zealand Herald} commented that artists’ impressions of the new building indicated that

\textsuperscript{79} See, for example, P. Akerman, ‘Museum is an originalimitation’, \textit{Sunday Telegraph}, 8\textsuperscript{th} April 2001, and P. Heinrichs, ‘Museum a copy, claims architect’, \textit{Sunday Age}, 8\textsuperscript{th} April 2001
\textsuperscript{80} Frith, ‘A monument…’. Also see I. Perlman, ‘House of Games’, \textit{Australian Financial Review}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} February 2001.
\textsuperscript{81} T. Honey, ‘A question of design’, \textit{Evening Post}, 26\textsuperscript{th} August 1998, p.18.
\textsuperscript{83} A. Ots, ‘Views mixed on museum design’, \textit{Evening Post}, 6\textsuperscript{th} June 1994.
it might be ‘utilitarian to the point of being visually boring’,\textsuperscript{84} while Mary Varnham from the \textit{Evening Post} stated that the exterior design ‘is boring, says nothing about us as a country and should be sent back to the drawing board’.\textsuperscript{85} Meanwhile two separate architects, Ian Athfield and Roger Walker, respectively described the design as ‘rather ho-hum’ and an ‘incredible lost opportunity’.\textsuperscript{86} A consequence of this controversy, was that early in June 1992, the public relations firm Saatchi and Saatchi put forward their own design for the museum based on a paua shell, stating that, in terms of its position as a stage for the nation, the ‘new national museum should be as important a piece of artwork as what is inside’.\textsuperscript{87}

In response to the criticism, Sir Wallace Rowling, Chairman of the Project Development Board, stated that there was a focus on the inside of the museum ‘because it was what went on inside that mattered most’, and that due to physical and financial restraints any further redesign would kill the project altogether.\textsuperscript{88} Nevertheless, by August 1992, public opinion did see small changes to the museum design in an attempt to make it more dramatic, such as the inclusion of an oversailing roof. The modifications were not enough to silence the critics, however, with Ian Athfield describing it as a ‘new Levene’s store’, and Howard Grieve from Saatchi and Saatchi commenting that the design was still ‘lifeless’: ‘There’s no reason it should not be an Eiffel Tower or Sydney Opera House … People won’t look at this with awe but as another big, faceless, cold building.’\textsuperscript{89} Calls for further redesign were ignored, however, and construction of the new museum began as scheduled in July 1993. The architecture of the museum has remained one of its most contentious issues though and many still feel the museum should have been built to a grander vision. Tommy Honey for example, head of interior design at the Central Institute of Technology, commented in 1998 that there is ‘a large and unsatisfied public hunger for Te Papa to be an icon’, to be as recognisable as the Sydney Opera House or Eiffel Tower.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{84} Editorial, ‘Think Big Reincarnate’, \textit{New Zealand Herald}, 29\textsuperscript{th} May 1992.
\textsuperscript{85} Varnham, ‘Museum of NZ…’.
\textsuperscript{89} A. Finnegan, ‘Museum design modified’, \textit{Evening Post}, 28\textsuperscript{th} August 1992.
\textsuperscript{90} Honey, ‘A question…’, p.18.
Problems and controversy, therefore, have surrounded both the NMA and Te Papa – influencing their development and reflecting perceptions of how and what a national museum should represent. In particular, such debates are important as they highlight the confusion over non-indigenous identity, as well as the concern over how these museums were going to represent that identity. In terms of changing museology, it is clear both museums made determined moves in their planning to apply new museological methods and adapt to the post-colonial environment. Yet, this has not been straightforward. To summarise, the moves by the NMA and Te Papa to implement more professional structures and to integrate different histories can be seen in museums throughout both countries, as can the perceived problems this has caused for the traditional museum role of scholarship. Alongside this, the greater use of new techniques, such as multi-media and other interactives, has contributed to general debate surrounding museums, such as over the possible neglect of education in favour of entertainment. Post-modern elements can also be drawn from the architecture of both museums, but the furore that they have aroused points to the growing discussion concerning post-modern interpretation and its conflict with traditional perceptions of museums and their role. Finally, conflict has arisen concerning the inclusion of different histories, especially over the museums’ desire to properly represent indigenous history and culture. As will be discussed, these debates did not disappear after the museums opened, highlighting the complex and contentious nature of identity in Australia and New Zealand.

**The Opening Exhibitions**

In order to provide some context for the subsequent discussion, it is useful to provide a brief descriptive overview of the permanent galleries that opened in 1998 and 2001. This is particularly helpful in terms of the exploration of the non-indigenous exhibitions in the next chapter, remembering that both museums initially sought to integrate different disciplines and histories so that, in theory, each gallery was to some extent to reflect the three themes of the environment, indigenous, and non-indigenous history.

---

91 It is important to note that this thesis is concerned with the opening exhibitions that were designed to reflect ‘Australia’ and ‘New Zealand’ in 1998 and 2001. It is useful to aware, however, that since opening, various exhibits have been changed or replaced – especially in Te Papa.
Te Papa was designed around a populist approach, in the sense that it aimed to appeal and attract visitors who would not traditionally go to a museum. This is most clearly illustrated by the use of interactive technology throughout. At the same time, the museum is based around celebrating New Zealanders, their achievements and national identity, designed to be, according to the guidebook; ‘a mirror on their lives, a place where their stories are told, a place to lose yourself and to find yourself’.

The museum exhibitions start on Level Two of the building, where the visitor is immediately confronted with the *Time Warp* area, the part of the institution which has contributed most to descriptions of Te Papa being like ‘an amusement arcade’. Reflecting Te Papa’s customer driven approach, here it is possible to have a go at virtual sheep shearing or a virtual bungy jump, there are rides for small children, and there are two virtual reality rides called ‘Blastback’ and ‘Future Rush’. In ‘Blastback’ the visitor is hurled back to the beginning of time, where New Zealand is torn apart from the super-continent Gondwanaland, while ‘Future Rush’ takes the visitor on a fast-paced tour of Wellington in 2055.

The rest of this level is dedicated to the natural environment, or *Papatuanuku*, consisting of three main galleries: *Awesome Forces*, *Mountains to Sea* and *Bush City*. *Awesome Forces* examines the natural forces that created and transformed New Zealand, tracing the origin of the country back 100 million years to its association with Gondwanaland, and illustrating the break-up of the continents and the drift south of New Zealand to its current position. There is a wide range of interpretative techniques and experiences, illustrative of the use of technology and multi-media throughout the museum, such as large-screen projections, animation and a seismic encounter. *Mountains to Sea*, a less dynamic gallery, puts the spotlight on New Zealand’s flora and fauna, covering a wide range of habitats and the plants and animals that live there, as the visitor moves through six different worlds: New Zealand’s alpine, bush, freshwater,
coastal, open ocean, and deep-sea ecosystems. Linked to these natural environment exhibitions by a bridge is *Bush City*, an outside ‘living’ part of the museum, where visitors can gain a snapshot of the New Zealand landscape as they move amongst native trees, from a wetlands environment to a volcanic plateau.94

The majority of the museums’ exhibits are on Level Four. *Mana Whenua*, the main gallery dealing with the Maori, occupies a large part of the space. Maori arts, language and culture are explored through a number of mediums, from the simple display of taonga (treasures) to extensive use of oral histories.95 Adjacent to the gallery is Te Papa’s marae (meeting place), central to which is the very modern-looking wharenui (meeting house), called Te Hono ki Hawaiki, referring to the connection with the ancestral homeland of Hawaiki in the Pacific. The first of its kind, *Te Marae* is designed to belong not only to Maori people, but to all the cultures in New Zealand.96 In line with New Zealand’s Pacific heritage, there is also a gallery examining the impact of Pacific Island cultures. *Mana Pasifika* explores the cultures of Pacific island communities in New Zealand today, especially those of Polynesia and Fiji, through their religions, clothes, music and histories.

On opening, Te Papa’s main art exhibition, *Parade*, took up a large gallery on this level, utilising some of the collections of the old National Art Gallery. As discussed later, *Parade* was the part of the museum that generated the most controversy. Initially called *The Exchange: Art in New Zealand*, and designed to ‘open up the definition of art’, its focus is ‘principally on Pakeha stories, acknowledging in many instances these stories will involve Maori and other perspectives’.97 Illustrating the integration of different museum departments, the display integrates works of art, household objects, clothing and videos, in order to create debate over what constitutes art. Also arousing debate, perhaps intentionally, is the exhibition *Signs of a Nation – Ngā Tohu Kotahitanga*.

---

94 For more information concerning *Bush City*, see S. Gaitanos, ‘Worlds within worlds’, *Landscape New Zealand*, January/February 1998, pp.21-29. The attraction that areas such as *Bush City* provide is gaining increased popularity within museums, illustrated by the incorporation of such a feature, known as the *Forest Gallery*, in the new Melbourne Museum that opened in 2000.
95 See MoNZTPT, *Mana Whenua: the land, the people, the spirit that binds, 100% Concept Design*, January 1996, p.2, Te Papa Archives.
Standing in the centre of the level, it explores the history of the Treaty of Waitangi. Underneath a giant replica of the Treaty, visitors can pause and listen to the voices of ordinary New Zealanders giving their opinions and interpretations of the Treaty, ranging from racist Pakeha views to militantly Maori.

The rest of this level is taken up with the Pakeha history displays, examined in more detail in the next chapter. Passports explores the stories of all the different people who have migrated to New Zealand, from the 1840s up to the present, through the objects and ideas that migrants brought with them. On the Sheep’s Back focuses on how the wool industry has contributed to life in New Zealand, while Exhibiting Ourselves examines how New Zealanders have projected a sense of national identity through International Exhibitions and Expos.98 The final permanent exhibit is the Golden Days, which re-emphasises the multi-media and innovative aspects of Te Papa, and which has become one of the most popular exhibitions in the museum. In a re-created junk shop, visitors sit on sofas or stools to watch a film, brought alive by moving objects, which celebrates New Zealand life through an array of ideas and emotions.99

The existence of an area such as Golden Days highlights the celebratory nature of Te Papa. A similar aim is evident in the NMA, and indeed the first stop on the way to the NMA’s exhibition galleries is Circa, a revolving theatre that introduces the three central themes of land, nation and people. Through a series of images and voices, often intentionally nostalgic, it attempts to consider ‘Australianess’ as being defined through a relationship with Australia as a land, as a nation, or as a group of people.100

On leaving this introductory experience, visitors immediately find themselves at the first of the NMA’s five permanent exhibition galleries. Tangled Destinies: Land and

98 Exhibiting Ourselves was closed in 2001.
99 Other areas of Te Papa include four discovery centres each with a different theme, such as ‘NatureSpace’ and ‘PlaNet Pasifika’. There are also temporary exhibition galleries and the Te Aka Matua Library, a research library. This discussion, however, focuses on the museum’s permanent exhibitions.
People in Australia investigates the relationship between people and the land in Australia. Tangled Destinies brings together scientific and cultural history to explore how people have responded to the Australian environment over thousands of years. Described as ‘an exciting journey through the past, present and future of the Australian environment’; it focuses on how the Australian continent has shaped the lives of those who have dwelled there, whether they be indigenous or non-indigenous.

The three main galleries dealing specifically with non-indigenous history and identity will be examined in more detail in Chapter Seven. Each of these attempt to explore the history of the nation in different ways. Eternity: Stories from the Emotional Heart of Australia, for example, the smallest permanent gallery in the NMA, seeks to explore the history of Australia through a range of ten emotions, such as Joy, Passion, Mystery and Separation, placing individuals and their experiences at the centre of the interpretation of Australian history.

The second gallery, Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788, then addresses Australian identity in terms of Australia as a settler society, moulded by the diverse visions and ideals brought to the continent during the last two centuries. It does this by exploring the migrant history of Australia from the convicts of the late eighteenth century to the refugees of the twentieth. Finally, Nation: Symbols of Australia, attempts to explore Australian national identity and history through a range of familiar national symbols. Inspired by Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’, whereby symbolic vocabulary is shared throughout a community, the gallery is divided between official symbols, such as the national anthem and flag, and symbols of popular culture, such as the kangaroo, the backyard and Australian slang.

First Australians: Gallery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is the fifth and final permanent gallery in the museum, exploring the stories and experiences of indigenous Australians - their diversity, spirituality, identity and survival. Through a variety of objects and personal stories, the gallery profiles some 40,000 years of indigenous heritage, before turning to history since European contact. There is also an open collection area where indigenous communities can both learn and share their knowledge with museum staff. Obviously the most politically sensitive gallery in the

101 NMA, Yesterday Tomorrow, p.12.
museum, it represents potentially contentious issues such as the history of frontier conflicts, land rights and reconciliation, without allocating blame or extensively representing ‘black armband’ history. There is clearly an emphasis on inclusion rather than confrontation and blame. As explained in 1999, the gallery was:

> to encourage broad based understanding and acknowledgement of Australia’s historical background to present day through issues that are creating uncertainty and tension in the present, including issues such as the stolen generations, land claims, deaths-in-custody and Indigenous health, and to consider how some of these issues might play out in the future.  

