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**Excavating MacGregor:  
reconnecting a nineteenth century  
collection from Papua New Guinea**

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# Exhibiting the MacGregor collections

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Two extensive groups of indigenous material culture assembled by Sir William MacGregor in British New Guinea (1888–1898), the Official and Personal collections, are largely held in three museums – Queensland Museum, University of Aberdeen Museums and the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery – each of which has a distinct history. This paper explores the public lives of the collections through their inclusion in galleries and exhibitions. This comparative history of how objects have been used and interpreted is revealing as it monitors the changing roles of ethnographic collections in museums in different socio-civic contexts over the last 120 years and how that influences the perception of museums amongst their publics.

□ William MacGregor, British New Guinea, Papua New Guinea, ethnography, history of collections, exhibitions, museum

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite changing social and political views about their role in the contemporary local and broader societies in which they have been situated, modern museums have also been shaped by their collections. The history of the large collections given to, rather than collected by, museums themselves provides a good example of the factors that have helped structure how museums curate and share their collections with the public. The importance of local social and cultural settings for understanding modern museums is well illustrated by the comparative history of how two collections – referred to here as the Official collection and Personal collection – have been cared for and displayed. The material was the outcome of the collecting efforts of Sir William MacGregor during his ten-year tenure (1888–1898) as first Administrator and later Lieutenant Governor in British New Guinea (see Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume).

The first of these, the Official collection, was made specifically with the intent of always being accessible to the direct descendants of the makers and owners of the objects and as a substantial asset for future generations of the indigenous peoples of British New Guinea.<sup>1</sup> The Personal collection was different and made by MacGregor for his own enjoyment, during various postings across the British Empire. It was eventually gifted to University of Aberdeen Museums with the intended purpose of inspiring and educating students as well as the broader population of the region (see Torrence & Philp, Chapter 14 this volume).

These two collections are now largely shared between three museums: Queensland Museum (QM)<sup>2</sup>; University of Aberdeen Museums (UAM); and the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery (PNGNMAG). Initially QM (Official collection) and UAM (Personal collection) housed the material, but as MacGregor had outlined to officials in Brisbane when securing QM as its temporary home, the Official collection was always deemed the property of and for a future nation that he envisaged and which eventually became Papua

New Guinea. In the 1970s, negotiations began for the return of the Official collection and over a period of 13 years more than 3000 items were transferred to the museum in Port Moresby, a process which is still ongoing (see BOX 1.2 in Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume).

Each of these three assemblages have distinct but enmeshed histories that reflect their origins and their deployment for different audiences. The museums are all sited in countries with disparate connections through their position within the British Empire: Scotland, Australia (Queensland) and Papua New Guinea. Queensland, as the nearest neighbour to British New Guinea, had a vested interest and influence in the early years of governing the colony. At the time of transferring collections to Brisbane and Aberdeen, MacGregor articulated clear intentions for each of them. By reviewing the public display of the collections, we can assess whether his aims were realised and also examine in what ways these intentions remain relevant to the museums today. The assemblages of material from British New Guinea were incorporated into each museum's wider collections but due to their significant size and limited documentation, the extensive collections that MacGregor put together have also had a role in shaping both the external and internal views of the museums themselves.

## FORMATION OF THE DONOR

Sir William MacGregor was born in 1846, just a year after the 'Museum Act,' which allowed local authorities to build and fund museums in the regional towns and cities of England, was instituted in the British parliament. This led to a new wave of municipal museum building, adding to the many museums associated with learned societies that were already established in towns across the country. Only five years later London's Great Exhibition welcomed over six million visitors and the success of the displays influenced another wave of museum building across Britain and her colonies.<sup>3</sup> As the British Empire expanded rapidly and the population of Britain continued to urbanise,

museums became part of the structuring of Empire. Museums have been described as part of the ‘long-arm of colonialism,’ one of the pillars of establishing governance that supported the subjugation of dissent at home and abroad. Collections were carefully deployed in museums with the goal of educating, entertaining, and enlightening ‘the masses’ and providing a positive moral framing of Empire as exporter of ‘civilisation’. They were also a tool of government to exert influence over citizens by demonstrating opportunities for economic prosperity and social mobility for those willing to be educated and innovate in an industrial world (Bennett 2005). Public museums were therefore part of a process of governance and ‘a necessity of every highly civilised society’ (Goode 1897:199).

During MacGregor’s university years (University of Aberdeen 1867–72 and Edinburgh 1873–4), he would have been part of the intended audience of this ‘museum age’ and seen collections which highlighted the natural resources, arts and industries of the world. MacGregor’s time as a medical student at the University of Aberdeen would also have exposed him to medical teaching collections. He was probably also aware of the collections in the museums of King’s College and Marischal College, which had fused in 1860 to form the modern university. These collections included cultural material from North America, the Pacific and Africa alongside geological specimens, classical sculpture, manuscripts and rare books (Curtis 2012:2). Amongst the items on display would have been the collection made by David Cargill, a Methodist missionary who spent time in Fiji and Tonga and donated collections in 1840 (Hunt 1996:94). In Edinburgh the first phase of building the new national museum, an encyclopaedic museum opened in 1866, was physically linked to the university by installing a bridge between the adjacent buildings, thereby linking opportunities for learning, advancement and scholarship with the museum’s collections.

Museums relied heavily on their citizens to grow their nascent collections. QM reached across the state to a largely settler-colonial audience. Calls to donors and new acquisitions were regularly

reported in newspapers and not unlike contemporary fund raising, museums often used individuals’ connections to place (e.g. through birth or reference to their *alma mater*) to encourage this generosity. For example, the Queensland Museum as a government organisation sought the support of other government employees, police officers and officials posted to remote regions of Queensland in sourcing rare or novel artefacts or natural history specimens to add to collections (Burden 2014:91–2). Members of the colonial service, a popular target of museums also readily responded to calls to contribute, encouraged by the opportunity to augment institutional collections ‘back home’. As Burden (2017) examines with respect to QM, the collecting and display of objects constructed culture for the visitor, thereby depriving indigenous peoples from having agency in this identity formation. Instead, the resulting collections became tools used to document and justify change, casting it as an inevitable and positive outcome for all society.

MacGregor’s first posting for the colonial office was to the Seychelles in 1873 where he was appointed medical officer. Not long after, he had a short stint as resident surgeon in Mauritius before he was appointed Chief Medical Officer for the colony of Fiji (1875–1877), followed by a longer term as Treasurer (1877–1888) (Joyce 1971:39–40). Over thirteen years he gained extensive administrative experience under the guidance of Governor Sir Arthur Gordon and was introduced to collecting on a grand scale. The obsession with collecting amongst the Governor’s household and guests was well known (see Herle 2018). Various rooms in the Governor’s house were decorated in an emerging display style similar to the style used in new museums and World’s Fairs and directly linked to the private collections of the landed gentry and displays in baronial halls and stately homes (Torrence & Clarke 2011). MacGregor’s observations and experiences in Fiji where he began his Personal collection, must have influenced his approach to collecting (Curtis 2015:20–21).<sup>5</sup> At the same time he became aware of the loss of cultural objects and the knowledge and skills to make objects as the Fijian community

responded to the rapid change brought about by commercial exploitation and colonial governance (see also Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume).

When MacGregor was appointed as Administrator of the newly annexed British New Guinea in 1888, he was presented with a new opportunity for collecting. The newness of the colony, the absence of major trading companies or European settlements encouraged his belief that he had a brief opportunity to collect 'authentic' objects before it was 'too late' (Quinnell 2000). His actions in making an Official collection designed specifically for the colony and not only for his personal enjoyment suggest that he understood that a real consequence of the rapid change brought by the imperial advance across the colony was the abandonment of certain practices which resulted in material culture loss. MacGregor's actions in relation to British New Guinea was innovative for his time. Not only did he place the assembling of the Official collection above the rights of all other collectors, but he also focussed on collecting as preservation for local people and their descendants, a strongly held view which drove his consistent assertion that the collections he made must retain their association with the colony and its people (Quinnell 2000: 89–95).

However, establishing the governance of British New Guinea with a limited budget was complex and took precedence over building a museum. As MacGregor was to report to and consult with the Governor of Queensland<sup>6</sup> on all important matters, he settled his family in Brisbane and made annual visits to the city. Prior to arriving in Port Moresby, MacGregor visited Queensland to receive instructions from the Governor. Once in British New Guinea and already actively collecting, MacGregor wrote to Governor Sir Henry Wylie Norman to confirm his desire for Queensland to provide a temporary home for the collection, again asserting the collections inalienable association with the people in British New Guinea:

They are an asset of the Government of British New Guinea, as they have been procured by its paid officers but it does not appear to me that they should be

kept in British New Guinea. It is therefore my opinion that it would be better that provision were made in the public museum in Brisbane for the proper exhibition of New Guinea collections, as a separate and permanent branch of that establishment (MacGregor 1889).

