

## ‘Scarcely more than a Christian trophy case’?

The global collections of the London Missionary Society museum (1814–1910)

Chris Wingfield

*The museum at the London Missionary Society headquarters has been studied largely by those with an interest in early Polynesian missionary encounters, and has become famous as a repository for pre-Christian religious ‘idols’ given up by converts to Christianity. However, the museum also contained material from Africa, China, India, Madagascar and the Americas. This paper demonstrates some of the ways in which collections from different areas of the world reflected particular histories of local missionary activity, but also came to influence missionary collecting practices in other regions of the globe. Rather than attempting to characterize missionary collecting as a single practice, this paper pays attention to the collections of a single missionary museum: it aims to suggest some of the ways in which motivations for collecting and the significance of collections for the London Missionary Society shifted over the course of the long nineteenth century.*

RICHARD Altick did a good job of dismissing the significance of the London Missionary Society (LMS) museum in the two paragraphs he devoted to it in his book, *The Shows of London*, describing it as ‘the least known and probably the least rewarding’ of London’s ‘handful of privately owned exhibitions of exotica’.<sup>1</sup> Altick concluded that ‘in spirit the collection was scarcely more than a Christian trophy case’, suggesting that ‘the museum’s purpose was not to advance learning but to publicize the Missionary Society’s success in the field and attract subscriptions for the cause’. While accurate in certain respects, the dismissive tone of this characterization is nevertheless worth reconsidering. The museum was established in 1814, decades before the emergence of a scientific approach to ethnology or anthropology in Britain, so to judge the museum by its ability to advance fields of learning that were yet to develop would be anachronistic. Indeed, what lends the LMS museum considerable interest from a historical point of view is that it predates the proliferation of museums that occurred in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century. While the LMS museum undoubtedly contained many objects that were described in its catalogue as ‘trophies of Christianity’,<sup>2</sup> this made it little different from similar museums considered by Altick – those

associated with the East India Company and Royal United Service Institution – where trophies were frequently the result of violent military conquest.<sup>3</sup>

Recent accounts of the LMS museum have also concentrated on the display of ‘idols’ as missionary trophies.<sup>4</sup> Steven Hooper has even suggested that abandoned ‘idols’ might be understood as ‘performance indicators’ through which missionaries demonstrated their success in conversion.<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that this perspective has predominated among Pacific scholars, for whom early religious ‘idols’ at the LMS museum are extremely significant as a unique and early source of information on pre-Christian religion in the region. Annie Coombes, who considered the LMS museum in the context of her book on the display of African material in late Victorian and Edwardian England, was more critical of the dismissal of missionaries as ‘idol-bashing evangelicals’.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, in describing the late nineteenth-century LMS museum from an Africanist perspective, she suggested that ‘items in its collection would have been associated with conversion, suppression of the slave-trade, philanthropy and education; the four main activities which British congregations associated with the missionary endeavour.’<sup>7</sup>

A more detailed account of the LMS museum by Sujit Sivasundaram, in a chapter of his book *Nature and the Godly Empire: Science and Evangelical Mission in the Pacific, 1795–1850*, recognized that the museum included material from different areas of the world, and of various types, but nevertheless asserted that the museum ‘can only be understood in the context of this web of exchanges between the Pacific and London’.<sup>8</sup> While his suggestion that the museum and its collection needs to be understood in the context of a web of exchanges is extremely valuable, to limit the consideration of these to one area of the world, whether Africa or the Pacific, or to any particular historical period, whether the first half of the nineteenth century or the late Victorian and Edwardian period, creates a somewhat artificial segmentation of an institution that remained situated at the intersection of missionary work on several different continents over the course of a century. My intention here is to demonstrate some of the ways in which collections from different areas of the world reflected local histories of missionary activity, but also the ways in which material collected in one part of the world influenced missionary collecting practices in other global regions.

Using a range of forms of evidence, including objects that once formed part of the museum, visual imagery, as well as published and unpublished textual documents, I have attempted to understand the LMS museum archaeologically. Drawing on practices involved in a great deal of archaeological work, I have approached these forms of evidence as material traces of an assemblage that no longer exists, and have attempted to set different forms of evidence in relation to one another in order to understand developments of the LMS collection over time.<sup>9</sup> In his 1991 book *Entangled Objects*, Nicholas Thomas suggested that apart from two surviving catalogues, there were few sources about the establishment and organization of the LMS museum.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent work has uncovered additional sources, but I intend to demonstrate that even by setting these two catalogues in relation to one another, and interrogating the differences between them, a great deal can be learned about the development of the LMS museum and its collection. With surviving traces of the LMS museum reassembled, it becomes possible to re-imagine the historical processes and networks of relation and exchange through which its collection was assembled, and

ultimately disassembled, over the course of the long nineteenth century.