102

*First Australians* is rich in material culture and also, as part of a museum of social history, relies heavily on themes, storytelling and oral histories. The stories are largely told from an indigenous perspective, but not entirely, as the stories of European explorers, settlers and missionaries who related closely to Aboriginal people are also examined – highlighting the integrated nature of the museum. The gallery has certainly received criticism since opening, but also its share of praise, with the successful combination of historical and contemporary Aboriginal stories prompting one commentator to declare it ‘the most vibrant display of indigenous culture this country has ever seen’.  

103

**The Public Response**

When they finally opened, both museums were generally received favourably and were certainly resounding commercial successes. In the first month alone there were over 100,000 visitors to the NMA, while two million visited Te Papa in its first year.  

104 Both museums, however, have been subjects of intense debate: debate that was expected and welcomed by Dawn Casey, the NMA’s Director, who conceded that the museum ‘could not talk seriously about Australian history and identity in the year 2001 without

---


encountering sharp differences of opinion’.\textsuperscript{105} Much of the comment applauded the two museums. Robert Macklin, for example, has described the NMA’s galleries as being ‘packed with fascination’,\textsuperscript{106} while an article in the Canberra Sunday Times explained:

> The museum has adopted a wonderfully refreshing style in the way in which Australia’s history is presented. It is more than a study of invaluable items that tell us something of our history. Opposed to the stuffed animals and still-life ceramics typical of many of the world’s museums is the highly interactive approach adopted. There is a hint of theme park and of fun in the way exhibits are presented.\textsuperscript{107}

Susan McCulloch-Uehlin has described the museum as ‘rich in material culture, but also ripe with ideas’,\textsuperscript{108} while Tim Bonyhady, whilst critical of the architecture, regarded many of the exhibits as ‘entertaining, interesting and imaginative’. Alluding to the long and difficult history of the National Museum, Bonyhady also commented that the museum ‘looked worth many visits, a remarkable achievement for an institution that has been in disarray for most of its life’.\textsuperscript{109}

Similar accolades were bestowed on Te Papa and there is little doubt that, in its positioning towards the traditional non-museum visitor and to children and families, the museum has achieved many of its goals. In October 1998, for example, the Evening Post described the people’s verdict on Te Papa as ‘overwhelmingly favourable’, and commented that ‘on busy days the museum’s patrons seems to represent the entire demographic spectrum, from black T-shirts and tattooed forearms through to cashmere sweaters and Gucci handbags’.\textsuperscript{110} Hamish McDonald, for the Sydney Morning Herald, described the museum as ‘full of interesting spaces to explore’, while historian Peter Franks declared Te Papa ‘a worthy successor to the Dominion Museum’.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{105} D. Casey, ‘History with a larrikin touch’, Daily Telegraph, 13\textsuperscript{th} March 2001, p.20.
\textsuperscript{106} R. Macklin, ‘And the rest is (our) history’, Canberra Times, 16\textsuperscript{th} March 2001.
\textsuperscript{107} ‘Swing open the doors to a young nation’s proud history’, Canberra Sunday Times, 11\textsuperscript{th} March 2001. Also see A. Barclay, ‘House of Treasures’, Daily Telegraph, 10\textsuperscript{th} March 2001, p.W21; K. Ingram, ‘Our identity may be elusive but the search can be fun’, Sydney Morning Herald, 13\textsuperscript{th} March 2001; D. Cronin, ‘National Museum a treat for the senses’, Canberra Times, 8\textsuperscript{th} March 2001; and R. Macklin, ‘Museum to “change” ACT’, Canberra Times, 12\textsuperscript{th} March 2001.
\textsuperscript{108} McCulloch-Uehlin, ‘Past the point…’, p.R21.
\textsuperscript{109} Bonyhady, ‘Lost in the loop’.
\textsuperscript{110} Editorial, ‘Te Papa: The people’s verdict’, Evening Post, 5\textsuperscript{th} October 1998. Also see C. Sotheran, ‘Crowds testament to Te Papa’s success’, Evening Post, 2\textsuperscript{nd} September 1998, p.20.
the museum from overseas commentators was especially positive. Sophie Campbell, the reviewer for *The Times* in Great Britain, described Te Papa as ‘a spectacular national space’, while Neal Becton, for the *Washington Post*, described it as ‘a really cool virtual game room’, before explaining:

> Te Papa, which loosely translates to Our Place, manages to combine a natural history museum, a national history museum, a national archive, an art museum, a nature walk and a great hi-tech arcade. It may be one of the most ambitiously eclectic museums in the world, but it works. It threatens to put Wellington, a charming city of 200,000 that until now has not been a major tourist magnet, on many visitors’ itineraries.

Despite the evident popular success of both museums, however, there have also been a significant and vocal number of detractors, highlighting concern over the way these national museums are portraying the nation. Much of this concern surrounds the emphasis on new museum techniques, especially technology. In regards to the NMA, Peter Ward has summarised: ‘it is an elaborate, theatrical stage for sometimes chimerial concepts of national identity and an astonishing range of high and low art, kitsch and ephemera. … Taking all together, it’s theme-park Australia.’ Such opposition has especially surrounded Te Papa, through the presence of its virtual reality rides, and its desire to be populist and to appeal to the ordinary visitor. Theodore Dalrymple, for example, has described it as ‘an amusement arcade masquerading as a museum’ and an example ‘of the lowest common denominator turned into official cultural policy, and stands as a terrible warning to the rest of the world’. Denis Dutton, a senior lecturer in the philosophy of art at the University of Canterbury and opponent of post-modern interpretation, has compared Te Papa to a junk shop, declaring the ‘$300 million theme park’ to be a ‘national embarrassment’, largely ‘keyed to the attention span of a nine-year-old’.

---

112 Campbell, ‘Come on down…’, p.31.
Art in Te Papa

Since opening in 1998, however, much of the opposition to Te Papa has surrounded the museum’s treatment of art, which resulted from the integration of the museum with the National Art Gallery and the subsequent inter-disciplinary collaboration. While not an issue in Australia, because of the long existence of the separate National Art Gallery in Canberra, it warrants some consideration because it has been the most controversial aspect of Te Papa. It also highlights some common concerns over the post-modern interpretation that has become increasingly prevalent in museums in both New Zealand and Australia.

The controversy surrounding art was given impetus by the furore surrounding one of Te Papa’s first temporary exhibitions, Pictura Britannica, which contained a work by Tania Kovat entitled ‘Virgin in a Condom’. A three-inch statue of the Virgin Mary sheathed in a transparent condom, it was met with hostility from religious communities. Graham Capill, the leader of the Christian Heritage Party, went as far to say, that while Te Papa seemed to carefully observe Maori spiritual values it ignored Christian values: ‘It’s increasingly clear that any faith or belief is acceptable in New Zealand, except for the Christian faith’.117

The commotion concerning Pictura Britannica, however, was only the beginning of the debate that has surrounded the museum’s treatment of art. As mentioned earlier, much of this has revolved around Parade, the main art gallery at Te Papa’s opening. By deploying the collections of the former National Art Gallery as illustrations in a series of narratives about New Zealand history and identity, Parade was a prominent example of the move to base all the exhibitions in a social and cultural history framework of visitor experience.118  As Ian Wedde, the Curator of Parade, has explained, everywhere

---

in the museum ‘art is in a cultural history frame’. Parade brought together art works from the 1750s to the present day with household objects, artefacts, clothing, pieces of industrial design, signs and videos, presenting them in a thematic but roughly chronological form. The exhibition attempted to say ‘where there are people, there is art’ and then, by juxtaposing acknowledged works of art alongside ‘everyday’ objects, effectively asked the visitor to decide what actually is art. One example of this was the display of Colin McCahon’s famous Northland Panels of 1958 next to a Kelvinator refrigerator made in 1959. The display, one that provoked strong reactions, asked the visitor to consider the value of two products from the same age that are normally divorced from each other, taking away the traditional idea of a work of art being an independent exalted creation.

This approach generated considerable contention amongst museum and art professionals around New Zealand, not only over Parade but also over the treatment of art throughout Te Papa. In other areas of the museum, for example, many art works were seen to lose their individuality and value by being placed purely as an illustration of an historical event, to the extent that they seem to simply become an extension of the running text. The display of Charles Blomfield’s The Terraces (1885) to illustrate the story of the 1886 Mount Tarawera eruption, or William Allsworth’s Emigrants (1844) to illustrate what wealthy migrants brought with them to New Zealand, are just two examples. Critics of the treatment of art in Te Papa have been numerous and also, significantly, often have very different viewpoints – highlighting the diverse debate surrounding museum interpretation. Jenny Harper, for example, the Head of Art History at Victoria University in Wellington and a former Director of the National Art Gallery, described Parade as taking a ‘chaotic post-modern stance’. In contrast, Rachel Kent, a writer for Art Asia Pacific and post-modern advocate, in describing the Northland Panels display, commented that ‘instead of provoking comparisons or parallels, the result is laboured and conservative’.

The controversy surrounding the art collection at Te Papa has ranged from criticism over the rate at which the former art gallery was integrated into the museum, the literary

---

rather than art historical backgrounds of some of the curators, the fact that a significant part of the collection remains in storage, the generally haphazard manner that the art works are deployed in the museum, and the perceived slurs to works of art usually treated reverentially. The approach taken by Parade was likened to that of the Museum of Sydney, which has been strongly condemned by some for taking a post-modern subjective role too far.\textsuperscript{122} John McDonald, for example, a curator at the National Gallery of Australia, saw the refusal to attribute cultural and historical values to certain objects as the fundamental problem that pervaded the whole museum: ‘A museum that refuses to make the most rudimentary value judgements and calls this “a radical idea” is a failure, no matter how many people stream through its portals’.\textsuperscript{123} Jenny Harper has been especially outspoken over the representation of art in Te Papa. Harper believes that in its desire to be populist and ‘unmuseum-like’, to the extent that it even tries to avoid being called a museum,\textsuperscript{124} Te Papa has succeeded in alienating a large number of traditional museum visitors: ‘A core museum audience is profoundly unhappy with the art displays … The museum too often becomes puerile in its effort to be populist.’\textsuperscript{125}

These debates surrounding art at Te Papa were not only confined to Parade. Another opening exhibition, \textit{Dream Collectors – 100 Years of New Zealand Art}, which opened as a temporary exhibition in Te Papa before travelling the country, received similar criticism through its method of juxtaposing colonial paintings with indigenous art.\textsuperscript{126} Te Papa though, did attempt to respond to these criticisms. In late 1999, for example, in an attempt to put more of the art collections on show, a new exhibition entitled \textit{What’s New} opened displaying the museum’s recent art acquisitions. Instead of lessening the attack, however, the exhibit seemed to only add to the many art critics who commented on Te Papa’s lack of a comprehensive long-term display of art. Jenny Harper, for instance, described the new acquisitions in \textit{What’s New} as sitting ‘like orphans’, in that they are displayed without context, and subsequently tell the audience little of significance.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{122} See, for example, \textit{LOG Illustrated}, Spring 1998, p.38.
\textsuperscript{123} J. McDonald, ‘From there to Eternity’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 10\textsuperscript{th} March 2001.
\textsuperscript{124} Jenny Harper, Personal Interview, 24\textsuperscript{th} August 2000.
\textsuperscript{125} Harper, ‘For the sake…”
In early 2000, the controversy surrounding the treatment of art became a major issue, prompted by the announcement that Te Papa was facing financial crisis and was asking the Government for more funding. This provoked many commentators to renew their condemnation of Te Papa, and call for the museum to justify its methods and any increase in government funding. Significantly, the critics found a supporter in Prime Minister Helen Clark who declared that the museum treated art ‘like an old fridge’ and also, while acknowledging the popularity of Te Papa, said it was important for it to enjoy the respect of critics and the museum community: ‘We have a responsibility overall to see the national museum and gallery stand up to critical scrutiny.’ In March 2000, therefore, Clark commissioned a review to investigate how the national art collection was presented, highlighting the important position Te Papa was seen to hold as a national institution. The review was to be undertaken by Dr Rodney Wilson, Director of the Auckland Museum, Chris Saines, Director of Auckland Art Gallery, and Des Griffin, former Director of the Australian Museum in Sydney. This provoked uproar amongst the Wellington arts community who saw the review, and especially the appointment of two Auckland directors who had been vocal in the past over the imbalance in Te Papa’s funding, as an ‘Auckland hatchet-job’. The subsequent report however, published in July, surprised many in being mild in its criticism and recommendations. In brief, the report commended the work of Te Papa over the years, stating that the aspiration that it be ‘a forum for the nation’ had certainly been achieved, in terms of attracting visitors from the wide spectrum of society, and found that its central tenet that the exhibitions be multi-disciplinary in nature was generally successful. In regards to the art collections and Parade in particular, the report acknowledged recent efforts by Te Papa staff to improve the representation of art, and

stressed that this should be implemented ‘as a matter of urgency’. It also highlighted the common concern of many of the critics in recommending that the Museum should, at all times, aim to respect and acknowledge the integrity of all individual collections and collection objects. In particular, it should be recognised that works of art have particular meanings and contexts of production, which remain unique to them, notwithstanding that these same works of art might usefully contribute to a wider understanding of other independent narratives within the Museum context.