## CREATING THE OFFICIAL COLLECTION AT THE QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

'It is a strange collection of treasures that seem to hide themselves in shame' ('Complete Reorganisation' *The Brisbane Telegraph* 2 September 1910, p. 5.).

The Queensland Museum (QM) in Brisbane was the first recipient of material from MacGregor because this colony had taken the most pro-active role in encouraging the British government to annex British New Guinea in 1884. After several temporary homes in government buildings, a purpose-built museum was completed in 1879. The neo-classical building was given a prominent location by the river in central Brisbane and swiftly became a popular visitor attraction. By 1889 when Curator Charles de Vis wrote to MacGregor regarding the collection, the museum was already so popular it was often overcrowded and visitors jostled for space.<sup>7</sup> The galleries had reached capacity so de Vis reassured MacGregor that although objects would be placed on display when received, where possible 'a special portion of the proposed new Museum in Brisbane will be allocated for the exhibition of New Guinea collections' (de Vis 1889).<sup>8</sup>

MacGregor's collecting endeavours in British New Guinea were more successful than perhaps any Brisbane official had anticipated. Nearly 11000 objects were amassed and transferred to QM between 1892 and 1898 (see Davies, Chapter 2 this volume). His focus in assembling the collection was the preservation of specimens for science and study, including future generations of Papua New Guineans, but in some sense what was received was an assemblage created through opportunity

– reflecting where MacGregor and his officers visited, the circumstances of his engagement with locals, and what was offered to them by locals, as demonstrated by the majority of chapters in this volume. The Personal collection was largely obtained in the same manner, but was comprised of a more selective grouping, shaped by MacGregor's aesthetics and the values he ascribed to individual objects as mementos or souvenirs (see Torrence & Philp, Chapter 14 this volume).

The eight consignments of British New Guinea material which arrived at QM led to a rapid growth in the museum's anthropology collections and resulted in British New Guinea material significantly outnumbering items from Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As items were unpacked, they were put on display and reported on in the local newspapers.<sup>9</sup> The sheer volume of the collection stretched a small (and dwindling) staff (Mather 1986:47) and in 1897 the naturalist Dr Lambert Loria was moved to write to MacGregor that 'the objects are often put in a heap with great possibility of deterioration' (Loria 1897).

The design of the William Street museum in Brisbane (Figure 1) had little provision for storage. What did exist was in the basement alongside laboratories. Within a few years the basement was dug out to accommodate further exhibition space. This change exhausted any opportunities for further expansion as the building was hemmed in by the river, the road and adjacent buildings. With limited staff and space, unpacking, processing, registering, labelling and displaying this growing collection would have been an enormous burden on the institution and helps explain much of the resultant confusion and issues surrounding the collection and its documentation as noted in Davies (Chapter 2 this volume) and Torrence and Davies (Chapter 13 this volume; cf. Quinnell 2000). The state of the displays were a visible manifestation of the impacts of these constraints (see Figure 5 in Davies, Chapter 2 this volume). It is possible that Loria's letter prompted correspondence from MacGregor to the museum (although none has been located) as in 1897 the museum was 'compelled to withdraw from exhibition

the whole New Guinea collection...and pack it away into a shed' (Norton 1898:1).

The museum finally relocated to the repurposed former exhibition building on Gregory Terrace in 1899. It provided increased gallery and storage space but had been built as a temporary structure and met none of the standards required to maintain collections in good repair.<sup>10</sup> With the move the total number of permanent staff grew from three to five (Mather 1986:48). Their small number continued to limit what could be done with such a large collection. De Vis' retirement in 1905 and the appointment of a temporary Curator brought further disorganisation and decline. Finally, champions for further investment were silenced when the Board of Trustees were disbanded by government in 1907.

Within the building on Gregory Terrace, the Official collection was given a large gallery area, the eastern end of the first floor (Figure 2), but even this could not accommodate the entire collection and items remained behind the scenes. Items were arranged in dense displays so that large quantities could be housed in the cases. Many other items were uncased and adorned walls or placed high in the rafters of the ceiling, making them inaccessible to staff or more detailed study. The scarcity of interpretation or labelling reflected the limited documentation provided with the transfers (Davies, Chapter 2 this volume; Davies et al., Chapter 5, this volume). MacGregor's reports from British New Guinea are full of detail pertaining to his travels, but they provide scarcely a baseline context for all but a handful of highlighted objects. At QM with little documentation to draw on, massed displays were glossed with single labels.

When MacGregor left British New Guinea in 1898, he was posted first to Lagos and then Newfoundland. In 1909 he returned to Brisbane to serve as Governor of Queensland, his last colonial posting (Joyce 1971:341). Between 1909 and 1910 there is a sudden focus on the museum by the press and politicians deploring the state of the displays. Whilst no evidence has been found in the Queensland State or Queensland Museum archives to date, it seems likely

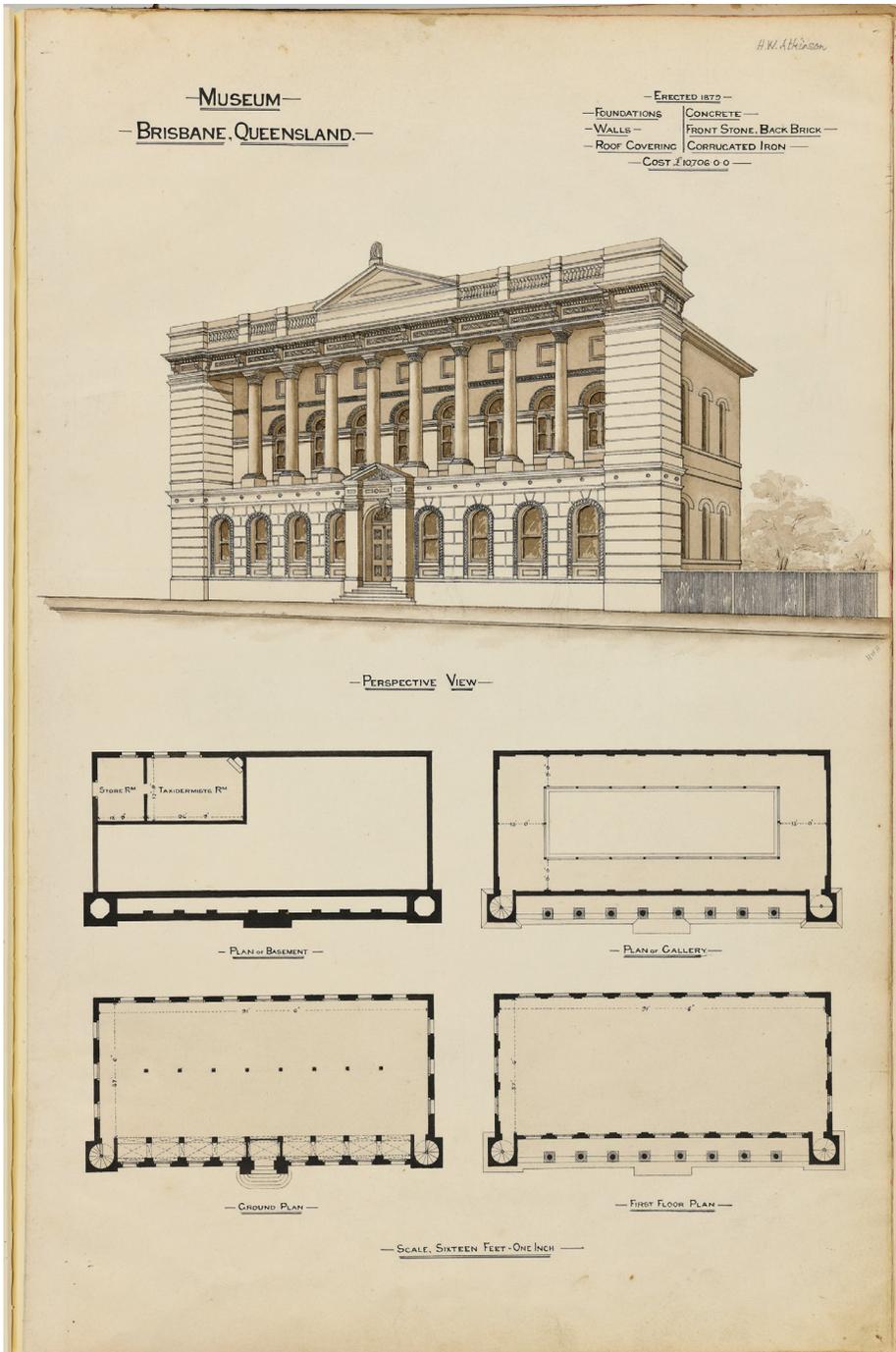


FIG. 1. Plan for the first purpose-built Queensland Museum. Completed in 1879 it quickly became too small for visitors and collections. Queensland State Archives Item ITM1110686, Architectural plans of the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Agency Control Number: No. 12. Dated 01/01/1888.

that on, or in anticipation of, MacGregor's arrival to the colony, attention was given to the museum.

