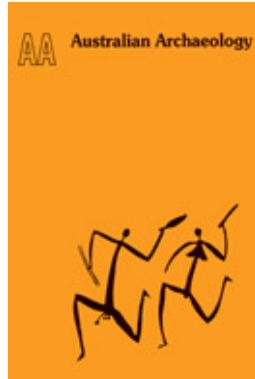


Australian Archaeology



Archived at Flinders University: dspace.flinders.edu.au

Full Citation Details:

Lauer, P.K. 1975. Current Work in the Anthropology Museum, University Of Queensland. 'Australian Archaeology', no.3, 4-6.

R. Robins, Department of Aboriginal and Islands Affairs

Location and recording of all sites throughout south-west Queensland.

M. Morwood, Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs

Investigation into dendroglyphs in Queensland, survey of Moreton Island.

K. Sutcliffe
Department of Aboriginal &
Island Affairs
Queensland

CURRENT WORK IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

Current work in the Anthropology Museum covers the whole spectrum of museology, and comprises cataloguing, display, conservation, teaching, field research and publication.

For many years during the first half of this century, ethnographic museum collections played a major role in presenting visually to the public and scholars alike the latest results of anthropological research. This role remained dominant for as long as the curators were also the only anthropologists. Since then and especially during the last twenty years, anthropological research has diversified rapidly in interest, theory and methodology. This development also shifted anthropology into an academic, university-centred environment, and excluded ethnographic museums from further participation in its development.

Since 1971 the Anthropology Museum of the University of Queensland has endeavoured to overcome this situation; and to achieve this a number of changes in the established museum policies were necessary.

Cataloguing: In the last twenty-seven years, the collection of the museum has grown to some 20,000 items. The existing catalogue for this collection was entirely directed towards morphological and *substance-matter* orientation: All stone axes/adzes were kept together, but those made of shell were completely separated, as were those made of metal. For each item there existed a small filing card, which described an item and provided the researcher with arbitrary dimensions.

The new catalogue has provided sweeping changes and is based on a functional orientation: all axes/adzed, regardless whether they are made of stone, shell or metal are not kept together, and each item is recorded on a 5" x 8" color-coded card as to its country of origin, has a 4" x 3" photograph of the artifact drymounted

on its surface, showing a scale and the catalogue number, and bears on its reverse side literary source material which may assist the researcher in tracing each item in the literature. The artifacts themselves are laid out in the storage shelves in correspondence to the filing system under functional headings such as: Household, Watercraft, Hunting, etc. A second card catalogue is maintained based on a numerical order to facilitate museum specific problems only.

The museum holds now material from three archaeological excavations and one surface collection. These are not included in the above-described artifact catalogue; their records are maintained separately.

Display: There are two new displays each year, and on the average some 10,000 visitors are recorded annually. Display techniques vary considerably and may be artifact oriented or rely on photographic documentation. Display topics reflect current museum research and rely heavily on modern anthropological research orientation: in 1975 the museum displayed nineteen original paintings, applique work and drawings by modern New Guinea artists. This display attracted not only anthropological attention but also attention from the general public at large and particularly from those who, until then, were only familiar with 'western' modern art.

At present the museum is involved in the acquisition and research of contemporary aboriginal artifact manufacture. For this purpose the Lardil people of Mornington Island were commissioned to make as representative as possible a complete set of their remembered items of material culture. This collection, numbering approximately 160 items, is now on display, and for help in its research, documentation and in technological aspects, the museum invited three Lardil couples to Brisbane where they also demonstrate their cultural knowledge to museum visitors. The Anthropology Museum believes that acculturated artifacts provide an insight into many aspects and processes of culture change which can then be concretely studied; and which involve both informants and researchers in mutually understandable roles.

The varied skills of the aboriginal participants of this display are also recorded on colour video tape. It is hoped that a final edited version will be of interest to other institutions.

Conservation: A significant step to conserve artifacts was incorporated in the Museum design: the entire premises are air conditioned and humidity controlled, and a fumigation room with separate ventilation has been incorporated. In this controlled environment many of the common storage problems are eliminated, and regular fumigation has eradicated so far, all insect activities.

Teaching: The museum provides guided tours for school visitors, tutorial groups and students of anthropology. For each display a small descriptive catalogue is obtainable free of charge.

Beginning in 1976 the museum provides a course for first year students in Material Culture. This course is one of four basic anthropological orientations in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology: Social Anthropology, Linguistics, Archaeology and Material Culture. Since 1971 seven Honours degrees and one Masters degree were carried out in Material Culture.

Field research: During 1975 the Anthropology Museum carried out field research in northwestern Australia. The expedition was designed to record and study material culture in environmental, technological-cultural, functional and social context. Over a period of two and one-half months, eighteen different artifacts were fully documented and in addition many more were obtained to document their variant forms. Excellent photographic sequences of manufacturing techniques, supplemented by floral samples to identify raw materials and observations of use and function, both in mundane and ceremonial contexts not only provide the most detailed record for any of our collections, but also make for comprehensive display work.

In the past few years departmental research students have also collected for the museum with excellent results both in New Guinea and Australia.

Publication: In January 1973 the first volume of 'Occasional Papers in Anthropology' appeared. This monograph series is designed to provide an avenue for discussion on matters relating to material culture. So far, the response to this publication has been encouraging and it enjoys a wide distribution through over twenty countries. At present Volume 5 is in preparation.

In the confines of this article, many issues could not be elaborated upon or were not even mentioned. Nevertheless, these lines may give some indication of the fields of interest in which this museum is involved. I would welcome any further discussion.

Peter K. Lauer
Curator of the Anthropology Museum
and Senior Lecturer of Material
Culture in the Department of
Anthropology and Sociology,
University of Queensland