The report was welcomed by Te Papa’s administration, which pledged to work on improving the art displays and to introduce new gallery space so that more of the collections could be available to the public. Late in 2000, a redevelopment began to create 1500m² of additional exhibition space. Opening in October 2001, it included a major new exhibition called Sightlines, displaying extensive works from Te Papa’s art collection.

Conclusion

It should be evident that both the NMA and Te Papa are representatives of the new museological ideas that permeate museums around the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century: developing along the lines of integrating collections, attracting different types of visitors, and experimenting with new display techniques. It is also clear that the use of these types of ‘new museology’ are sites of considerable contention, both museums having being surrounded by controversy since their conceptual planning began in the 1990s. This chapter has sought to provide a broad overview of the

---

133 ibid., p.10.
135 The controversial gallery Parade was subsequently replaced in 2001 by Made in New Zealand, a chronological history of New Zealand’s visual and material culture, tracing the development of themes such as art, design, architecture and music.
intellectual and physical development of the NMA and Te Papa, both to provide context to the subsequent examination of the non-indigenous exhibitions, and to illustrate the prominent position these national museums hold in the political and cultural arenas of their nations.

The chapter began with a discussion of how the attention paid to indigenous history and culture, by both the NMA and Te Papa, had contributed to a growing concern that the non-indigenous populations were not being recognised within representations of the nation’s identity. Such concerns and controversy were actually accentuated once the museums opened, continuing to highlight the problems with representing non-indigenous history and identity. In particular, they are indicative of the way representations of Aboriginal and Maori history play an important part in the problematic and contentious nature of non-indigenous identity.

In regards to Te Papa being ‘Maori-centric’, for example, an editorial in the Dominion explained that if an overseas visitor were to ask where in Wellington they could find Maori art, the immediate answer would be ‘the museum’. If, on the other hand, they asked about Pakeha New Zealand art, ‘the answer would be “in storage at the museum” – which is to say there is no permanent, comprehensive display at all’.

The perceived imbalance between Maori and Pakeha representation, and especially the perceived status given to Maori culture, is considered by some to exist throughout Te Papa. Rachel Kent, for instance, contrasts the ‘highly sophisticated and successful presentation of the Maori perspective’ to the ‘shaky, unclear presentation of Pakeha culture’, while Gordon Campbell goes further to state that Te Papa fails to adequately represent the identity of Pakeha New Zealanders:

Ultimately, is this really ‘Our Place’? The name seems premature, facile, while we remain so polarised as a nation. Behind the gizmos and several worthy displays, the museum does reflect who we are now, but perversely. It showcases Maori confident of their identity and Europeans who haven’t a clue, lost as they are in mere nostalgia – mainly because European tradition is now being rewritten by gender and race zealots.

---

that most Europeans neither believe nor endorse. … It is what this mess of a building, with all its shiny pretensions, best expresses.  

There have been similar accusations that the NMA trivialises non-indigenous Australian culture. Journalist Miranda Devine has been the most outspoken, comparing the museum to the abstract post-modernism of the Museum of Sydney, which has been strongly criticised since opening in 1995. Stating that the underlying message of the National Museum ‘is one of sneering ridicule for white Australia’ she has described:

It is as if non-Aboriginal culture is a joke, all upside-down Hills Hoists and tongue-in-cheek Victa mowers. The museum is supposed to reflect the national identity. But all of World War II is dealt with in the small part of a display case that is not filled with Phar Lap’s heart. That war gets less space than the proposed republic. … The entire Anzac tradition is summed up by a bleached-out statue of a Digger, displayed as just another piece of drollery. … The whole museum is a lie. To find the national identity, you would be better served going along to the porn museum which has also just opened just around the corner.

Such criticism has especially been applied, as will be discussed in the next chapter, in regards to the Nation gallery and the choice of exhibiting symbols such as kangaroos and rotary washing lines as being representative of the nation. Alongside this is a concern over the lack of ‘heroes’ to be found in the museum. Nevertheless, the museum has not been short of support for its non-indigenous representations. Susan McCulloch-Uehlin, for example, has acknowledged that some might see the non-indigenous experience as being trivialised, but believes the museum has achieved a successful balance between display, education, scholarship and entertainment. Caroline Turner, at the Australian National University, also believes that it has fulfilled its role as a modern museum in telling ‘the story of ordinary people from the bottom up’. The museum has also moved to defend itself, by making it clear that as a museum of social

140 M. Devine, ‘“The museum has adopted the left-wing position in every conceivable historical issue … all you see is white interlopers, without a culture” – Trivial pursuit of our history’, The Advertiser, 14th March 2001, p.30. Also M. Devine, ‘A nation trivialised’, Daily Telegraph, 12th March 2001.
history it believes it should be about the Australians who make up everyday society. For example, Dawn Casey, the NMA’s Director, has explained that ‘the National Museum recognises that history is also ordinary people doing everyday things’:143

Because the National Museum is a social history museum its chief subject is people. Some of the characters in our exhibitions are famous or prominent, others are unknown and even unexpected, but all contribute their story to the big themes of land, nation and people. … Some visitors are delighting in the quirkiness and wit to be found here and there in our exhibition content and design. Others who expect a national institution must be solemn and austere may be offended and mistake humour for mockery. It isn’t. A self-confident nation must be capable of looking at its own history in unusual and unsolemn ways. It’s part of the national character to be irreverent – sometimes – and so are we.144

These debates surrounding non-indigenous history are especially pertinent now that the discussion moves to investigate in greater detail the non-indigenous galleries, as they point to the ways the museums are perceived to have interpreted their national histories – so they might contribute to an understanding of Australian and New Zealand identity.

144 Casey, ‘History with…’, p.20.
CHAPTER SEVEN


A great deal of the commentary surrounding both Te Papa and the NMA after opening has concerned their presentation of indigenous history and culture – indicative of the central role indigenous peoples are now seen to play both in museums and the nation. However, when criticism has been directed at the museums it has often been towards their interpretations of non-indigenous history. In part, this perhaps reflects the emphasis by both museums on the presentation of Maori and Aboriginal culture, and even a reluctance by non-indigenous commentators to reflect on sensitive indigenous issues. Most importantly, however, it illustrates the highly problematic and contentious nature of non-indigenous Australian and New Zealand national identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Some of this debate concerns the representation of specific histories. Pru Goward, for example, who was appointed as Australia’s new Sex Discrimination Commissioner in 2001, has raised questions over the representation of the role and contribution of women in the NMA. Pointing to the representation of women in domestic settings, such as in a 1950s kitchen display, and the Lindy-Azaria Chamberlain incident as just a ‘quirky’ episode in history, Goward has accused the museum’s curators of not considering that women have made a contribution to Australian society.

---

1 See, for example, S. McCulloch-Uehlin, ‘Past the point of a fresh turn’, Weekend Australian, 24th March 2001, p.R21, which discusses the different approaches that the NMA, Melbourne Museum and South Australian Museum, take in representing indigenous culture in their exhibitions – which have all opened since 2000.
2 P. Goward, ‘Making an exhibition of ourselves’, Australian, 13th March 2001, p.13. Also S. Brook, ‘Elite clash over museum for the ordinary’, Australian, 13th March 2001, p.3. Pru Goward, who is also a former head of the Office of the Status of Women, is married to David Barnett, the museum council member and John Howard’s biographer who had been so critical over the NMA’s direction during the developmental process.
As discussed in the previous chapter, much of the criticism concerned a perceived imbalance between the representation of non-indigenous and indigenous culture. This included accusations that both the NMA and Te Papa marginalise and trivialise the contribution of the non-indigenous population – especially significant as it points directly to how the museums are attempting to explore notions of non-indigenous national identity, and how successful they are perceived to be.

How then do the history exhibits in the NMA and Te Papa attempt to represent non-indigenous Australians and New Zealanders? This chapter examines in greater depth the history displays, the concepts behind them, and the ways they might contribute to an understanding of Australian and New Zealand national identity. It highlights the growing recognition within these museums that they should not attempt to present a single interpretation of what it is to be an ‘Australian’ and ‘New Zealander’, but instead should suggest and question possible interpretations. However, it also shows that adapting this recognition into the actual exhibitions is not straightforward, and that both national museums continue at times, however inadvertently, to prescribe their own definitive interpretations of the nation’s identity.

Due to the different nature of the galleries in both the NMA and Te Papa, it is necessary to look at them individually. However, despite their distinct outcomes, many of the exhibits were based on similar aims and concepts. For example, both museums try to explore non-indigenous national identity through the ideas that identity is based on a relationship with the land, that the two nations are immigrant societies, and that national identity is constructed. This illustrates the similarity in Australia and New Zealand of current notions of national identity, their comparable histories since European settlement, and the way museums now try to interpret these national histories.

The underlying concept to both the NMA and Te Papa was the inter-relation of the environment, indigenous and non-indigenous history, and this was to permeate throughout the galleries. This recognised that post-colonial non-indigenous identity is inextricably tied to the indigenous populations. Significantly however, the end results of both museums did not emulate the degree of integration that the intellectual frameworks were trying to convey. There is clearly a spatial distinction, for instance, between the non-indigenous and indigenous galleries. This is most noticeable in the NMA, where
the gallery *First Australians* exists on its own almost entirely separate territory. In Te Papa too, there is a clear division between the Maori and Pakeha galleries. Level Four is clearly in two halves with the central point being *Signs of the Nation*, the exhibition looking at the Treaty of Waitangi. This reflects the bicultural nature of both the nation and museum, but also precludes the possibilities for generating understanding of the common themes and links between the diverse histories and cultures. This integration of indigenous and non-indigenous history is also limited in the actual exhibitions. For example, there is minimal non-indigenous representation in the indigenous galleries. This is especially apparent in Te Papa. In the NMA too, however, although the *First Australians* gallery does go some way to exploring the experiences of early settlers and missionaries who had close relations with Aboriginal people, the stories involving non-indigenous people, such as conflicts and massacres, are often told only from the indigenous perspective. As will be evident in the subsequent discussion, reference is also made to the role of indigenous people in the non-indigenous displays in both museums. Yet, this often seems to be a token effort to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Maori presence without really attempting to explore the connections between the different cultures. Only by exploring these histories together, and their influences on each other, can post-colonial identity really begin to be explained.

‘*Tangled Destinies*’ in the NMA

One exception to this is perhaps the gallery *Tangled Destinies: Land and People in Australia* in the NMA.³ An exhibition that is one of the first of its kind in the world, it is also a type that was considered in the early planning stages of Te Papa, but never eventuated. A natural history gallery would not normally find a place in this discussion, but *Tangled Destinies* is not a natural history gallery in the traditional sense. Rather, it examines environmental history. Mike Smith, the curator chiefly responsible for *Tangled Destinies*, has described environmental history as being distinguished from natural history ‘by an explicitly historical perspective which contrasts with the focus on ecology, systematics, or physical processes more usually adopted by natural history

³ Previous names for *Tangled Destinies* were *Australian Space and Time*, *Time Past: Time Present*, *Settling In* and *Links to the Land*.
This type of integrative interpretative approach can be seen as indicative of new museological theory, by focusing on the inter-relation rather than compartmentalisation of different disciplines. It is essentially the primary theme of ‘people’s interaction with the environment’ that was part of the structure of the National Museum as long ago as 1975, but developed to be approached by interpreting the natural history of the continent through the ways that knowledge of its human settlement has deepened and extended:

It also includes interpreting the frames of reference through which people have perceived the Australian environment, how they have used and misused the productive capacities of the land, and how the Australian environment has shaped human settlement and society.

The philosophical basis of *Tangled Destinies* is the three levels of analysis recognised by environmental historian Donald Worster: the history of the natural environment, the reciprocal interactions of people, the land and biota, and the values, laws, myths and ideas that shape these interactions. Put simply, the gallery is about the interactions between land and people in Australia, and it is possibly the best example of the museum’s brief to integrate the different disciplines.

Essentially to reflect an Australian identity based upon a relationship with the land, the gallery has a central narrative of ‘response, adjustment and attachment’, which is explored through ten modules grouped under three different sections: Encountering Australia, Living with the Land, and Understanding Australia. Encountering Australia, for example, looks at the response of Europeans to the flora and fauna of Australia during the first hundred years of their settlement. Part of this includes potentially controversial issues such as extinction and biological invasion. One module, ‘Endling’,
for instance, examines the historical wave of extinction of native species that marked
the European settlement of Australia, such as the Tasmanian Tiger. ‘Biological
Invasion’ then focuses on the many different species the settlers introduced to the
countryside in order to make themselves feel more at home, some which died out while
others, such as the rabbit, proliferated to change the nature of the land causing
difficulties and opportunities for both European and Aboriginal people.