In June 1910, within six months of MacGregor's arrival in Queensland, Premier Kidston commissioned a report on the museum from Robert Etheridge, Curator at the Australian Museum, Sydney who was known to MacGregor. His report was detailed and scathing, but provides the first detailed overview of the Official collection's display and interpretation.

New Guinea. Occupying by far the greater part of the Eastern side of the Gallery floor (about fifteen or more cases) and wall space is the fine MacGregor Collection. The cases are crammed to repletion [sic] the specimens roughly sorted, and not a label! Of what possible use is such a display? Just one half the number properly arranged and labeled

[sic] would reveal to the onlooker the arts and manufactures of the British New Guinea natives in a manner not hitherto attempted. Along the walls are "trophies" of spears [sic], arrows, etc. all unprotected as in the case of similar Australian objects (see I.12.). An integral part of this collection is a magnificent series of Tapa cloths placed on the bare western wall of the Gallery, with one general label "British New Guinea". This should not be. I know of no other samples from New Guinea equal to these, and in all probability such a series will never be obtained again – they are worthy of better care (Etheridge 1910:6).

In offering a full paragraph describing the displays in detail, Etheridge affirmed the importance of the collection and its value to scholarship. The



FIG. 2. The museum moved to the Old Exhibition Building in 1899 where a large portion of the upper floor was dedicated to the Official collection. Spears and shields from the collection are visible amongst the rafters. Courtesy of Queensland Museum.

'MacGregor' title became a catch-all which reminded the reader that its scale and date was of particular importance. Local newspapers tended to focus on the natural history displays, but when other areas were highlighted, the collection from British New Guinea was always included. From the 1890s on, the Official collection dominated the cultural material in the galleries and shaped the work behind the scenes.

Etheridge's report triggered a new phase of interest and engagement. Funding was increased and Ronald Hamlyn-Harris was appointed as Curator reporting to the Premier via the Colonial Secretary. The newspapers highlighted 'important changes' ahead and in an echo of Etheridge's report noted that full cases and a lack of labels 'helped hide the real value of the collection'. One article also observed that, 'The plan adopted seems to have been to show the exhibits en masse and leave the student or the casual visitor to make of them what his own knowledge or imagination enabled him to do' ('The Queensland Museum' *The Queenslander* 21 January 1911, p. 8.).

Hamlyn-Harris quickly made an impact. He refreshed cases<sup>11</sup> and in 1912 relaunched the museum's research publication as the *Memoirs*. MacGregor visited the museum, discussed the collection and reviewed progress. He and Hamlyn-Harris developed a cordial relationship and corresponded until MacGregor's death in 1919. Over the years extracts from MacGregor's official reports from British New Guinea (1888–1898), were cited in the *Annals*, but they were heavily focussed on the natural history of British New Guinea.<sup>12</sup> In the 1913 volume of *Memoirs* the short article 'A Papuan Mosquito Net', represents the first publication of new information related to a collection item for which MacGregor was the main source (also see Davies, Chapter 2 this volume).

His Excellency Governor of Queensland, Sir William MacGregor, whilst on a visit to the Mekeo District, came across a native mosquito "net" erected in one of the houses, and was fortunate enough to secure it for the famous MacGregor collection which he made

and which is now housed in the Queensland Museum in Brisbane. ...The writer is indebted to His Excellency for kindly drawing his attention to this rare and unique specimen and for the assistance given in deciding its identity, which had been lost for many years (Hamlyn-Harris 1913:7).

The article demonstrates how much more information could have been provided for the collection. The illustration showing the net 'Hanging by cords, but base resting on the floor' (Hamlyn-Harris 1913:8; see Figure 12 in Davies, Chapter 2 this volume) hints at a potential difference in the display style for the museum, although we have no evidence that any such changes were actually made. A redisplay of the Official collection was completed by Hamlyn-Harris during his tenure, but the only evidence of it is a congratulatory letter from MacGregor (by then retired and living in Scotland) commending him for 'the splendid way you have reserved and arranged the New Guinea collection...I know that the excellent way you have exhibited the collection has been highly appreciated by competent judges...' (MacGregor quoted in 'Sir William MacGregor and the Museum' *The Brisbane Courier* 28 August 1915, p. 4).

## QUEENSLAND MUSEUM AFTER MACGREGOR

After MacGregor's death interest in the QM Official collection was nevertheless sustained, as exemplified by the preparation of a separate 'Register of the "MacGregor" Collection of New Guinea Ethnology' (Queensland Museum 1915–2001; see also Davies, Chapter 2 this volume), which provided a moment of reappraisal. An individual was employed with that sole purpose, but it was an insurmountable task since items in storage for decades had become disassociated with each other, as demonstrated by the mosquito net cited above. Once completed, the register became the basic list for the collection from this point on (Davies, Chapter 2 this volume). A duplicate copy was lodged with the colonial government in 1922.

Despite the burden of the collection and its bulk, which filled cases and storage areas, staff, visitors and the press continued to recognise it as an important series. Consequently, the association with MacGregor became its defining quality (see Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume). After Hamlyn-Harris resigned in 1917, his successor, Heber Longman, continued his redisplay of the material. In 1920 *The Queenslander* published an article stating 'Within the last two years the whole of this collection has been remounted and displayed in a more modern way. The objects illustrated are appropriately shown against a black background...' ('Queensland Museum' *The Queenslander* 18 December 1920, p.36). An accompanying illustration is the only known photograph of a display of Official collection items for this period (Figure 3). Items are grouped by type, in this case jewellery, with a single summary label. Photographs, most likely purchased by Hamlyn-Harris, were used to provide contexts for the displays

of objects (Quinnell 1986:205). The photograph captioned 'MacGregor British New Guinea Collection' identified the items with the colony *and* the man.

Any further new displays were not documented, but storage issues continued. In 1955 objects from the Official collection were featured in a special exhibition organised by QM Director George Mack on the Centenary of the Queensland Museum, which traced the history of the museum and featured directors, curators and collectors (Vernon & Campbell 1986:82). The following year Mack wrote a short history of the museum and highlighted the ongoing neglect that dogged the Official collection both front of house and behind the scenes and argued that the collection would be better served with a dedicated curator (Mack 1956:118).

The poor documentation was compounded by the multiple missed opportunities to collate further information from the many colonial staff, including

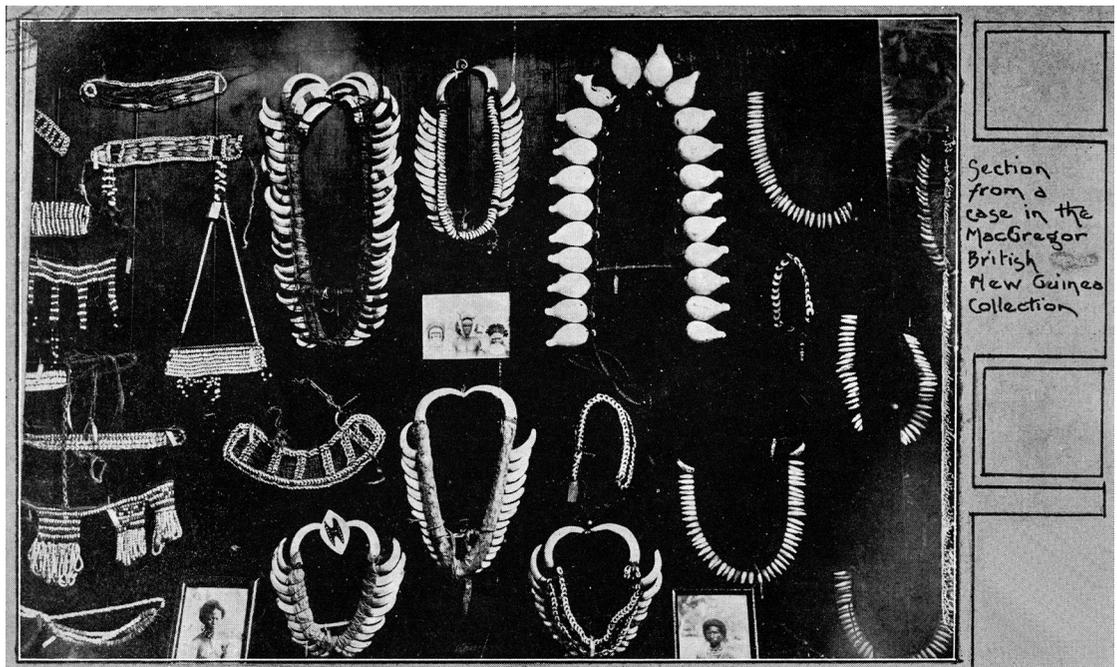


FIG. 3. A full-page of images of refurbished displays was printed in *The Queenslander*, 18 December, 1920, p.18 to supplement a review of new galleries on page 36. The page was captioned 'Queensland Museum Specimens' and, as well as the display of adornment pictured here, another image showed a mounted Bird of Paradise also donated by Sir William MacGregor (Anon. 1920:18). Image Courtesy of Queensland State Library.