Each section represents both indigenous and settler interaction with the environment.
‘Firetracks’, for instance, a module in the section Living with the Land, looks at the
impact of fire on the Australian landscape through aspects such as it being used as a tool
by indigenous people and its use in farming throughout history. Another module,
‘Cities’, focuses on Australia as the most urbanised nation in the world; examining how
cities have developed, expanded and used the land around them, such as Adelaide using
the distant Murray River as a water source and the effect of the discovery of gold on
Melbourne. The section Understanding Australia concentrates on how changing
knowledge, especially during the twentieth century, has shaped Australians’ relationship
with land. ‘Deep Time’ explores the acknowledgement that Australia’s extraordinarily
long history of human settlement means that Aboriginal people have had to live through
major changes in the global climate and regional environments, and so transformations
to the continent were part of a cultural as well as natural story. Tangled Destinies,
therefore, explores national identity by taking a cross-disciplinary approach to explore
both what is distinctive about the Australian environment and experience, and the
changing relations between people and the land.

Significantly, a similar gallery had earlier been planned as a major feature in Te Papa,
initially to be called Human Impacts and later People and the Land. In a paper

8 For a general overview of the programs in Tangled Destinies see NMA, North Gallery – Tangled
Destinies, and also NMA, Land & People – Interim Design Development Submission, 11th June 1999,
9 This type of historical interpretation of the environment is beginning to gain considerable popularity
around the world, largely because many natural history museums that have remained traditional in their
interpretation and display have experienced falling visitor numbers. One example was the exhibit ‘Seeds
of Change’ at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History during the mid-1990s. It explored
how the voyages of Christopher Columbus laid the ‘seeds’ that profoundly transformed the world, both
biologically and culturally, through the exchange of plants, animals, and diseases, which were introduced
sometimes deliberately, sometimes accidentally, by Columbus and those who followed him. The exhibit
attempted to show that the process of encounter and exchange Columbus initiated affected the Old World
as well, altering the flora and fauna, reordering the ethnic composition of countries, and changing the diet
and health of peoples everywhere.
presented in 1999 at the ‘National Museums: Negotiating Histories’ conference in Canberra, Geoff Hicks, who was Conceptual Leader of the Natural Environment at Te Papa, explained that in terms of exhibition presentation, it was anticipated that ‘contestation about past “wrongs” could be placed alongside current “rights” deriving from a human sense of place, and openly debated’.¹⁰ In this sense, it would explore aspects such as the introduction of new species and the extinction of indigenous species in much the same way as *Tangled Destinies*.

The general view, however, was that the exhibition would not be celebratory enough for Te Papa, which in every way was attempting to be an entertaining experience, and would concentrate too much on how badly New Zealanders had treated the land leading, in Hicks’ opinion, ‘to an institutional timidity that ultimately saw the *People and the Land* exhibition stall’.¹¹ As will later be discussed, the celebratory nature of Te Papa leads to a number of questions over the museum’s effectiveness in addressing national identity. The fact that this particular exhibition did not develop, for instance, can be perceived as limiting the success of Te Papa in its mission to explore national identity through the ‘heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment’.¹² The story of people’s interaction with the land is fundamental to the development and understanding of the nation. The existence of such a theme in the NMA just a few years later, indicates a growing awareness within museums of the need to explore and confront all aspects of the past, even if they are spheres of contestation.

The curators of *Tangled Destinies* also encountered tensions with how to fit environmental history into what was primarily a social history museum, one whose role it was to celebrate the nation. Indeed the gallery that eventually developed was the third put forward as the ‘environment’ theme of the museum, the first two being more specialised and concentrating more on a traditional interpretation of natural history. During the production process, there were also similar concerns raised by the National Museum Council to those in Te Papa, regarding the inclusion of a gallery that could be

---


¹¹ ibid.

perceived as concentrating too much on ‘black-armband history’, and other problems arose such as with loan arrangements. The final existence of Tangled Destinies, however, marks a success for the museum in its claim to confront multiple aspects of the past. Certainly, no other museum supplies such a holistic perspective on the history of the environment, the impact of people, and the influence of the environment on Australian society. By bringing together environmental perspectives, social history and indigenous knowledge, and by its placement as the first major exhibition visitors encounter, Tangled Destinies provides a solid introductory framework for visitors to the NMA to think about Australia’s history and the three themes of land, nation and people.

Non-Indigenous History in the NMA

The three main galleries dealing specifically with non-indigenous Australian history in the NMA are Eternity: Stories from the Emotional Heart of Australia, Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788, and Nation: Symbols of Australia. This section focuses on two of these, Eternity and Horizons, looking at the ways they developed in the planning and structure of the museum and the ways they address Australian identity.

Adjacent to Tangled Destinies is Eternity: Stories from the Emotional Heart of Australia, the smallest but also one of the most discussed galleries in the NMA, largely due to its unique exhibition approach. Named in remembrance of Arthur Stace, who wrote ‘Eternity’ for thirty years on walls and footpaths around Sydney, the exhibition seeks to explore Australian human history and identity through a range of emotions, placing individuals and their experiences at the centre of the interpretation of Australian history. In terms of national identity, the idea is that through a range of personal stories spanning Australia’s history, the visitor will be able to relate to these emotions and have their own emotional experience allowing them to form a connection to what it means to be Australian.

Fifty stories are grouped under ten themes that are emotions and experiences encountered by everyone in real life: Mystery, Separation, Hope, Joy, Loneliness, Thrill, Devotion, Fear, Chance, and Passion. Each theme is displayed under a singular

---

13 Mike Smith, Personal Interview, 27th June 2001.
14 Eternity was previously called Australian Stories and then Perceptions.
evocative colour, and within each are five stories headlined by a large face banner and one individual object. Under ‘Mystery’, for example, the story of Azaria Chamberlain is recounted along with the display of her black dress. Each of the emotions is supposed to arouse in the visitor nostalgia, and their own experiences of that particular theme. ‘Hope’, for instance, aims to represent the ideas, hopes and dreams that all Australians have had at some point in time, whether it may be as a migrant landing in a new land or the hope of achievement. The theme includes, therefore, the stories of Arthur Phillip, the first Governor of New South Wales, and Olympian Betty Cuthbert. Similarly, ‘Devotion’ seeks to represent the common devotion that many Australians have to different causes, whether those causes might be related to religion, politics, or even a commitment to sport. As a result, the stories represented include that of Mary Mackillop’s devotion to her faith, and Faith Bandler’s commitment to the fight for Aboriginal rights in the 1960s.

Altogether the stories are supposed to represent an emotional history of Australia over a broad matrix of time, ethnicity, class, and gender: ‘They emphasise the importance of individuals, the complexity of Australian life, and the diversity of its people’. A 1999 planning document explained the basis behind this ‘emotional overview’ of Australia:

Together the ten emotive themes constitute a complete story of Australian life that looks both backwards and forwards. They present our common national mysteries and tragedies, our passions for each other and our possessions, and our national and shared obsessions. They portray the essence of the Australian character in the ‘lucky country’, they celebrate our joy and achievements, our hopes and fears and our passionate devotion to a range of causes that have shaped Australian society and values.

Within each individual emotion there are also touch-screen units, whereby people can explore each story in more depth, and at the end of the exhibition two video booths where visitors can record their own experiences, highlighting the Museum’s mission to be as much about the present and future as the past, and making sure that the audience

---

15 To find out about the Chamberlain incident see J. Bryson, Evil Angels, Ringwood, 1985.
17 NMA, Australian Stories, 2nd February 1999, Prepared by Dr Marion Stell, Sophie Jensen and Johanna Parker, NMA Research Library.
become participants rather than passive consumers. The aim is to limit the presence of a curatorial voice in *Eternity*, beyond the selection of the personal stories at any rate. The stories are told in the first person, the majority using primary source material and when this is not possible, for instance when the subject is no longer living, secondary source material has been used to tell the story rather than text panels written by curators. There is also even gender representation, different ethnic communities are represented, and both ordinary and prominent Australians are depicted, and by putting them together in emotional themes it attempts to make sure that they are not aligned in specific historical groups such as ‘migrants’ or ‘icons’. Marion Stell, one of the curators chiefly responsible for *Eternity*, has explained her own aims in designing the exhibition:

> My ambition, from the beginning, was to make this gallery very different. I did not want to regurgitate the predictable ‘famous’ Australians, pay lip service to a couple of token women and eulogise the ‘unsung heroes’. I wanted a way to eschew limiting and unsatisfactory social history categories like ‘migrants’, ‘achievers’, ‘sporting heroes’, ‘the disabled’. I wanted to abandon uninspiring chronological constructions and lazy timelines. For me the exhibition had to say something worthwhile and new, and it had to say it differently.

There are a number of possible problems with *Eternity*, not least the criticism that can be applied to the small space of what has become a busy gallery. The use of the name ‘Eternity’ in the national museum, to describe a gallery that is supposed to be exploring the nation’s identity, is also problematic. The word ‘Eternity’ has itself increasingly become a clichéd image of the nation in Australia in recent years, illustrated by its widespread use at the Millennium celebrations in Sydney and at the 2000 Olympics. On another level, it is also hard to ascertain the actual emotional connection visitors have with the displays, or even whether the stories succeed in expanding the horizons of Australian history for the visitor. The complete reliance on triggering some kind of emotional response from the visitor is a difficult one. Without further interpretation some stories, such as that of children entertainer’s The Wiggles under the theme of

---


‘Joy’, could easily just be seen as amusing curiosities. The cramped nature of the gallery might also restrict the possibilities of personally interacting with any one story or theme, though *Eternity* was initially planned to be double the size, both in the number of stories and in exhibition space. It was designed to be one of two thematic exhibitions, the other being *Horizons*, that threaded around the other galleries complementing and providing a non-narrative, non-chronological overview of the places and events represented in the exhibitions nearby it.\(^{21}\) *Eternity* was eventually limited due to practical problems with both space and budget,\(^ {22}\) and it can now be seen as isolated from the other galleries, hindering the effectiveness of its interpretation and the possibilities for interaction with other exhibitions, histories and ideas.

While *Eternity* explores Australian identity through a shared sense of emotion, *Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788* focuses on national identity specifically in terms of Australia as a place of destination, in other words as a settler society. *Horizons* went through various changes during the museum’s planning process.\(^ {23}\) Initially it was intended to be a far broader exhibition than it now is, focusing on Australia’s place in global networks of empire, trade and population movement. Titled *Journeys*, the exhibition was to provide a global perspective on Australian history and society through a theme-based exploration of Australia’s colonisation and national expansion, ‘with an emphasis on the growth and nature of the population, the connections between population policy, economic development and culture, and the relationship of Australia to the world outside its borders’.\(^ {24}\)

*Horizons* was originally designed to provide a conceptual spine for the other permanent exhibitions, and in particular to complement *Eternity* – putting those stories of individuals into a larger context, to create deeper meaning.\(^ {25}\) As it eventuated, however, due to problems with space and money, *Horizons* now exists alone in the museum on a third floor mezzanine, and like *Eternity* can be seen as isolated from the other galleries. It now also focuses more specifically on topics of migration, rather than the broader


\(^{22}\) Personal correspondence to the author from Dawn Casey, Director of the NMA, 18th June 2001.

\(^{23}\) Previous names for *Horizons* were *Journeys, People in Motion*, and *Currents*.


\(^{25}\) NMA, *Conceptual Design – 100% Submission*. 
themes of population trends and Australia’s place in the world, though of course such themes are inherent in one way or another throughout any discussion of migration. As the title suggests, *Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788* examines the history of migration in Australia and the role it has played in the development of the country:

The exhibition encompasses the variety of Australian experience from indigenous people and convicts, to migrants from around the world. It celebrates the richness of our backgrounds and shows how this heritage has influenced our sense of ourselves and our relationship with the rest of the world. … The story of the peopling of Australia is one of the great human dramas, and the exhibition attempts to show the range of human experiences and emotions that are part of this drama.26

*Horizons* is based around four main themes: Possession, Visions and Opportunity, Home, and Defining Ourselves. Implicit throughout the exhibition is that Australians can now be identified as part of a multi-cultural, multi-voiced, and vibrant society, illustrated in part by the representation of different ethnic groups throughout the gallery. Each theme also attempts to illustrate the debate and changing nature of Australian national identity. ‘Possession’, for example, focuses on aspects such as the history of convicts in Australia, examining the changing perception of convicts in the national memory.

Topics that are addressed in ‘Possession’ include both the appropriation of indigenous culture by early European settlers and the appropriation and adaptation of introduced culture by Aborigines, highlighted by the relationship between Bennelong and Governor Arthur Phillip, while the changing perception of indigenous people is illustrated through European art during the nineteenth century, as it moved from romantic images of natives to caricatures of the indigenous people as weak or treacherous fringe-dwellers.

‘Visions and Opportunity’ then explores the continuing settlement of Australia, by focusing on schemes to increase migration to Australia and the motivations surrounding those who chose to settle. The ‘Visions’ aspect, for example, examines the schemes of migration planners such as Caroline Chisholm and Edward Gibbon Wakefield, as well as the migration programs of colonial, state and Commonwealth governments, to

---

illustrate how Australia was portrayed as a new and attractive country in order to attract migrants. ‘Opportunity’ then explores this concept of a ‘land of opportunity’ further, by focusing on the working life, enterprises and achievements of various migrants who strived to create an ‘ideal’ Australia. Individual stories of migrants are told, such as that of Mei Quong Tart, a Chinese immigrant who became a prominent business figure in Sydney during the late nineteenth century, and Vincenzo Dublé, an Italian barber who started his own business in Melbourne in the 1930s.