MacGregor, who spent time in Brisbane. By the time the first Curator of Anthropology, Eleanor Crosby, was appointed in 1966, many of the potential informants had passed away. Instead, Crosby focussed on improving the Anthropology store and co-locating the scattered collections, a massive task because over the years all sorts of disparate spaces had been pressed into service as stores. She worked hard to familiarise herself with the MacGregor collection because she recognised this important assemblage was at significant ongoing risk to pest and deterioration in storage. For example, Crosby spent much time looking after the fibre skirts that had remained in the trade bundles in which they had first arrived. She checked for pest damage and then inserted each bundle into a separate stocking to prevent further damage by becoming entangled when placed on top of each other in the large metal bins used for storage. After little more than a year, Crosby had

registered an additional 3000 specimens from the nineteenth century collections (Quinnell 1986:214). In 1968 Crosby was succeeded by Michael Quinnell, who continued the process of identification, co-location and registration. On average he added one thousand objects to the registers each year between 1968–1975 (Quinnell 1986:215).<sup>13</sup> Although collections under his care included Pacific and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material, the scale of the Official collection meant that of the total number of items in the Anthropology collections, roughly 60 per cent were derived from the Pacific.<sup>14</sup> During the 1970s Quinnell began a series of changes to the displays with the intention to develop a modern display of Melanesian art. As older cramped displays were dismantled through this process, however, additional unregistered material came to light requiring further revision of the documentation.<sup>15</sup>



FIG. 4. Senator the Hon. Bob McMullan, Australian Minister for the Arts and the Hon. Bernard Narakobi MP, Chairman of the Papua New Guinea Museum Board of Trustees, at the entrance to the gallery *Melanesia: people and traditions of the south-west Pacific*. This photograph documents the most recent transfer from the Official collection in 1993. Courtesy of Queensland Museum.

## REFRESHING THE QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

In 1986 the QM transferred its collections to a purpose-built museum in the newly developed Cultural Centre on the South Bank of the Brisbane River. The move presented an opportunity to rethink the displays and interpretation. In preparation for the move, Quinnell curated a new permanent exhibition *Melanesia: people and traditions of the south-west Pacific* (Figure 4).<sup>16</sup> Although some of the Papua New Guinean material on display had been sourced from the Official collection, the objects were not identified as such because the focus was on the region and cultural context and not on collectors. This shift reflected changes in the disciplines of both museum practice and anthropology.

The new building included new stores adjacent to staff offices. For the first time the Official collection was held together, accessible in one room, with an associated 'anthropology lab' which stored related documentation, collection photographs and provided a space for viewing and reviewing collection items. The Official collection also now had 'two homes' as a proportion of the collection was being returned to Papua New Guinea (see BOX 1.2 in Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume). With a smaller proportion of the collection on display, the stored items had become more accessible to visitors and researchers. The 1990s initiated a new phase when visitors to the museum with cultural and familial ties to the collections were actively encouraged and guided to the stored collections. Although items from the Official collection were less well represented front of house, back of house visits could be facilitated. In 1992, to coincide with the most recent transfer of items back to Papua New Guinea (PNG), a small display was placed in the museum foyer celebrating 'The MacGregor Collection': the only display at the QM to have focussed exclusively on the person who assembled the material.

In Queensland Museum there have been few recent displays of the Official collection except for a small case opened in September 2015 to mark the fortieth anniversary of PNG independence. Titled

*Wan Kantri*, this exhibition highlighted the strong relationships between Queensland and PNG, the Official collection, and the forthcoming redisplay of the PNGNMAG galleries, as one strand of a larger story of independence.<sup>17</sup> The most recent display of objects from the Official collection has been the inclusion of ten items from the Milne Bay and Western Provinces<sup>18</sup> relating to canoes and trade in the special exhibition *Connections across the Coral Sea: A Story of Movement*. This special exhibition explored ancient trading routes between Papua New Guinea, Torres Strait Islands and the North and Eastern coasts of Queensland.<sup>19</sup>

Over the lifetime of the Official collection at Queensland Museum displays were continually adapted and shifted, changes not always recognisable to the average visitor. In those first years cramped displays had high visitation; in Gregory Terrace the collection was highly visible showcasing its size, scale and significance, but frustratingly inaccessible through a lack of interpretation and dense displays. Only the appointment of a dedicated Curator for the Anthropology collections led to meaningful change with improvements in documentation, storage and interpretation. On arrival at South Bank the collection became more accessible through improved storage facilities but less visible on the floor. The shifting style of display well illustrates the discourse in museums at the time. With a changing relationship with PNG, now an independent nation, culture and context have become celebrated and the hagiography of the collector has diminished.

## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN MUSEUMS

'An anatomist's ethnographic museum'  
(Southwood 2003:243)

Shortly after the transfers of the Official collection to Queensland Museum concluded and MacGregor left British New Guinea for his next posting in Nigeria, he made the first loan of his Personal collection to the University of Aberdeen. It was placed under the care of Professor of Anatomy, Robert Reid (Torrence & Philp, Chapter 14 this volume), who was

subsequently appointed as the founding Honorary Curator of the University's Anthropological Museum. The British New Guinea assemblage makes up the largest proportion of MacGregor's Personal collection currently held by University of Aberdeen Museums (UAM) (Anon. 1912). At the time of the first transfer, the museum collections at his *alma mater* were dispersed amongst teaching departments, the King's College Archaeological Museum, the zoology museum in Marischal College and the small Wilson Collection of Mediterranean archaeology adjacent to the Marischal College library (Curtis 2012). Arriving in a series of consignments over the course of MacGregor's career (1899–1909), the collection as a whole became a gift on his death, when a further final transfer was made. As discussed in Torrence et al. (Chapter 1 this volume), the University of Aberdeen was not the first place that the Personal collection was displayed. Items from this collection from Fiji and British New Guinea had been exhibited in British New Guinea at Government House, Port Moresby alongside the Official collection. The display was described by a visitor as follows:

The house itself is not a large one, and about the oldest building in Port Moresby, but it contains a very valuable collection of native weapons and implements. Sir William has brought them together from all parts of the South Sea, and every piece is carefully numbered and catalogued, thus forming a most unique museum of curios. ('New Guinea News' *The North Queensland Register* 12 May 1897, p. 7).

Of the material donated to the University of Aberdeen, some items were on view in the Anatomy Department's Anthropometric Laboratory on the ground floor of Marischal College. An undated newspaper clipping describes arrows, paddles and headdresses from British New Guinea (Southwood 2003:103). In 1906 an article commemorating the Institutions' Quatercentenary noted 'In the laboratory is also housed a large and valuable collection of objects illustrating the habits and customs of the different races of mankind' (Anon. 1906:707).<sup>20</sup> However, soon after this article was published, the cultural artefacts,

including archaeological material from King's College Museum, were brought together by Robert Reid to comprise the Anthropological Museum in the gallery previously occupied by the library of Marischal College (Southwood 2003:100).

Reid was an anatomist and the museum remained strongly connected with medicine and under the honorary curatorship of anatomists until the late 1970s, an association that would have been familiar to MacGregor. As it was put at the time, 'The Anthropological Museum is composed of two parts – one situated in the Anatomy Department and the other in the Museum adjoining the Mitchell Hall' (Reid, 1912:iii). Through his own studies as a medical student at the university, MacGregor would have been both familiar with the space and the staff of the museum and the departments. Reid (1919:14) described MacGregor's intent in sending objects to Aberdeen as an opportunity to illustrate to students that the 'universe is not limited to Aberdeen and its "twelve miles radius"', in addition to providing scientific specimens for study and to illustrate lectures.

Reid's display style is described in his preface to the *Illustrated Catalogue of the Anthropological Museum* (Reid 1912) as 'specimens which have been collected and arranged in order to illustrate, in so far as they can, the habits, customs and culture of the different races of Man'. He goes on to clarify that 'the specimens have been arranged from a geographical and not from an evolutionary standpoint' (Reid 1912:iii). While the displays were geographically arranged, they also reflected the ideas of race that were also present in the teaching of anatomy in the Anthropometric Laboratory. The exhibition was accompanied by an *Illustrated Catalogue* (Reid, 1912) which could be used by a visitor in their exploration of the gallery, with a companion *Catalogue of Specimens Deposited by Sir William Macgregor in the Anthropological Museum, Marischal College, University of Aberdeen, 1899–1909* (Anon. 1912) separately listing the items deposited by MacGregor.<sup>21</sup> It appears that items donated by MacGregor were included within the overall display, rather than being shown separately.

Unlike the Queensland Museum where discussions with the Governor of British New Guinea about producing a catalogue of the Official collection were still ongoing, MacGregor's Personal collection was listed and published within three years of receipt in Aberdeen. However, the Aberdeen catalogue, for the British New Guinea collection at least, was also bereft of attendant documentation, detailed descriptions, or the important contextual information that would have encouraged greater use and further study. The transfer of the remainder of his Personal collection stored and displayed in his home to the University in 1919 (see Torrence & Philp, Chapter 14, this volume) increased the total number of collection items received to around 3000. It can be assumed that most of this final transfer remained in store as the galleries were full. It was also weighted towards British New Guinea collections, demonstrating that MacGregor's enthusiasm for collecting was greatest whilst in British New Guinea, driven by the notion that he was collecting items that would otherwise be lost to history.

Although there are no photographs and few records of the displays in this period, it is likely that MacGregor's personal collection featured prominently in the packed, dense displays that were the display aesthetic of the time, but it is unlikely that material was displayed in the inaccessible and frequently chaotic style of QM. As a loan it would have suited Reid to have it on display and the publication of a catalogue dedicated to MacGregor's collection recorded the link between him and his *alma mater*, no doubt cementing the relationship with an eye to its future donation.

## OVERHAULING THE MUSEUM

As in the case of QM, the 1970s also brought the first signs of change to the UAM. Reid, who was Honorary Curator until 1937, was followed by his successors as Regius Professor of Anatomy, Alexander Low (Honorary Curator 1937–38) and Robert Lockhart (Honorary Curator 1938–1979). Lockhart initially made a few changes by rotating objects and updating labels but did not make wholesale changes to the

existing gallery contents and layout. Instead, he initiated a series of special exhibitions and talks on types and topics, including one on hats which prominently displayed New Guinea headdresses, although these were not sourced from MacGregor's collections (Southwood 2003:244). In later years, following the removal of the Zoology Museum to a new building, Lockhart expanded the Anthropological Museum with displays in the additional South Gallery arranged by object type and cultural group, using universal themes to demonstrate shared approaches and uses of materials across the world, described by Southwood (2003:266) as 'Arts and Crafts of the World'.

In response to changes in museum theory and practice, in 1979 UAM underwent a radical shift in display and interpretation following the appointment of Charles Hunt, who had previously worked in the Fiji Museum, as the first professional curator. Just as the return of items to PNGMAG by QM had contributed to an ongoing discussion reshaping the meaning, value and ownership of collections in a post-colonial world, British museums, including UAM, were beginning to address the issues and collecting legacies in their collections and in particular how they communicated these histories with their audiences.

Soon after his appointment, Hunt curated an exhibition and accompanying catalogue entitled *Shark Tooth & Stone Blade: Pacific Island Art from the University of Aberdeen* (Hunt n.d.: 5) which highlighted MacGregor's practices as a colonial administrator.

A major preoccupation and characteristic of his regime, inherited from Sir Arthur Gordon, was the need to preserve local customs and social systems where they did not conflict with the values of "christian [sic] civilisation". Like Gordon in Fiji, he tried to protect the interests of the native peoples against the exploitative urgings of planters, traders and entrepreneurs. It is regrettable that his interests were so wide-ranging and the demands on his time and attentions so great that he

was unable to record what he saw and collected with scientific consistency...It is gratifying, therefore, that such men as Sir Arthur Gordon and Sir William MacGregor were relatively sympathetic to the people they ruled and deliberately sensitive when imposing the imperial code (Hunt n.d.:5).

In his subsequent work, Hunt took a post-modern approach and explicitly set out his intent to challenge audiences and disrupt the status quo which 'dispense[d] with history in favour of a synchronic comparative presentation of ideas, institutions or behaviour' (Shelton 1992:14). His radical remake of both museum galleries broke with the past seventy years of display. In 1986 *About Human Beings: About Being Human* was opened in the renovated South Gallery, with the *Encyclopaedia of the North-East* opening in the North Gallery in 1990 together with the museum being renamed 'Marischal Museum'. The South Gallery underwent major structural changes so that the historic features were masked by the construction of a split-level mezzanine, accessed by two separate stairways. The predominant features of the interior architecture became industrial red steel and blue electrical trunking deliberately at odds with Marischal College's Victorian gothic architecture. Shelton's (1992:15) appraisal of the gallery in *Anthropology Today* described it as a place that 'presents [cultural] comparison at the level of ideas'. Hunt (1993:118) described it as 'not authoritative, but speculative, not didactic but enlightening'. Although MacGregor's Personal collection featured in the display, the names of collectors were not identified on labels. Exceptionally, MacGregor was highlighted by the display of a beaded crown worn by the Elepe of Epe in Nigeria and confiscated by MacGregor during a trial in 1903. This crown was borrowed from the British Museum to which it had been given by MacGregor since it had been confiscated by him as colonial governor on behalf of the state. Hunt (1993:120) noted 'The public humiliation of the Elepe continues to be played out, silently and innocuous in the North East corner of Scotland'.

A year later Hunt (1996) wrote an overview of the Pacific collections at the University of Aberdeen, which for the first time properly published the extent and variety of the Pacific collections and placed MacGregor amongst several significant donors who had shaped the collections. In 1995 a replacement exhibition in the South Gallery, *Collecting the World*, opened and provided another critical reflection on museums and their collections (Figure 5). MacGregor's Personal collection again featured in the display with very brief biographical information<sup>22</sup>. Hunt's opinion of him was enumerated in a later publication:

...MacGregor was the prototypical imperial governor, exemplary in his application of the principle of indirect rule to the provinces he governed. His attitudes and policies were always directed toward the best interest of the indigenous peoples of those territories. Nowadays we may choose to view such governance at best as paternalistic and authoritarian, yet in his hands it achieved a very real good in terms of peace, health and prosperity of the subjects (Hunt 1996: 94).

He goes on to note

The collections of artifacts accumulated by MacGregor, often in circumstances of punitive force, may be construed as a political affront to the recently liberated societies from whom they were removed. But it is indisputable that they are tangible evidence of the historic role, however intrusive, played by Northeast Scots in a wider world (Hunt 1996: 95).

## THE POST-COLONIAL WORLD AS VIEWED IN SCOTLAND

A new phase of the UAM began in 2008 when the Marischal College galleries closed and a series of special exhibitions were displayed in a small museum on the main university campus. One of these *Fiji, Scotland and the Making of Empire* (January to May 2014) addressed the collections comprising