Another of the themes, ‘Home’, addresses the shifting concept of home in a migrant society, from early settlers who still considered Great Britain as their ‘home’ and ‘nation’, to contemporary immigrants and their own feelings of alienation or belonging to a new land. Finally, ‘Defining Ourselves’ begins to ask broader questions about population, community relations and identity in Australia, by illustrating that the development of migration in Australia intersects with long-standing concerns over the nature of the population, community cohesion and questions of security, loyalty and identity. For example, by focusing on the White Australia Policy, it shows how the government was selective in its desire to strengthen the ‘Britishness’ and purity of the population. Another module, then explores how Australia became a sanctuary for refugees during the twentieth century and the tensions that this at times has created, such as around the arrival of Indo-Chinese refugees after the Vietnam War. By emphasising the triumph of overcoming such problems during its history, the underlying concept throughout the theme is that the nation can largely be judged ‘as a success in its development as a multi-racial and multi-cultural community’.27

The gallery, therefore, attempts to place Australian identity firmly as a product of a settler society, identified by the multicultural nation that now exists. It illustrates in particular how the image of Australia being ‘British’ was constructed in the nineteenth century, and how this became increasingly untenable during the twentieth, and consequently succeeds in raising questions over the non-indigenous populations’ traditional notions of identity. *Horizons* is the most conventional gallery in the NMA, however, in terms of its display techniques, through its reliance on an abundance of objects and interpretative text displayed in traditional, and often badly lit, glass cases.

---

27 ibid., p.3.
This is a problem in any modern museum, but more so in a museum that overall seems to be challenging visitors with new methods of interpretation, through thoughtful combinations of text, objects and multi-media. This return to more established museum practice in *Horizons*, as well as its isolated physical position, perhaps limits the exhibition’s effectiveness by not managing to entice interest and ensuring that there is less interaction with the audience.

**Pakeha History in Te Papa**

Taking a similar approach to *Horizons*, in that it too explores national identity through the idea of New Zealand being a settler and multicultural nation, is *Passports*, the first of the main exhibitions dealing specifically with Pakeha history in Te Papa. On opening, the non-indigenous historical component of Te Papa was made up largely of three main galleries: *Passports*, *On the Sheep’s Back* and *Exhibiting Ourselves*. This examination focuses on *Passports* and *On the Sheep’s Back*, along with some discussion of two other exhibits that attempt to interpret Pakeha identity in different ways: *Golden Days* and *Signs of the Nation*.

Planning had begun for Te Papa’s galleries as early as 1990, and because of this consideration of the earlier ideas and concepts for the ‘history zone’ is warranted, in order to gain some idea of how these developed into the final opening exhibitions – known as the ‘Day One’ exhibitions.\(^2\) In 1990, the plan for the history area was for a number of exhibitions dealing with separate issues to be linked to *The Promenade*, designed as a chronological, collections-based journey through New Zealand’s history, including Pakeha, Maori and Pacific Islander history. Various suggestions for the exhibitions were put forward, quite different to those that exist today but which continue to illustrate a modern approach to museum representation. *Being Here: The Family*, for instance, was to present aspects of New Zealand social history, aiming to ask what the future would bring, and ‘personalised by the inclusion of first-person

---

\(^2\) For example, it is worth noting in the context of this entire thesis, that early conceptual plans in 1990 made it clear that Te Papa should break with conventional museum practice and incorporate the ‘new museology’. This was especially to be the case through the representation of ‘new social histories’. See MoNZTPT, *Exhibitions Conceptual Plan: Draft*, Prepared by Ralph Appelbaum Associates Inc., New York, 1990, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) Archives, p.27.
accounts and primary sources wherever possible’.\footnote{S. Simeral, ‘Excerpts from the Exhibitions Conceptual Plan: Ralph Appelbaum Associates Inc. in collaboration with the Concept Development Team’, Museum Anthropology, vol. 15, no. 4, November 1991, p.17.} \textit{Exceptional New Zealanders} was to showcase famous and infamous personalities in a series of collection-based displays, while \textit{Creating a New Zealand Identity} was to examine the process of creating a unique New Zealand identity, by exhibiting different objects from different cultural groups.\footnote{ibid.}

By the middle of 1993, however, these themes had significantly changed, the specific exhibitions becoming \textit{Immigrants}, \textit{Work and Leisure}, \textit{Claiming the Land}, as well as a ‘current issues’ space that would feature a series of changing exhibitions on issues of topical importance.\footnote{As will be evident, these themes are reflected in the opening exhibitions: ‘Immigrants’ in \textit{Passports}, ‘Work’ and ‘Claiming the Land’ in \textit{On the Sheep’s Back}.} The concept was based around a social history approach, in order to ‘challenge our audience to explore, celebrate and question different viewpoints of New Zealand’s past’.\footnote{MoNZTPT, History Sector Exhibitions Concept Description, October 1993, p.6, Te Papa Archives.} Like many of the NMA’s exhibitions, there was also recognition of the need to represent the ‘everyday’ and familiar within the displays, in order to interest a wide range of visitors. Concerning the \textit{Work and Leisure} exhibition:

\begin{quote}
Work and leisure are an important component of every person’s life and they can be used to cover many topics. By establishing a gallery like this we can display aspects of the collection with a specific theme in mind. It will also allow us to explore some specific ideas in social history which in the past, as a museum, we have not really dealt with.\footnote{ibid., p.28.}
\end{quote}

At this point, the \textit{Promenade} aspect of the history sector was still seen as an integral part of the interpretative process. It had been developed by Tim Hobson in consultation with the curators of the History Sector Group, and its aim was not only to provide the visitor with an understanding of the broad sweep of New Zealand’s history and to act as a backbone in linking the separate issue exhibits, but also to serve as ‘a fast track through the history exhibitions for those visitors with little time or interest’, and to supply a link with the Maori cultural exhibitions.\footnote{ibid., p.12.} At the end of 1993, however, the development process began to change with the appointment of Jock Phillips, the
Government’s Chief Historian, as Conceptual Leader in History. Shortly afterwards, Promenade was shelved, largely due to a belief that its traditional chronological approach was too boring for a museum that was, in every respect, attempting to be innovative and modern. As will be discussed later, this shelving can in certain ways be considered unfortunate, leaving some conspicuous gaps in the historical representation.

Once Jock Phillips arrived on the scene a thematic approach was embraced, evident in the exhibitions that exist today. Indeed, the themes adopted for two of the exhibitions soon afterwards, Passports and Exhibiting Ourselves, remained the same throughout the planning process. It is important to again remember that all the exhibitions, and in fact the whole museum, is geared towards aiding the interpretation of national identity in New Zealand. Significantly too, like the NMA, they were not designed to identify or suggest to the public any single distinct version or idea of New Zealand’s identity – another illustration of changing museological practice, as museums no longer attempt to spell out definitive stories or historical interpretation. Put in another way, they no longer tell their visitors what is right or what to believe. Instead, museums often now encourage people to debate and explore different interpretations of history and to come to their own conclusions. As Jock Phillips has described in relation to the three main Pakeha history exhibits in Te Papa, the aim was to give visitors three approaches to understanding national identity – ‘identity is the sum of immigrant cultures, identity comes from interaction with a distinct environment, identity is a construct of the mind.’ He goes on to emphasise that ‘the hope was that questions would be asked, perceptions opened, not closed down.’ In other words, the history exhibitions were created to help people question notions of national identity.

Passports, for example, explores national identity through the idea that New Zealand is an immigrant and multicultural society. In this respect, it is based upon a similar concept to Horizons at the NMA. Passports sees the migratory past as the one aspect of national identity that all Pakeha New Zealanders share. Jock Phillips describes it as ‘a

35 My thanks to Michael Fitzgerald, History Curator at Te Papa, for clarifying these issues.
37 Passports was originally called The Peopling of New Zealand.
founding trauma’: ‘They chose to leave, they suffered the uprooting of the voyage and they were forced to set down roots in a new land.’

The exhibition explores this through three themes – leaving, travelling and arriving. Telling the story of non-Maori migration to New Zealand from the early nineteenth century to the present, ‘these themes of leaving familiar surroundings and moving into uncertain territory allow people of all ages to identify with the migrant experience’. The aim is also to take visitors on a journey themselves, ‘a journey of discovery in which they vicariously experience many of the hopes and fears, the choices and obligations of being an immigrant’. It attempts this through a combination of artefacts, interactives and oral histories, focusing both on older and more recent migrants. There is a game, for example, through which the visitor can find out whether they would gain entry into modern New Zealand, while another interactive game allows the visitor to take the role of a ship’s captain in the voyage from Europe in the nineteenth century. These games attempt to be both entertaining and educational, based on solid research. The trials that are faced as a ship’s captain, for instance, are based on original passengers’ letters. A 1995 Concept Report warned, the games should not be designed in a way ‘that trivialises the migrant experience, which was very often not “fun” … Games need to be read in the sense of role-playing, rather than in the recreational sense.’

Other experiential aspects of the exhibition include sound effects, reconstructed cabins in which the visitor can experience the living conditions on voyages, and drawers that hold a plethora of objects relating to specific individuals. Significantly, Passports is careful not to make the migration experience seem a necessarily good one, confronting each of the three themes by focusing on the hardships and trials migrants have to endure. There is also a fair representation of both male and female immigrants. In the section dealing with the arrival and adjustment to the new land, for example, the exhibition highlights that while some new arrivals embraced the challenges of the new

---

38 ‘Search for the Kiwi identity’, Sunday Star Times, 14th April 1996.
country, others were disillusioned by the realities of the environment and poverty. One illustration is the female Danish writer Ingeborg Stuckenberg, who migrated to New Zealand in the 1890s thinking it to be the utopian social laboratory of the world. Finding the country to be backward and uncultured, and forced to work as a maid, after eighteen months she shot herself.

Passports can also be regarded as being largely representative of the many different nationalities and cultures and their contribution to New Zealand life, and next to the exhibition there was a temporary gallery focusing on the Chinese community in New Zealand titled The Making of a Chinese New Zealander. In August 2000, this was replaced by an exhibition focusing on Dutch settlers, recognising ‘the enormous influence that the Dutch have had on New Zealand culture’. Jock Phillips has, however, identified two problems which had to be overcome during the development of Passports. The first was simply a lack of collections relating not only to the immigrant experience, but to popular culture and Pakeha history as a whole – highlighting the absence of collecting in this area by the museum in the past. To remedy the situation, Phillips was forced to rely on more visual mediums such as games, and to go out into the community for the objects and stories he needed.

The second problem concerned the need to be representative of smaller minority migrant groups, but not to the exclusion of the British majority who still accounted for some eighty per cent of New Zealand’s immigrants. According to Phillips, this was a concern raised by some as soon as it was announced that there was to be an exhibition exploring New Zealand as an immigrant society, fuelled by the news of the development of the community gallery focusing on the Chinese. A perception that the ‘British inheritance was being ignored for the sake of making Pakeha New Zealanders look bad’. This can be seen as a continuation of the criticism about the perceived marginalisation of Pakeha history in relation to the Maori, now extended to a view that

---

42 MoNZTPT, Nieuw Zealand – going Dutch, Concept Design 90%, January 2000, p.3, Te Papa Archives.
44 Passports is consequently made up of a considerable number of loans and donations, as well as oral histories, especially from ethnic communities such as through the Wellington Indian Association, the Netherlands Foundation and the Dalmation Cultural Society. See MoNZTPT, Passports, 90% Developed Design, p.168. This was a problem also encountered with the exhibition On the Sheep’s Back. See ‘Museum help call’, Wairarapa Times, 13th August 1996.
‘traditional’ Anglo-Celtic New Zealanders were being marginalised within the nation by other Pakeha. To resolve this the history team put added focus on British culture by breaking it into its regional parts, presenting the variety of the different cultures it contains. A video called ‘Places of Origin’, for example, visits various parts of Britain and features different people, with different accents, discussing their experiences and ancestors, such as someone from County Antrim talking about linen weavers who left for New Zealand. The suggestion is that if the British inheritance consists of many different cultures then New Zealand, as an ‘immigrant nation’, has always been multicultural.

The Maori impact on Pakeha settlers as they adjust to the land is also highlighted. As Phillips explains: ‘we as Pakeha must come to terms with the fact that our settlement here and our identity as New Zealanders necessarily rest on a history of conflict with the tangata whenua’. The most notable illustration of this in the exhibition, is the story of John and Betty Guard, early pioneers in New Zealand, who had a famous conflict with the Maori in the early 1830s. It is worth noting too that the story of the Guards is one of only a few relating to famous people in New Zealand’s history. Another illustration of Te Papa’s adoption of ‘new museology’, Passports concentrates on ordinary and everyday stories and people. As Phillips describes the concept behind the entire history zone:

We rejected the most obvious, and in some quarters popular, option – to establish a gallery of heroes. The clamour for such a solution came particularly from pakeha who sensed that the Maori exhibitions would be affirming of identity and therefore perhaps hagiographic in tone and who believed that the pakeha exhibitions should fill the same role. But we believed that a hall of fame would lay down narrow definitions of the New Zealand type. … We did not want to fossilise definitions, nor prescribe restrictive

47 Briefly, the Guards were returning to New Zealand from a trip to Sydney when they were shipwrecked on the Taranaki coast. They and their companions were attacked by local Maori who took Betty and her two sons hostage. John Guard was also captured but was let go on the condition he return with gunpowder. Instead, he set sail for Sydney where he persuaded the Governor that the Maori needed to be taught a lesson. Returning with a company of the Fiftieth, the Queen’s Own Regiment, the hostages were released, and the violence ended with the soldiers of the Fiftieth playing football with the severed head of a Maori chief.
identities. … we decided that it would be more interesting to start thinking about identity through the tales of the ordinary, not the famous’.48

The absence of more notable people from New Zealand’s past, however, has been one focus of criticism of the Pakeha history exhibitions. The lack of representation of sporting heroes is especially noticeable – in a country where sport is important and often seen as indisputably contributing to the national character. As Joseph Romanos has described, you could fit the displays dealing with sport ‘inside a decent-sized broom cupboard’: ‘To walk around Te Papa, the huge Museum of New Zealand, you would never believe that sport is, and has been for more than a century, one of the most important aspects of life here.’49

*Passports*, therefore, suggests that national identity is based on the idea of a ‘nation of immigrants’, in that everyone has the shared and common past of choosing to leave their homes, undergoing the upheaval of their journeys, and adjusting and establishing themselves in a new land. The second exhibition takes an entirely different approach. *On the Sheep’s Back*, the smallest of the three main Pakeha history exhibitions, suggests that a distinctive New Zealand identity has emerged through people’s interaction with the environment – somewhat like *Tangled Destinies* in the NMA. Working on the assumption that distinctive patterns of life develop after people have arrived, the exhibition explores this theme by looking at the place of wool in New Zealand’s history.

Initially this theme was going to be addressed far more broadly, under the title *Life in New Zealand*, examining various patterns of social life that developed once people arrived in New Zealand. Jock Phillips has explained that he initially hoped for a number of changing short-term exhibitions that focused on the social experience, and the history team decided upon three themes with which people could be familiar and relate: issues of work, issues of play, and issues of domestic life and relationships. The three initial subjects agreed upon were the history of gambling to illustrate play, the processing of wool for work, and ‘love’ for the relationship section.50 The gambling exhibit, for example, was to explore the conflicts surrounding gambling, and opposition to it, while the love exhibition was seen as a way of exploring interracial, gay and lesbian love and

relationships. Over time however, both the gambling and love components were seen to be too controversial for a national museum and were quietly shelved.

On the surface, it would appear that a history of the wool industry in New Zealand would not be stimulating enough for the visitor in comparison to the rest of Te Papa. Nevertheless, the exhibition attracts attention through its display of familiar objects and its emphasis on the importance of wool to New Zealand. It traces the development of the Kiwi shearing shed, including a reconstructed shed in which the visitor can listen to old shearing yarns including those of Maori people, who played an important part in the shearing world. It also examines the history and traditions of weaving and knitting, displaying various wool products, and significantly succeeds in allowing important social divisions to be explored, such as those between men and women, Maori and Pakeha, rich and poor. Interestingly too, the exhibition makes use of the Elgar Collection of European colonial furniture, that had been largely bought with wool profits, the storage of which earlier in the 1990s had aroused so much controversy over the perceived marginalisation of Pakeha New Zealanders.

*On the Sheep’s Back*, however, is the smallest of the history exhibitions, and consequently perhaps the least successful in attracting visitors, and in addressing the view that what gives New Zealanders their unique identity is their encounter with the land. The exhibition was planned to be much larger but in late 1996, the Museum Board, in line with the aim of appealing to the widest range of visitors, commandeered half of the space designated for the wool exhibition to establish *Golden Days*, an object theatre largely based around nostalgia.51 As will shortly be highlighted, the decision contrasted sharply with the concept upon which the other history exhibits were based.

*Golden Days* is a fast-paced moving image and object theatre showing images of perceived nation-making moments. Visitors enter a junk shop theatre, to sit upon worn sofas and stools, to find themselves surrounded by paraphernalia such as a grandfather clock, stuffed toys, a New Zealand flag and old television sets. The window of the shop acts as the screen for the film, which begins as the shopkeeper pulls the window shutter

---
51 Jock Phillips has also pointed to the lack of sponsorship as contributing to the problems of *On the Sheep’s Back*. Wools New Zealand had been approached, but support was not fostered as they wanted the display to focus on the modern development of wool, with the latest technical expertise, instead of a backward look at the historical culture of the wool industry. See Phillips, ‘The Politics…’, p.154.
down at the end of the day. The film celebrates, aided by the involvement of moving objects in the theatre, New Zealand’s pioneering spirit from the sowing of the land, the development of international exports and energy resources, to events such as women gaining the vote, Vietnam protests and Sir Edmund Hillary conquering Everest.\footnote{For further description see T. Martyn, ‘to the future’, \textit{Pacific Wave}, February 1998, pp.60-65, and G. Reid, ‘Let’s do the time warp – we are more than a sound-bite’, \textit{New Zealand Herald}, 7th February 1998, pp.G1-2.} \textit{Golden Days} is essentially a nostalgic experience that attempts to celebrate the past by appealing to people’s emotions through images of familiar and recognisable moments in history. Through this emotive approach, it can be compared to the \textit{Eternity} gallery in the NMA. They are very different exhibitions, however, and while \textit{Eternity} tries to appeal to a wider range of emotions, ranging from joy to fear, \textit{Golden Days} is unashamedly a feel-good experience.

There are problems with the presence of \textit{Golden Days} amongst the other history exhibits, especially concerning their aim of exploring notions of national identity. As discussed, the Pakeha history exhibits were designed to suggest a number of different approaches to national identity in New Zealand. Most importantly, they were designed to challenge pre-conceived notions and raise questions over modern interpretations of that identity. \textit{Golden Days}, however, by dramatically showing a range of celebratory and ostensible ‘nation-making’ moments, appears to be attempting to definitively say that these are the points in history at which the nation can be identified. As Geoff Hicks describes, the exhibit ‘wallows in reflective sanitised histories where no real tragedies occur other than a bit of social unrest and the Wahine and Tangiwai disasters’,\footnote{Hicks, ‘Natural history museums…’, p.188. The Tangiwai disaster was a rail accident caused by debris flow from Mount Ruapehu in 1953, costing 151 lives. Then, in 1968, a cyclonic storm caused the \textit{Wahine} ferry to founder at the entrance to Wellington harbour, costing 51 lives.} while Phillips has mused that it ‘seemed to destroy the whole conceptual scheme of the history exhibitions’.\footnote{Phillips, ‘The Politics…’, p.154.} The exhibit came about at the expense of half of \textit{On the Sheep’s Back}, and largely because of the New Zealand public’s perception that Te Papa was not doing enough to celebrate Pakeha culture. \textit{Golden Days} has become one of the most popular exhibits in Te Papa, so succeeding in the museum’s aim to be celebratory and entertaining, but it can also be seen as subversive to the other Pakeha history exhibitions, within which it is positioned, that seek to seriously question ideas of national identity.
The *Signs of a Nation* exhibition at Te Papa deals with the Treaty of Waitangi, the central document in New Zealand’s history in terms of Maori and Pakeha relations. As such, it represents an important part of the museum’s bicultural nature, also reflected by the exhibition’s prominent central position.\(^{55}\) Central to *Signs of a Nation* is a large replica of the tattered Treaty of Waitangi,\(^ {56}\) and on each side the articles of the treaty are displayed, in both Maori and English, and there are areas where the visitor can sit and gain an understanding of some of the differences between the two versions.\(^ {57}\) Perhaps the most effective part of the exhibition, however, is the existence of three clusters of tall steel poles, each cluster representing the treaty’s articles relating to governance, land and cultural heritage, and citizens’ rights. Standing amongst the poles, visitors can listen to a multitude of voices reflecting the different views of both Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders to the treaty and biculturalism: views ranging from ‘The Treaty – it’s not just for Maori, it’s a bill of rights for us all’, to ‘the treaty is just a gravy train for the rich Maori elite’.\(^ {58}\)

In terms of ‘equal’ representation given to both Maori and Pakeha peoples and their views, the exhibition can be seen to succeed in its bicultural mission, and also in contributing to an understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, especially for many people who quite possibly would never have read it before but might have pre-conceived opinions. The rest of the exhibition, however, is less successful as it moves on to offer eyewitness accounts of the treaty’s signing and then a series of artefact cases presenting the themes of governance, land and cultural heritage, and citizen’s rights. In general terms, this part of the exhibition is badly lit and confusing in its arrangement of artefacts in glass cases, but more specifically fails to adequately examine the history and development of Maori and Pakeha relations. Where it does touch upon this, it is at best superficial, cursory and unfocused. For example, there is a series of timeline flip panels dealing with the changing relationships between Maori and Pakeha at ten year periods, which succeed in going into only the most minimal of detail.

---


\(^{56}\) The Treaty was neglected for the first sixty years of its existence, before being found damaged by water and chewed by rats.


Since Te Papa’s opening, a second Treaty of Waitangi exhibition has opened in Wellington at the National Archives of New Zealand. This offers a deeper examination of the specific topics that have surrounded the treaty over the years, including a focus on more contemporary issues such as the Waitangi Tribunal. The failure of Te Papa to further focus on these aspects in the Signs of a Nation exhibition, can be seen as a considerable missed opportunity. The topic of the treaty and its central location would be an ideal place to further integrate and examine the important themes of the Maori people’s influence on Pakeha civilisation, and the impact of Pakeha settlement on Maori culture. Though these themes are touched upon at times in the museum’s other exhibitions, their lack of full representation in Te Papa is a noticeable and serious aspect of this celebratory museum; surprising perhaps for a museum that has pushed its integrated and multidisciplinary concept so much.

This is an important point, as in its endeavours to be populist and celebratory, Te Papa often appears to be neglecting crucial aspects of New Zealand’s history that might not be especially appealing, but are pivotal to the nation’s development. As discussed, for example, the indigenous situation is inevitably tied to understandings of non-indigenous identity, and thus the exploration of the Treaty of Waitangi, its subversion by Pakeha settlers during the nineteenth century, and the continuing often bitter Maori-Pakeha relations throughout the twentieth century, is integral to this. In this regard, the NMA, through its occasional emphasis on contentious aspects of Australia’s history, could be considered as being more representative of the nation’s history and identity. In contrast, Te Papa as a whole, despite its blatant promotion of the ‘nation’, seems to portray a more idealised version of the past, restricting the possibilities for analysis and questioning of the factors that have contributed to New Zealand’s history and identity.

‘Nation’ and ‘Exhibiting Ourselves’

The non-indigenous history galleries at the NMA and Te Papa, therefore, address national identity in various ways, such as through the idea that identity is founded on a settler and multicultural society, or on a relationship with the land. The final two galleries dealing specifically with non-indigenous history, Nation in the NMA and Exhibiting Ourselves in Te Papa, take a different approach. Both galleries focus on the ways that national identity can be ‘invented’ through a range of national symbols.
Exhibiting Ourselves, for example, attempts to put this in a historical context by looking at the symbols New Zealanders have constructed to describe themselves in the past, while Nation focuses on a range of symbols that could be used today to define Australian identity.

The idea of the ‘construction’ of national identity used by both galleries can be seen to be inspired by Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’, whereby symbolic vocabulary is shared throughout a community.59 Nation: Symbols of Australia, the largest of the permanent non-indigenous history galleries in the NMA, attempts to explore Australian nationhood and national identity through a range of familiar national symbols acting as windows into Australian history. Guy Hansen, the curator principally responsible for Nation, has explained the rationale behind this method of interpretation:

Expressions, or ‘symbols’, of national identity can be found in the visual, aural and material culture record of Australian history. Each symbol has a history that explains how the object, image or practice emerged, how it was accepted or contested over time, and what ideas and values about Australia and Australians it embodies. Reviewing the history of symbols in this way provides a range of views or voices about national identity, varying according to the time and context in which they were produced, and demonstrating that the concept of national identity is diverse and dynamic. This approach highlights the active way in which different groups and individuals use symbols to represent the nation and its citizens.60

Nation aims to explore various different representations of national identity that have at sometime been constructed by society in a bid to define the nation and the people. In this sense, each symbol that is examined represents a different voice on Australia’s national identity. Allowing the visitors to decide for themselves which symbols best reflect their own notions of the nation, the objective is effectively to provide them with a basis upon which to start considering issues of national identity and nation.61 By

60  G. Hansen, Symbols of Australia: Exploring national history at the National Museum of Australia, Unpublished paper presented to the Museums Australia conference, Australian National University, Canberra, April 2001, p.6. My thanks to Guy Hansen for providing me with a copy of this paper.
moving away from a traditional historical examination of national history, each symbol that is examined provides a ‘window’ to specific aspects of Australia’s history, hopefully encouraging the visitor to explore the nation’s history and culture even more.