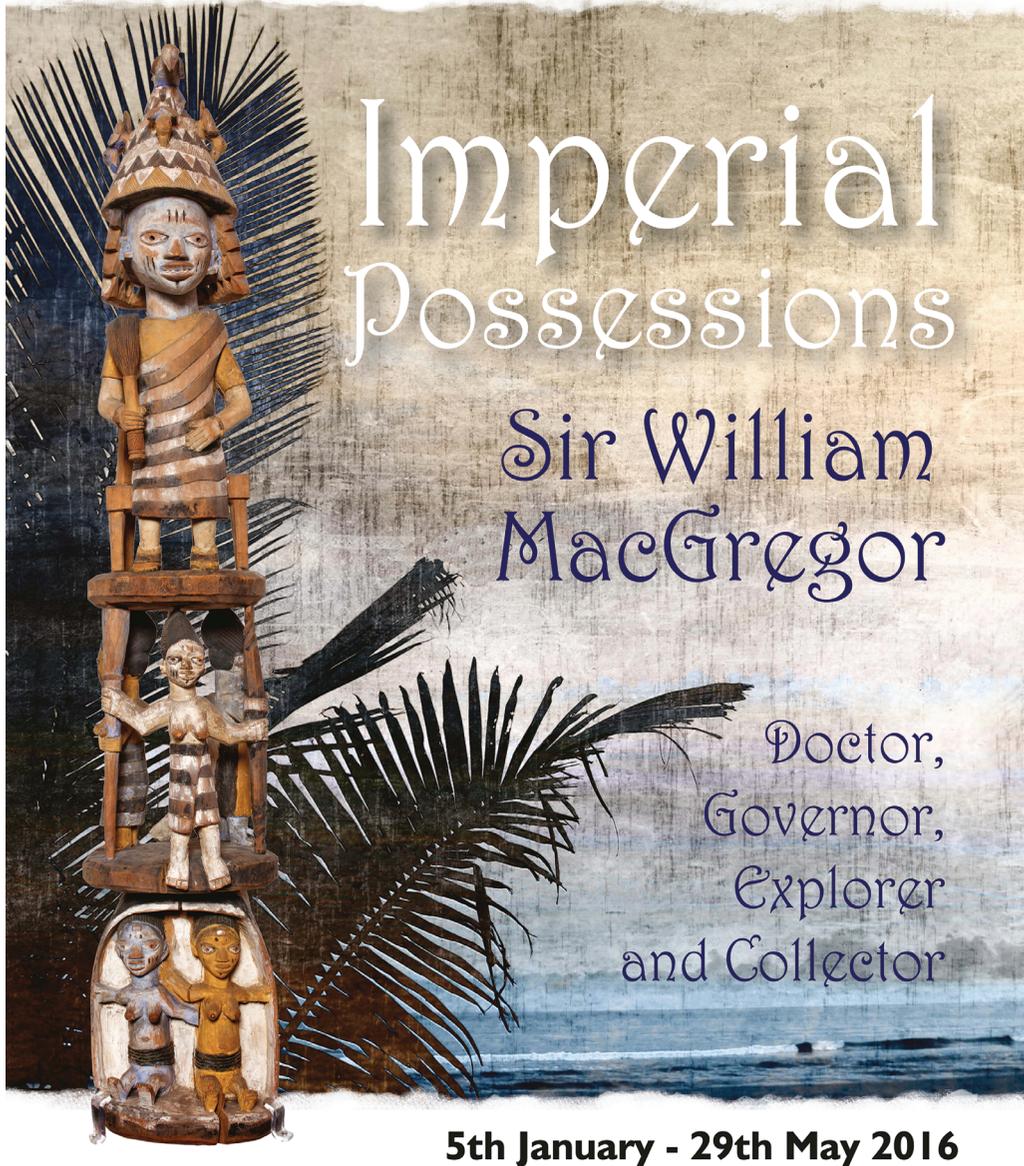


FIG. 5. A case in the *Collecting the World* exhibition (1995 to 2009), Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen showing objects donated by Sir William MacGregor including items from Papua New Guinea. Photograph by Neil Curtis © University of Aberdeen.

Governor Gordon and his household, which featured items collected by MacGregor. Two years later MacGregor's Personal collection became the focus of the special exhibition *Imperial Possessions: Sir William MacGregor, Doctor, Governor, Explorer and Collector* (January to July 2016) which dug deeper into MacGregor's multiple roles in the colonial project and the collections he acquired (Curtis 2016) (Figure 6). The biographical exhibition was a reflection on a colonial career. Each section of the exhibition included acquisitions from a region where MacGregor had been posted, sometimes revealing personal relationships or interactions in the object label text, but more generally describing the object as a cultural artefact in relation to its known history and use. The exhibition also showed how his collecting practices varied in his different postings, illustrating how his time in British New Guinea saw a heightened level of collecting.

In October 2021 Aberdeen's Provost Skene's House museum re-opened with a new exhibition about famous people from Aberdeen.<sup>23</sup> Among the hundred people featured was MacGregor, noting that he had been 'born to crofter parents in the parish of Towie, Aberdeenshire', and observing that his 'natural ability saw him become one of Britain's best regarded and most able colonial administrators'. A rather hagiographic exhibition, with no critical comment on any of the people featured, it goes on to say that 'he championed the causes of the people whose countries he governed, earning their respect and preventing their exploitation'. As this is a permanent exhibition, MacGregor will now become better known in twenty-first century Aberdeen, even if the role of colonial governor is now generally regarded in a much more critical light.

In many ways QM and AUM followed similar trajectories in attempting to maintain large amounts of material on



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Old Aberdeen Town House  
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[www.abdn.ac.uk/museums](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/museums)

FIG. 6. Poster for the special exhibition *Imperial Possessions: Sir William MacGregor, Doctor, Governor, Explorer and Collector*. King's Museum, University of Aberdeen © University of Aberdeen.

display to ensure the education, enlightenment and entertainment of visitors and students. The several catalogues produced by AUM (Anon. 1912; Reid 1912; Hunt n.d.; Curtis et al. 2016) positioned MacGregor's collection as significant and as part of a valuable whole that could be interrogated by subject matter, region or type. This provided greater access to the collection within a few years of the first material arriving. In contrast to QM, the personal association with MacGregor has remained constant as an inspiration to others so that they could follow MacGregor's remarkable career and advancement. In the past forty years curators Hunt and Curtis have reflected the changing discourse in Museum Anthropology by using the collection's personal association with MacGregor to question and critique colonialism, the inequity of colonial relations and Aberdeen's own place in these histories.

### **VIEW FROM THE HOMELAND: NATIONAL MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

'The original and final guardians of New Guinea culture' (Craig et al. 1975:4).

Although it took until 1977 to open a purpose-built museum in Port Moresby, successive Governors of British New Guinea continued to acquire material and from time to time advocated for a museum in the colony. In 1908 the newly appointed Governor, J.H.P. Murray, discussed with the government of Queensland his intention of bringing the MacGregor collection back to British New Guinea (Quinnell 2000:93–4). Murray established an Anthropology Museum in the colony and by 1914 collections were on display in a building in Port Moresby. However, the museum was short lived because soon after opening, Alfred Cort Haddon, British anthropologist and museum curator, visited and recommended that the artefacts would be better preserved if they were moved to Australia. By 1916 the material assembled by Murray, known as the 'Papuan Official Collection,' had been transferred to the Australian Museum

in Sydney (Edmundson 2019:112–113). It has since been transferred to the National Museum of Australia in Canberra.

In 1954 the Australian Administration established a museum in Port Moresby and although it was housed in rooms in various government buildings, several individuals championed its existence and lent support to develop a collection which provided a strong foundation for the museum that eventuated with independence (Busse 2010:7–10). Over the years both Queensland and Papua New Guinea governments occasionally sought reassurance or legal advice regarding ownership of the Official collection demonstrating its status as an important and valuable asset in the minds of both governments<sup>24</sup> (Quinnell 2000:95–7). As with QM and UAM, although not yet independent, Papua New Guinea was not immune to the debates concerning artefact ownership, repatriation and museums in the 1970s. The prospect of a new museum building to celebrate the new independent nation of PNG ushered in a period of significant change to the Official collection as negotiations between the PNG government, Queensland Government and QM set favourable conditions for the partial return of the collection to its country of origin (see BOX 1.2 in Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume).

During the period leading up to its opening on 27 June 1977, museum staff and government officials set the stage for the museum's purpose by proactively preventing collections leaving the country. A narrative of the importance of artefacts as cultural patrimony and their place in the national museum was deemed essential to the emerging national identity. In 1975 *The Seized Collections of the Papua New Guinea Museum* were exhibited in the old museum housed in government buildings. Michael Somare, President of the Museum Trustee Board, set the tone for the negotiations of other items held in collections abroad when he wrote 'they can never mean as much to people from other countries as they do to us' (Somare 1975:1).

The Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery (PNGNMAG), finally opened in 1977, funded by a gift to the nation from Australia to mark the occasion of the end of its administrative role. The new museum had as its stated aims the preservation and display of objects, animals and natural sciences and also included spaces for performance, research and education (Wright 1998:131–135). It was intended as ‘a meeting place for Papua New Guineans’ (Mosuwadoga quoted in Dark 1978:6) and the architecture was deliberately inclusive in its decoration and style. The Director of the Queensland Museum, Alan Bartholamai, attended the official opening of the PNGNMAG and observed that the Australian Museum delegation arrived with several gifts from their collections. On his return to Brisbane, QM quickly followed suit, gifting a recently identified Gogodala drum from its collections to the PNGNMAG’s (Quinnell 2000: 97).<sup>25</sup>

With an exhibition space of 1500m<sup>2</sup>, the new galleries took several years to develop. They were temporarily filled with special exhibitions to be gradually replaced by permanent displays. The main suite of galleries was set around a central open-air courtyard.<sup>26</sup> The first and largest exhibition to be opened in 1979–1980 was the *Masterpieces Gallery* which comprised around 120 objects. Sadly, the gallery roof was damaged by an earthquake in November 1980 and it had to be closed. The return of two shields from the Official collection housed at QM was expedited so they could be installed in the redeveloped gallery curated by Barry Craig, which opened in September 1981 (Craig 2010:1).

This return of shields was the first of a series of transfers. Negotiations between the Queensland and PNG governments and museum staff had agreed that the collection should in fact be split and held between the two institutions. The principles (as outlined in Quinnell 2000:97; see also BOX 1.2 in Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume) were that on average 60 per cent of the collection would be returned and should include the best examples. Where only a single example of a type or style of object was represented, it would be returned to

PNG. Between 1979 and 1992 regular meetings between staff were held and eventually 3297 items were selected and returned over 9 transfers (Quinnell 2000:99).<sup>27</sup>

The first ten years of exhibitions at the PNGNMAG were intended to embed the purpose of the museum, its collections and displays in the minds of the public, while also furthering the aim to demonstrate a shared, collective history which could define the new nation of PNG. In 1985 when PNG marked ten years of independence, two new galleries were installed. These were visited and surveyed by Knowles in 2017. The lower area of the *Independence Gallery* housed a striking full size Milne Bay canoe on open display with cased displays on the surrounding walls. Included with the canoe were items associated with seafaring and fishing. Three items, a paddle, netted bag (*bilum*) and drum were labelled as collected by MacGregor.<sup>28</sup> Although the Official collection was not well represented in this lower portion of the gallery, the inclusion of these few items from Milne Bay is not surprising as they are a regional strength of the Official collection (Figure 7).

The innovative introduction panel to the gallery still on display thirty years later, situates the museum in dialogue and interaction with its Papua New Guinean visitor. First focussing on a regional context, it stated that ‘We have many past achievements of which to be proud. Papua New Guinea has the oldest cultural heritage of any Pacific Islands nation’. Using this context the remaining text provided a perspective on the cultural heritage of PNG, its uniqueness and the interest it has garnered from overseas visitors for generations. However, the final paragraph shifted from the interest of others and addressed the visitor directly as a PNG national.

It is easy to be angry about artefacts overseas, but we also have to appreciate that most of the artefacts in our national collection are the result of concern by non-Papua New Guineans. This is evident by the collector/donor information given

in the caption of this display. We need to become more invested in documenting our cultural heritage. The nature of the museum's holdings of the artefact types on display in this gallery can be seen in the inventories located by the large PNG map. It is evident there are many gaps in our collections. Can you help?<sup>29</sup>

The text urged the visitor to be an active participant in determining the museum's purpose, its collections and future direction. It asked the visitor to be the curator, archaeologist, and collector at large, observing collections at risk, understanding gaps in the collections and seizing self-determination in the national narrative as told in the galleries.

In contrast, the upper level of the *Independence Gallery*, known as the *MacGregor Gallery*, had less coherence and was displayed on more traditional

lines. Cases grouped objects by type or context of use and each item was referred to individually in the labelling.<sup>30</sup> By 2017 the gallery combined remnants of previous displays (including a diorama at one end) and the different interpretation styles of the suites of wall cases showed they had clearly been installed at different times (Figure 8). Introductory or explanatory panels were absent, but individual labels provided an object name, location, date or date range and each highlighted the object's source as 'Sir William MacGregor'. Only one object explicitly highlighted the transfer with the label 'This particular object and others were repatriated from the Queensland Museum – Australia in 1984'.<sup>31</sup>

The gallery may have developed gradually in response to the staged return of the collection from Queensland Museum. One can detect an echo of the process experienced in Brisbane,

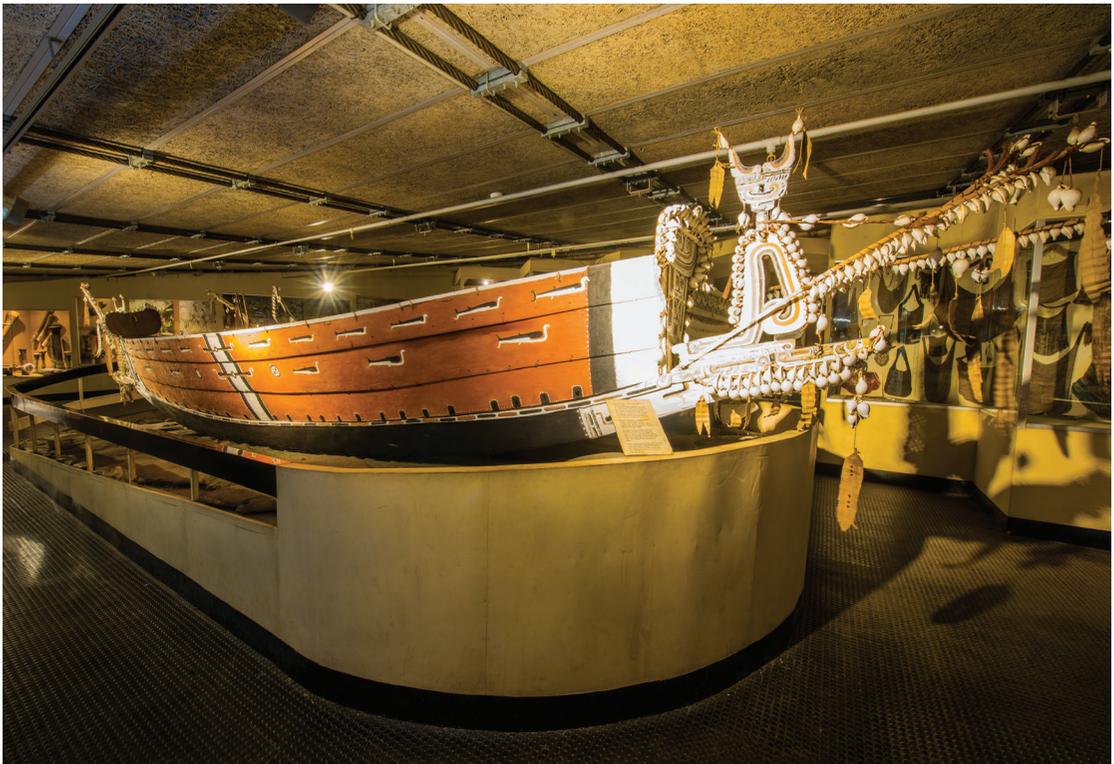


FIG. 7. *Independence Gallery*, National Museum and Art Gallery of Papua New Guinea. Opened 1985, photographed 2017. Queensland Museum photography, Gary Cranitch.



FIG. 8. The *MacGregor Gallery* photographed July 2017. Queensland Museum photography, Gary Cranitch.



FIG. 9. The exhibition *Built on Culture* opened at the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery in September 2015. Queensland Museum photography, Gary Cranitch.

## A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY DISTRIBUTED COLLECTION

nearly a century before. As each consignment arrived, contents of the exhibition cases were shuffled and layered to accommodate additions, which must have impacted the potential for providing a coherent narrative or purpose (as the lower gallery was able to do). However, by placing the gallery prominently, it demonstrated the successes of securing its return from overseas. The addition of material from the early colonial period gave historical depth and signified that a deeper national story was unfolding. Perhaps it was from here that a narrative of a *founding* collection, articulated in later galleries emerged.

The most recent gallery to be installed in PNGNMAG is *Built on Culture*, opened in September 2015 marking the anniversary of independence<sup>32</sup> (Figure 9). The first part of the gallery comprises a series of introductory panels which outline the timeline of development of the museum and the nation (described as *The Built on Culture Story*). The first panel, 1888–1897 is devoted to *The MacGregor Years*<sup>33</sup> and describes his role in assembling what is described for the first time as the *founding* collection.<sup>34</sup>

These panels documenting collections and institutional histories contrast with the labels and panels within the larger upper part of the gallery which is object rich and where labels list the names of museum staff, local patrons, Trustees, artists and dealers as the source of the artefacts. These sources perhaps demonstrate that the engagement requested in the introductory panel of the *Independence Gallery* (1985) had been realised. Only two drums from the Morehead River region are credited as ‘Collected by William MacGregor in 1897’.<sup>35</sup> Themed texts throughout the gallery address nationhood and the role of the museum and echo the direct dialogue initiated in the first independence gallery, but now situate the museum in a wider national context with a role in the care and creation of cultural patrimony. Read together the *Independence Gallery* (upper and lower) and *Built on Culture* show how an institution founded on colonial collecting is now participating in and promoting a national culture.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout their histories, each museum reviewed here (QM, UAM, PNGNMAG) has responded to its socio-civic and economic drivers, but the transformation of displays has also been driven by the intellectual and disciplinary strengths of their staff. The latter part of the twentieth century and the emergence of critical museology happened in tandem with the emergence of Pacific Island museums in independent nations. Both Soroi Eoe and Geoffrey Mosuwadoga from PNG were regular correspondents and contributors to museum forums across the Pacific and inclusive of Australia and New Zealand driving conversations around institutional change and museum responsibilities in their approaches to objects and their communities. There is no doubt that Hunt (UAM) and Quinnell (QM) contributed to these global dialogues and their actions responded to these debates.<sup>37</sup>

Today we might consider the three assemblages at the QM, UAM and PNGNMAG acquired by Sir William MacGregor as comprising a single but distributed collection. While MacGregor made a distinction between what he placed in the Official collection and those objects he reserved for his Personal collection, they should not be wholly disentangled. Collected at the same time, often as part of the same events, they document MacGregor and his staff’s activities in British New Guinea as well as the individuals and communities they encountered. Unfortunately, limited documentation (cf. Davies, Chapter 2 this volume) means that for a long time the catch-all for the sum of these hidden parts has been ‘MacGregor’, one man’s name. Despite significant numbers of objects being on display for extended periods, there has always been a portion consigned to stores. The scale of the Personal and Official collections (nearly 14 000 objects in total) has supported the maintenance of a distributed collection where care and responsibility is shared. Inevitably a display of the entire collection in any one museum would be impossible.