The ideology behind the Nation gallery changed little during the development process. The use of symbols to reflect the nation’s history has been prevalent throughout, though earlier in the process these were to be more strictly and evenly divided between official symbols, that provided a more traditional chronological overview of national history, and symbols of popular culture. As it eventuated, the gallery was extended once the Eternity gallery was cut in size, and more emphasis was given to the selection of constructed symbols of popular culture that have been prominent in the national imagination. Official symbols are still represented in Nation, however, and indeed a centrepiece of the gallery is a scaled-down replica of The Citizen’s Arch that was built to celebrate the 1901 opening of federal parliament.

The official symbols displayed in the gallery are straightforward enough, illustrating recognisable images such as the national anthem and flag; exploring the history of such symbols to reveal ‘how they have evolved over time, reflecting the changing face of Australia’. As Guy Hansen describes, the symbols are examined so that they ‘no longer appear as immutable signifiers of the Australian nation but rather as an evolving set of symbols reflecting changes in Australia’s national identity’. An example is the history of the national flag, where despite Federation in 1901 it was not until 1950 that the Federal Government confirmed the official adoption of a new national flag.

The symbols of popular culture, however, are more challenging and open to misinterpretation. Twelve different categories represent constructed images that are recognised nationally, and that can be seen to contribute to a sense of belonging and the national psyche, and because of this the exhibition relies significantly on the display of individual, prominent and everyday objects aimed to instil recognition and often

---

Hansen, Denis Shepard & Brad Manera, NMA Departmental File, 98/0017, NMA on Acton – Program Working Group – Nation, NMA Research Library.


63 Exhibition text. Also see Summary Content Outline – Symbols of Nation, Module 0928, NMA Research Library, Nation – Symbols of Nation 0928 File.

64 Hansen, Symbols of Australia…, p.7.
nostalgia in the visitor. ‘Cooee!’, for example, explores how the development of national institutions such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and the Post Office helped create a shared sense of community across the nation. Highlights are the display of different types of Post Office mailboxes that were used between the 1870s and 1960s, and the ABC outside broadcast van used during the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.

Each category depicts images that can be seen personify the Australian character. ‘Spirit of the Digger’, for example, looks at the origin of the ‘Digger’ archetype and the importance of Anzac Day as a national holiday. ‘Hopping Mad’ portrays the kangaroo as a symbol of the uniqueness of Australia, including the display of a rugby jersey of the Australian national team who are called the Kangaroos, while ‘Feeding the Nation’ attempts to show how the Australian diet is an important part of the national identity through the display of familiar foods such as Vegemite. Within ‘Suburbia’, the importance of suburban living in a nation where most people live in suburbs is explored. Particular attention is given to the significance of the backyard as a special place in Australia’s cultural landscape and imagination, through the display of objects such as Hills Hoist rotary washing lines and Victa lawnmowers, and asks the visitor: ‘Is this where Australians are most truly themselves – sociable, relaxed, domestic and democratic?’

‘Australian Voices’ on the other hand, examines the uniqueness of the Australian language as contributing to a distinct national identity. Visitors can explore the development of the language through the medium of a basic interactive, whereby they can learn the origins of various common phrases, such as discovering that the expression ‘dinkum’ originates from a phrase from the British Midlands meaning ‘a fair share of work’.

Indigenous people are also represented within Nation. ‘Australian Dreaming’ examines how Aboriginal people and their culture have often been used to symbolise Australia through souvenirs, art, advertising and films, and there is acknowledgement that for many the use of such imagery is offensive and disrespectful. Some of the other themes also consider the contribution of the Aboriginal people. Bush tucker and how it has sustained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for thousands of years is

---

65 ibid.
explored in ‘Feeding the Nation’, while ‘Spirit of the Digger’ includes a poem by an Aboriginal serviceman describing how he continued to suffer racism in Australia even after fighting for the nation in the Korean War. ‘Hopping Mad’ also explains how kangaroos have held a profound place in the traditions and stories of indigenous people.

The inter-relation of the NMA’s primary themes of land, nation and people is also evident in the gallery. ‘Land, Sea and Sky’, for example, depicts images of iconic landscapes, such as Uluru and Bondi Beach, which ‘populate Australia’s national imagination’, while the theme ‘Imagining the Country’ attempts to show how maps have helped the way Australia is understood. Dominating ‘Imagining the Country’ is a large three dimensional map of Australia, visible from three floors, that constantly shows images and statistics illustrating Australia as ‘a place of diverse and often unique people, landscapes and national boundaries’.

*Nation*, therefore, attempts to explore a selection of traditional symbols that have been constructed to represent the Australian nation and national identity. Each is portrayed to illustrate how the object, image or practice emerged as a national symbol, how it has been accepted or contested over time, and what ideas and values about Australia it embodies. Problems arise, however, with such an approach to national history and identity in a museum. As discussed, for instance, some critics have been vocal in accusing the museum of trivialising Australia’s history, with a message of ‘sneering ridicule for white Australia’. In some ways this is easy to understand, as displays that include kangaroos, vegemite, Hills Hoist rotary washing lines and Aussie slang, can be seen to perpetuate stereotypical views of Australia more appropriate to promoting the country abroad than forcing self-examination of the Australian national psyche. Nevertheless, the gallery appears to engage with a wide range of visitors. Despite the absence of a chronological examination of Australia’s history since 1788, the display of everyday and, significantly, recognisable symbols and objects, reflects new museological ideas and might instil in its audience a sense of belonging and attachment.

---

66 ibid.
While *Nation* can be seen as largely celebratory in its use of familiar symbols as windows to a possible Australian national identity, *Exhibiting Ourselves* in Te Papa took a far more critical approach in examining the motives and flaws behind previously ‘official’ images of identity. *Exhibiting Ourselves* actually closed during 2001, as part of the Greater Te Papa Project that saw the extension of gallery space for Te Papa’s art collections. Its existence as one of the main Pakeha history opening exhibitions, however, and its conceptual similarities with *Nation*, warrant its consideration here.

*Exhibiting Ourselves* essentially explored the history of national identity in New Zealand. Central to the exhibition was the notion that having migrated to the new world, and having developed a distinctive way of life, Pakeha New Zealanders began to consider their identity and sought ways to proclaim their uniqueness. It examined how they ‘officially’ regarded themselves at different points in time and then explored, with the benefit of hindsight, the reality behind those sanctioned views. *Exhibiting Ourselves* suggested that national identity is a product of the mind, no more or less than what people imagine it to be, focusing on the question ‘How was our national identity constructed?’ By investigating four international exhibitions spaced at approximately fifty year intervals, the 1851 Great Exhibition, the 1906 Christchurch International Exhibition, the 1940 Centennial Exhibition in Wellington and the Seville Exposition of 1992, *Exhibiting Ourselves* attempted to highlight a celebratory sense of nationhood while at the same time inviting debate about its content. At the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, for instance, the New Zealand display was designed to illustrate New Zealand as a land of abundance, in order to sell goods in Britain and attract immigrants and investors. The Maori were portrayed as ‘native curiosities’ and one exhibit was John Gilfillan’s painting *Inside a Maori Pa*, which evoked a peaceful image of life in a native village. *Exhibiting Ourselves* challenged this promotion by not only displaying the painting but also telling the story of when Gilfillan was attacked by Maori, losing his wife and three children, and forcing him to move to Australia.

The 1906 Christchurch Exhibition was largely a celebration of the progress made since the time of the pioneers. *Exhibiting Ourselves* showed how New Zealand was portrayed as the social laboratory of the world where ‘the landscape had been tamed’ and

---

‘civilisation and prosperity were just around the corner’, evident through progressive laws giving the vote to women and pensions to the aged. By 1906 too, Pakeha New Zealanders were portraying New Zealand as ‘Maoriland’, an appropriation of Maori culture to express a national identity that *Exhibiting Ourselves* acknowledged has existed ever since. In 1906, for example, this was expressed by the construction of a full-scale Maori pa next to the Exhibition’s fairground, a placement suggesting that the Maori were best seen as a tourist attraction. In contrast, at the Centennial Exhibition in 1940, New Zealand illustrated its progress as being based both on a tradition of loyalty to Britain and veneration of pioneer New Zealanders. It also put itself forward as a model for bi-racial harmony, and *Exhibiting Ourselves* challenged this myth by displaying, alongside a photograph of the Prime Minister Joseph Savage shaking hands with a Maori warrior, a quote by the Maori leader Apirana Ngata: ‘I do not know of any year that the Maori people approach with so much misgiving as the Centennial year. In retrospect what do the Maori see? Lands gone, the power of the chief crumbled in the dust. Maori culture scattered – broken.’

*Exhibiting Ourselves* questioned traditional images of national identity by illustrating the ways in which identity is often a construction of the mind. Another more recent example is that of the 1992 Seville Exposition. At a time when New Zealand was in deep recession, the message was put forward of a sophisticated cosmopolitan nation with strong secondary and tertiary industries.

*Exhibiting Ourselves* was the most traditional of the opening history exhibitions, in terms of its reliance on an abundance of artefacts in glass cases. Yet, this in some way perhaps aided the exhibition’s intellectual, if not popular, success. Bronwyn Labrum, one of the history curators at Te Papa, has described how *Exhibiting Ourselves* appealed particularly to academic historians, especially on a conceptual level as they knew the history behind it. The exhibition was punctuated throughout by vivid re-creations of the Exhibitions’ displays, including basic interactive games such as an original fortune-telling machine and test-your-strength machine from the 1906 Christchurch Exhibition.

---

71 Exhibition text.  
72 ibid.  
and the robot Dr Well-and-Strong, from the Department of Health, who in 1940 proclaimed to visitors the virtues of the New Zealand welfare state. Indeed, the only part of the exhibition that relied heavily on new technology, the section dealing with the 1992 Exposition that included a light and sound show, was far and away the least comprehensible and generally failed to get the desired message across. Jock Phillips acknowledges himself that this area, called ‘The Void’, was confusing and that a lot more could have been done with the space, and it was through late development and lack of money that it could not be developed further.\textsuperscript{74} At any rate, there is a certain irony in the inclusion of \textit{Exhibiting Ourselves} in Te Papa in the first place. The International Exhibitions, and more lately the Expos, were very self-conscious ways in which a country and its people promoted and presented themselves. In many ways, Te Papa can be interpreted as the latest manifestation of this. Jock Phillips himself has described the Exhibitions as the ‘Disneylands of the past’,\textsuperscript{75} and as Rodney Wilson, the Director of the Auckland Museum, has discussed:

\begin{quote}
[Te Papa] does it in a more profound and intelligent way of course, but it is essentially within the genre of our display in Brisbane or our display in Seville, and I do not mean that in a dismissive way, or disrespectful way. I think Te Papa has a very clear desire to tell a story about New Zealand … and it does it in a way that people, by and large, enjoy.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

\textit{Exhibiting Ourselves} was a unique approach to addressing the issue of national identity, and forced visitors to question their own pre-conceptions of what it was to be New Zealanders. This was brought to the fore at the end of the exhibition, where a selection of t-shirts were displayed illustrating various narrow or stereotypical images of national identity in New Zealand today, such as sheep and the America’s Cup. In many ways then, \textit{Exhibiting Ourselves} can be seen as the most pertinent opening exhibition in terms of the museum’s mandate to be about nation, as well as the most critical of traditional representations of national identity, and because of this it is unfortunate that it was closed in 2001.

\textsuperscript{74} Jock Phillips, Personal Interview, 25\textsuperscript{th} August 2000.
\textsuperscript{75} J. Phillips, ‘Our History…’, p.116.
\textsuperscript{76} R. Wilson, Personal Interview, 9\textsuperscript{th} August 2000, Tape with the author.
Central to the philosophy of both these new national museums, therefore, is the need to consider and explore national identity, without prescribing any one single definition of identity. Addressing the problematic question of non-indigenous identity, both museums attempt to do this by taking a thematic approach, and by putting forward three main different interpretations upon which national identity could be based. To summarise, in the NMA *Eternity* interprets identity as being based on shared emotional experiences, *Horizons* suggests that this identity derives from Australia’s existence as a settler society, while *Nation* attempts to explore Australian identity through a range of familiar symbols, which have been invented over time to create a shared sense of belonging and attachment to the nation. In essence, both the NMA and Te Papa take the visitor on a journey of possible ways to interpret what it is to be an Australian or New Zealander. In Te Papa, for example, *Passports* takes a similar approach to *Horizons* by suggesting that New Zealand should be viewed as a nation of immigrants, in that everyone has a common past shaped by the trauma of ‘leaving’, ‘journeys’ and ‘arrival’, while *On the Sheep’s Back* presents the opposite view that identity is actually shaped by the land. Finally, *Exhibiting Ourselves*, like *Nation*, suggested that national identity is nothing more than a construction of the mind. In other words, it is ‘what we conceive it to be’.77

Significantly too, *Exhibiting Ourselves* indicated that one image, history or identity is not sufficient in proclaiming a nation.

*Nation* and *Exhibiting Ourselves*, through their exploration of images and symbols that have been and could be constructed to provide a basis for an Australian and New Zealand identity, can be seen as the exhibitions that most flagrantly reflect the perceived role of the national museum in addressing the nation and its meaning. They can also be seen as manifestations of the new museology, in terms of their questioning of possible interpretations of identity, as well as illustrations of the complex and confused nature of non-indigenous identity throughout Australia and New Zealand’s European histories, and especially at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

---

More critical than the celebratory nature of *Nation, Exhibiting Ourselves* can perhaps be viewed as more successful in making clear that identity is a construction of the mind, by examining how New Zealanders have ‘officially’ regarded themselves and, with the benefit of hindsight, then exploring the reality behind those views. In contrast, *Nation* at the NMA, rather than challenging such images, at times seems to celebrate and proclaim them in a way that could easily be interpreted as perpetuating constructed and often misleading perceptions of the Australian nation.

The approach of exploring national history and identity through a range of constructed symbols can cause notable problems. *Nation* is designed to provoke Australians to question traditional representations of the nation. Yet, many of the themes are represented as being largely celebratory with little space for contesting views. This is in contrast to other parts of the museum, which often highlight areas of contestation. Despite one of the principles behind the *Nation* gallery being that it was not to attempt to lay down definitive interpretations of identity, just by displaying such images in an institution such as the National Museum, the message that might be conveyed is that these are the images through which we can identify and define ourselves. In effect, simply reinforcing the notions that define the ‘imagined community’.

Indeed, this leads to an important possible shortcoming of the thematic approach that the history exhibitions in both the NMA and Te Papa take, and that was briefly mentioned earlier in regards to an early plan for a *Promenade* in Te Papa. In both museums, there are significant gaps in the Australian and New Zealand ‘story’. Especially in terms of political and military history, and without any kind of chronological key to the country’s history, these ‘absences’ make the interpretation of some of the displays very confusing. Of course, the express aim of the history exhibits in both the NMA and Te Papa was not to tell a comprehensive history of Australia and New Zealand. It is important to be aware, however, that many people do still visit museums to learn or experience the past of a museum’s locale, whether it be a town, city, state or nation, and the lack of some kind of general historical narrative, in this author’s view, can contribute to a lack of coherency and understanding.\(^78\) In this sense, the retention of the pre-1993 idea of the *Promenade* in Te Papa, a chronological journey

---

\(^{78}\) Also see K. Windschuttle, ‘How not to run a museum’, *Quadrant*, vol. XLV, no. 9, September 2001, pp.16-17.
through New Zealand’s history linking various separate theme exhibitions together, might have been more successful. At the very least, it is likely the History Zone would be better served by even just a detailed panel highlighting the pivotal events in New Zealand’s past. The lack of some kind of broad overarching narrative linking the different exhibits, can make the national histories that the museums are supposed to be interpreting incoherent and unintelligible. In the NMA too, the closest the museum comes to a traditional national history narrative is ‘Moments’, a part of Nation, displaying a number of individual moments in Australia’s history since 1788. Yet not only are these limited in number, by laying out a range of specific events, such as the gold rush, Federation, and the death of Phar Lap, the underlying curatorial voice in 'Moments’ seems to be declaring that these are the defining moments in Australia’s history, not allowing room for dispute. This is comparable to Golden Days in Te Papa, which also presents a selective number of nation-making moments.

The lack of inter-related discussion of the different histories is also evident, notably between indigenous and non-indigenous history, despite the integrated frameworks upon which both museums are based. It is important to remember that, in order for identity to be comprehensively discussed, museums need to create an understanding of the many diverse pasts and histories that exist. This is particularly true of national museums in their aim of contributing to the interpretation of national identity. Only then, and by allowing history and notions of identity to be questioned and explored, can a national museum really begin to be representative of the nation.
CONCLUSION

A Challenging Future

This thesis has been written in response to the developments in museology that have taken place around the world during the last few decades, and the increasingly prominent and debated issue of non-indigenous history and national identity in both Australia and New Zealand. The post-colonial era has created an environment within which people actively seek to examine the legacies of European imperialism in order to gain an understanding of their place within the burgeoning global world. This has created specific issues of identity for the non-indigenous populations of settler societies such as Australia and New Zealand with their chequered histories, especially those concerning the domination of indigenous peoples. In particular, new interpretations of history have emerged during the last few decades, challenging traditional bases of nationalism, which has led these societies to actively seek to understand and reconcile themselves with the past, in order to define an increasingly problematic and complex national identity. Broadly, issues of identity, especially in relation to history, have gained a particularly prominent role in the political and cultural arenas of Australia and New Zealand.

As a product of this post-colonial environment, the museum community in both countries has also markedly changed in recent years. As the role of history has become increasingly important, so too has the role and function of museums in interpreting these histories and contributing to understandings of the nation. In brief, as a consequence of this new prominence, museums have been forced to adapt to become representative of different communities and all the diverse histories that they comprise, which traditionally would not have a place within museums; to accommodate and interpret these histories in new ways, and to become more accessible and open to debate. The importance of this has also been fuelled by both governments and the public demanding greater accountability from museums, and by their position within a growing competitive marketplace. Consequently, museums have also been forced to adopt new methodologies, such as state of the art technology and oral histories, in order to appeal to the widest possible audience.
The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa have developed recently, both in response to this changing historical and museological climate, and to the increasingly important role and position of national museums around the world. Illustrative of new museological trends, for instance, both the NMA and Te Papa take a multi-disciplinary approach towards the interpretation of history and identity, integrating different themes and making use of new histories and new technologies. The NMA, however, is careful not to stretch this new museology too far, especially in terms of focusing on entertainment to the neglect of education. Throughout the museum, for example, interactive and multimedia elements are balanced with more conventional displays of artefacts and interpretative text. This is in contrast to Te Papa, which has been harshly criticised in some quarters for resembling ‘Disneyland’ more than a museum. Te Papa is clearly a unique institution stretching some concepts of the ‘new museology’ through its rides and post-modern interpretation. As Robin Parkinson celebrates: ‘Te Papa is, in the best sense, the ultimate do-it-yourself museum. It tells the New Zealand story; it is aimed at the widest New Zealand audience and it is a uniquely New Zealand product. There is … nothing else like it in the world.’

Te Papa is a visually entertaining place, and there is no doubt that it has succeeded in its aim of being ‘unmuseum-like’, in attracting non-traditional museum visitors and being a popular tourist attraction, illustrated simply by the staggering number of visitors in the first few years of its opening.

Furthermore, there is little chance that the debate surrounding both museums, that was identified in the preceding chapters, will go away. This is especially the case in regards to Te Papa, but the NMA is certainly not immune. Indeed, the controversy surrounding both museums is indicative of the complex and contentious nature of national identity in both countries and surely should be welcomed, both in illustrating the museums’ success in being vehicles for contested notions of identity, and in provoking discussion within the museum world concerning changing roles and functions. As Bronwyn Labrum, one of the curators of the opening Pakeha history exhibitions at Te Papa, asserts: ‘Public debate involves pressure but it’s also a very healthy sign. … it shows that people do in fact care and that history matters and is alive to them.’

---

It is also clear that the thematic approach taken by both the NMA and Te Papa is representative of museum trends at the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially in their efforts to represent many different segments of the population. In fact, both museums can be seen as illustrative of the themes that have thread throughout this thesis. Namely the changing nature and functions of museums, the important political and cultural role of history and museums in society, and the complex and problematic nature of post-colonial settler identities. Most significantly perhaps, their long developments stretching back to the nineteenth century represent how the traditional cultural homogeneities of Australia and New Zealand have been challenged, and how their museums and societies as a whole have been forced to adapt to the post-colonial world.

Such developments are not limited to these two societies of Australia and New Zealand. Questions of nation and identity, as well as the role of museums, have become increasingly prominent in societies all around the world, illustrated by the renovation and establishment of new national museums everywhere during the last two decades. These museums face similar challenges and tensions as they seek to tackle the question of national identity, and the impossible task of satisfactorily representing all the different histories which comprise every nation.

National museums find themselves in conflict. On the one hand, new interpretations of history have shown that there is no longer one national story for a museum to tell. Museums need to contribute to an understanding of the many different pasts and histories that exist, and only then can national identity, or more importantly national identities, be realistically discussed. Yet, the national museum exists primarily to tell the story of the nation, and in order to properly understand that story the museum inevitably needs to retain some kind of coherent narrative, to show the nation’s progress and to hold all the other stories together. Caught between these two sets of demands, national museums have never faced a more difficult – nor a more interesting – future.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Alexander Turnbull Library


Mitchell Library


Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives


____ 1996a. Mana Whenua: the land, the people, the spirit that binds, 100% Concept Design, January 1996.


National Archives of Australia

(AA CRS – Australian Archives Commonwealth Record Series)

National Museum of Zoology –
A432/86 1934/1812 – Agreement with Donors.
A432/86 1931/1837 – Australian Institute of Anatomy Bill
A1658/1 151/1/1 Part 1 – Australian Institute of Anatomy, General File.
A1818/2 – Federal Capital Design No. 29 by Walter Burley Griffin, Original Report, Copy A.
A1928/1 695/2 – Australian Institute of Anatomy. Transfer of the control and administration to the Department of Health.
A1928/1 695/3 Section 1 – National Museum of Australian Anatomy, reservation of site at Canberra and transfer to Canberra.

National Museum of Ethnology –
A6006/5 1927/09/06 – Suggested Establishment of National Museum at Canberra, 6th September 1927.

National Centre –

National Museum of Australia Research Library


**National Museum of Zambia, Livingstone**


**Powerhouse Museum Archive**


**Te Aka Matua (Te Papa) Library – (formerly known as the Hector Library)**


_____ 1989. *Activities: adopted by the Project Development Board at its meeting on 10th July 1989 as a base for planning*. Wellington: MoNZTPT.


_____ 1992. *Collections Development Policy (Revised)*.


c.1997. The Brand Story: Why the need for change?


GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS, PRESS RELEASES & LEGISLATION

Australia


_Museum of Australia Act 1980._


_New Zealand_


_____ 1990. _Internal Affairs – Te Tari Taiwhenua, a newsletter for staff and friends of the Department_, vol. 1, no. 16, 12th March 1990.

Heart of the Nation Strategic Working Group. 2000. _The Heart of the Nation: a cultural strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand._

Hector, J. 1866. Memorandum concerning the Colonial Museum. _Appendices to the Journal of the New Zealand House of Representatives_, D. No. 9, 1866, pp.3-6.


NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Australia

The Advertiser (Adelaide)

Devine, M. 2001. ‘The museum has adopted the left-wing position in every conceivable historical issue … all you see is white interlopers, without a culture” – Trivial pursuit of our history. Advertiser, 14th March 2001, p.30.


The Age & Sunday Age (Melbourne)


*Australian & Weekend Australian*


The Bulletin


Canberra Times


*Courier Mail & Sunday Mail* (Queensland)


*Daily Telegraph & Sunday Telegraph*


*Perth Sunday Times*


*Sydney Morning Herald*


New Zealand

The Chronicle (Levin)


City Voice (Wellington)


Daily Post (Rotorua)


Dominion (Wellington)


Evening Post (Wellington)


*Gisborne Herald*


*The News* (Westport)

*New Zealand Herald* (Auckland)


Oamaru Mail


Otago Daily Times


The Press (Christchurch)


Sunday Star Times (Auckland)


*Waikato Times* (Hamilton)


**United Kingdom**

*Daily Telegraph*


*The Times*


**United States**

*The New York Times*


**BOOKS, PERIODICALS & JOURNAL ARTICLES**


Irvin, E. 1974. Sydney as it might have been. Sydney: Alpha Books.


341


1998b. Te Papa Explorer, Wellington: MoNZTPT.


**FILMS**

*Getting to Our Place*, Gaylene Preston Productions in association with NZ on Air and TVNZ, directed by Anna Cottrell and Gaylene Preston, 72 minutes, Wellington, c.1998.

**THESES**


**INTERNET SITES**

**Australia**

Australian Museums and Galleries Online
www.amol.org

Creative Nation

David Barnett Memo – written by David Barnett, member of the NMA Museum Council, to Tony Staley, Chairman of the Museum Council. Available on the *Sydney Morning Herald* site at:
Museums Australia
www.museumsaustralia.org.au

Museum Victoria
www.museum.vic.gov.au

National Museum of Australia
www.nma.gov.au

Parliament of Australia (& Parliamentary Library)
www.aph.gov.au

Powerhouse Museum
www.phm.gov.au

**New Zealand**

Creative New Zealand
www.creativenz.govt.nz

Ministry for Culture and Heritage
www.cultureandheritage.govt.nz

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
www.tepapa.govt.nz

Museums Aotearoa

New Zealand Government Online
www.govt.nz

Statistics New Zealand
www.stats.govt.nz
Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:
Gore, James Michael

Title:
Representations of history and nation in museums in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: the National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Date:
2002-03

Citation:

Publication Status:
Unpublished

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/38803

File Description:
Representations of history and nation in museums in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: the National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Terms and Conditions:
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.