Although the most recent displays across the three museums (QM 1986, 2015 and 2021; AUM 2016 and PNGNMAG 2015) comprise a marked reduction in the number of objects on display, the cultural material has been made more intellectually accessible to the visitor, through providing broader interpretative settings which place cultural context to the fore and demonstrate their ongoing relevance for audiences. At the same time, the local and museum context has continued to evolve as an important story in Brisbane, Aberdeen and Papua New Guinea, reflecting on their current role as custodians of significant collections, the meaning and relevance of these collections today, the histories they illuminate, and their ongoing historical entanglements.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## □ ENDNOTES

1. This intention was summarised by Michael Quinnell (2000:83) who draws on MacGregor's (1897) book *British New Guinea: country and people* where he clearly states both the motivation for the collection 'Timely warning has been taken of the omission by Fiji, Hawaii, and some other places, to secure collections...before it is too late.' (MacGregor 1897:88) and goes on to emphasise 'It is the property of the Possession, and should never be alienated under any circumstances' (MacGregor 1897:89).
2. A proportion of the Official collection was set aside as duplicates by QM for dispersal to other museums in 1897 (see Torrence & Davies, Chapter 13 this volume).
3. Most prominent of these was the Victoria and Albert Museum on which Dublin and Edinburgh's museums were modelled.
4. Artist William Ngakuru (Te Roroa, Te Rarawa, Ngapuhi – Hokianga/Aotearoa) described museums as the 'long-arm of colonialism' in a talk given at Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum, 1 June 2021.
5. There are no items in his Personal collection in Aberdeen from postings prior to Fiji (Anon. 1912).
6. The *Annual Reports of British New Guinea* which he produced each year were scrutinised by the Governments of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria who had a 'right to intervene' as well as the Colonial Office in London.
7. The museum was an extremely popular venue for both visitors and locals. In 1886, a census year, the Brisbane population was 51689 and the annual visitor numbers for the museum more than double at 106 907, which was a third of the population of the colony of Queensland. This suggests the museum both drew visitors from beyond Brisbane and that locals made repeat visits.
8. The purpose-built museum was already overcrowded, and a mooted new museum was being discussed in parliament, however, this was not realised during the period that MacGregor was sending consignments.
9. Most local newspapers ran articles on the museum, but Charles de Vis contributed a regular column in *The Queenslander* called 'Scientific and Useful' which shared information about new acquisitions, displays and visitor numbers. The column ran from the 1870s into the 1890s.
10. A report compiled in 1933, funded by the Carnegie Trust and under the auspices of the Museums Association, singled out the Queensland Museum as having 'Possibly the most unsuitable museum building in the Commonwealth...a positive fire-trap' (Markham et al. 1933:27).
11. Hamlyn-Harris reinvigorated the taxidermy displays, instituted new labelling for natural history and opened the Aboriginal Camp-Site diorama in 1914. Although we know that the Official collection displays were improved, there is no documentation of what actual changes were made.
12. The *Annals*, the forerunner of the *Museum Memoirs* often repeated information from the Reports. See for example the article 'A Papuan Kite' (de Vis 1900:3-5).
13. Stores improved in 1977 when the Art Gallery moved out of the building and the significant elements of the Anthropology collections were moved to the South wing store giving the Papua New Guinea collections (including the Official collection) more space.
14. Knowles, C. Interview with M. Quinnell, 12 June 2020.
15. With limited staffing numbers and the acquisition of large quantities of items, QM rarely had the capacity to process all the collections arriving at the museum. Limited space also meant collections were 'stored' on display and were forgotten. Regular attempts were made to bring collections together and address registration issues (Quinnell 1986: 211-215), but each time the collections were moved, further issues were revealed and in addressing them without contextual documentation, errors were sometimes compounded. See Price et al. (2021) for a thorough review of the registration process at QM in relation to another collector, Archibald Meston.
16. *Melanesia: people and traditions of the south-west Pacific* was displayed from October 1986 until July 2005.
17. *Wan Kantri: Celebrating 40 Years of Independence in Papua New Guinea* opened in September 2015. Three items from Milne Bay sourced from the Official collection were placed on display: lime spatula, ER9929 (MAC1053); betelnut mortar ER9959 (MAC1205); and betelnut pestle ER9987 (MAC1116).
18. The full list of canoe and canoe related materials are ER11601 (MAC2) adze; ER15214 (MAC3935) canoe prow; ER9568 (MAC4549) canoe prow finial; ER9247 (MAC4598) canoe washboard; ER9251 (MAC4599) canoe washboard; ER13165 (MAC4656) canoe cutwater; ER9254 (MAC4670) canoe washboard; ER9252 (MAC4698) canoe washboard; ER13357 (MAC 624) canoe prow finial; ER10928 (MAC 8898) canoe model.
19. The exhibition was shown at the Museum of Tropical Queensland, Townsville, from 11 December 2021 – 2 May 2022 and will tour to the Queensland Museum, Brisbane later in 2022.
20. The association between Marischal College and its collections and the discipline of medicine was reinforced by the *British Medical Journal* being a regular reviewer of galleries and venue for publications by staff at the museum.

□ **ENDNOTES** cont.

21. This catalogue records objects as having been registered in 1899, 1900, 1901 and 1909 suggesting a series of transfers and a positive and ongoing relationship between Reid and MacGregor.
22. 'Sir William MacGregor was born in 1846 in Towie on Donside and spent his early years in very poor circumstances as an agricultural labourer. After obtaining a medical education at Aberdeen, he joined the Colonial Service and rose through its ranks to become governor, in succession, of New Guinea, Lagos, Newfoundland and Queensland.'
23. Provost Skene's House is a newly refurbished city museum and the website describes it as follows: 'The new attraction celebrates the pioneering people of Aberdeen and the North-East of Scotland who have not only shaped the city, but have also helped transform the world.' <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/AAGM/plan-your-visit/provost-skenes-house> accessed 21 May 2022. On loan from UAM are three items acquired by MacGregor from the Trobriand Islands: wooden carvings attributed to Mutuaga of a seated male figure (ABDUA:1950) and a seated female figure (ABDUA:1951) as well as a painted wooden shield (ABDUA:63451). Also on display is a presentation case of MacGregor's medals and decorations (ABDUA:13693 to ABDUA:13703).
24. The term 'asset' is used here deliberately. The collection was frequently noted for its uniqueness and value, hinting at both a heritage and financial value. In the discussions and correspondence produced over the decades, the financial burden of housing the collection for another entity was frequently noted, with the implication that it was unfair that such a significant investment should be ignored when determining its future.
25. Queensland Museum registration number E4525.
26. This courtyard has since been filled in as part of more recent refurbishment.
27. The process of return has yet to be finalised. The spears, arrows and bows, which made up the largest portion of the total number of objects, are still under review.
28. These are: canoe paddle (No.83.71.315) from Woodlark Island, Milne Bay Province, described as 'Collected by Sir W. MacGregor in 1892'; *bilum* (No.83.71.342) from Rossel Island, Milne Bay Province, described as 'MacGregor Collection made in 1888-1898'; *kundu* or drum (No.83.71.489) from Morehead River, Western Province, described as 'Collected by Sir William MacGregor in 1888-1898'.
29. Verbatim text as recorded by Knowles at the entrance to the display, July 2017.
30. The history of this gallery was harder to determine. Its relationship and transformation as a part of the *Independence Gallery* and then into the *MacGregor Gallery* was receding from the institutional memories of staff when Knowles visited in July 2017.
31. Full label text 'NECKLACE. Catalogue Number: E13811 "Job's Tear" seed necklace from Giwobi village of the Supei/Kubor clan from the Western Province – Local name gwen. Collected by Sir William MacGregor on 26th August 19A66[*sic*]. This particular object and others were repatriated from the Queensland Museum – Australia in 1984.'
32. This redisplay was funded by the Australian Government, delivered by Architectus design and architecture firm in partnership with the National Gallery of Australia.
33. The panel is the first in a series of seven titled: *1888-1897 The MacGregor Years; 1908-1940 The Murray Years; 1914-1945 The World Wars; 1949-1962 The Cleland Years; 1958-1970 The Mann Years; 1964-1974 Papua New Guineans take ownership* (characterized through the appointment of Sir Michael Somare as the President of the Board of Trustees); *1975 Independence, A New Home* (the appointment of Geoffrey Mosuwadoga as the first Papua New Guinean Director); and *2015 Celebrating 40 years of Independence*.
34. Unfortunately, the repatriation of the 3225 artefacts is incorrectly described as follows: 'The 2550 objects distributed to the Australian Museum, The National Museum of Victoria and the British Museum in 1897 have been returned to form the foundation of the National Museum and Art Gallery.'
35. Nos. 83.71.494 & 83.71.490.
36. Subsequent to the launch of *Built on Culture*, *Masterpieces* was reinstalled for a third time and at some point the two shields installed in the gallery in 1980 were removed.
37. Like Quinnell, we see this through the negotiation and documentation of the transfer of the Official collection to PNG (see Quinnell 2000). Hunt (1985:19) noted that 'Our Museum, like Britain, has lost an empire and not yet found a role' and used the exhibitions to carve out a new role.

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