### From curiosity to idol gods, 1814–1823

Following its formal establishment in 1795, meetings of directors of the Missionary Society generally took place in a room near London Bridge, lent by Joseph Hardcastle, a London merchant and the society’s first treasurer.<sup>11</sup> The enthusiastic and interdenominational character of these meetings ultimately led to the establishment of the Religious Tract Society (1799), and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), organizations that would ultimately contribute significantly to the work of the LMS.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in 1814, the directors took a ‘set of rooms in the Old Jewry, near Cheapside’, giving the Society a relatively permanent material presence in London for the first time.<sup>13</sup> The minutes of the first meeting, held there on 29 August 1814, include a letter of thanks to Hardcastle which begins:

Sir, The Directors of the Missionary Society, having thought it expedient to engage some rooms in which the curiosities sent by our missionaries may be deposited, and judging that the apartments being centrally situated will be convenient for the meeting of the Directors in future . . .<sup>14</sup>

This suggests that the establishment of a headquarters in London was in large part driven by an accumulation of property in the form of curiosities from other parts of the world. A note in the October 1814 *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* announcing the preparation of a museum for visitors suggested that ‘curiosities’ had been ‘transmitted from Otaheite, China, South America, and particularly from South Africa’.<sup>15</sup> Three months previously, LMS director and Independent Minister, John Campbell (1766–1840), had returned from southern African where his brief had been:

personally to inspect the different settlements, and to establish such regulations . . . as might be most conducive to the attainment of the great end proposed – the conversion of the heathen, keeping in view at the same time the promotion of their civilization.<sup>16</sup>

Although not formally part of his commission, Campbell returned with a large number of curiosities, including a giraffe skin that was stuffed and mounted for display, so it is perhaps unsurprising that rooms were felt to be needed.<sup>17</sup> It was only four years later, in 1818, that ‘London’ was added to the official name

of the society, suggesting that the association between the society and the imperial metropolis was in part connected with this process of materialization, driven by the acquisition of property, even though many instigators and early supporters of the society were drawn from provincial regions of Britain.

In April 1815, the Missionary Museum was declared to be open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11.00 a.m. until 3.00 p.m. for the inspection of members and friends of the society. Admission was by ticket, issued by a director of the society, on which would be written the name of the visitor and the date at which they were to visit. Alongside this announcement an appeal was printed:

Ladies or gentlemen, possessed of any curious articles suited to this collection, and disposed to part with them, will greatly oblige the Society by presenting them to the Directors to enrich their Museum.<sup>18</sup>

It is striking that when the museum opened, the overwhelming criterion for inclusion among its collection appears to have been curiosity, rather than any specific connection with missionary activity.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the museum appears to have been immediately successful in inspiring support for the society. A guide to London, published in 1817, suggested that the curiosities were 'mostly from Africa and the South Sea islands', and that 'many persons viewing these are induced to become subscribers to the fund'.<sup>20</sup> In February 1818, the *Missionary Chronicle* announced the dispatch, 'nailed up in a case directed to Mr. Hardcastle', of the 'family gods' of Pomare the 'King of Otaheite'.<sup>21</sup> These, it was suggested, would 'enrich the Museum of the Society, and we shall probably give a print of them in a future number of this work'. While the museum continued to receive donations of 'curiosities' from non-missionary supporters,<sup>22</sup> the eventual arrival of the Tahitian 'gods' in September 1818 marked the beginning of a significant and ultimately decisive shift in the orientation of the museum, away from straightforward curiosity.<sup>23</sup>

A visitor to the museum in February 1819 noted the 'very fine cameleopard' (i.e. a giraffe), a series of Chinese paintings 'illustrative of the method of gathering and preparing tea, and a net made of human hair'. However, he particularly remembered the 'peculiar productions, natural and artificial, particularly those which relate to the religious observances of the natives'.<sup>24</sup> A letter written from Demerara (Guyana) in June 1819 by the LMS missionary John

Smith suggests that not only had he already seen the image of 'the family idols of Pomare' in the October 1818 issue of *Missionary Sketches* (Fig. 1), but had also discussed them with 'the negroes' in whose opinion 'they must have been made in secret'.<sup>25</sup> Images of Pomare's gods also seem to have inspired donations of items connected with pagan religion from supporters in other parts of the world. In September 1819, a gift of twenty-two models of 'Hindoo deities' was recorded, a present from the Bengal Auxiliary Missionary Society at Calcutta.<sup>26</sup> While it seems likely that the dispatch of this 'present' was in emulation of, or perhaps in competition with Pomare's 'idols', it is significant that the 'Hindoo deities' were referred to as models, presumably purchased rather than given up voluntarily by converts. Nevertheless, these were intended to form the basis of prints that would feature in the new quarterly publication, *Missionary Sketches*, which had featured the image of 'the family idols of Pomare' on its front cover in October 1818. The

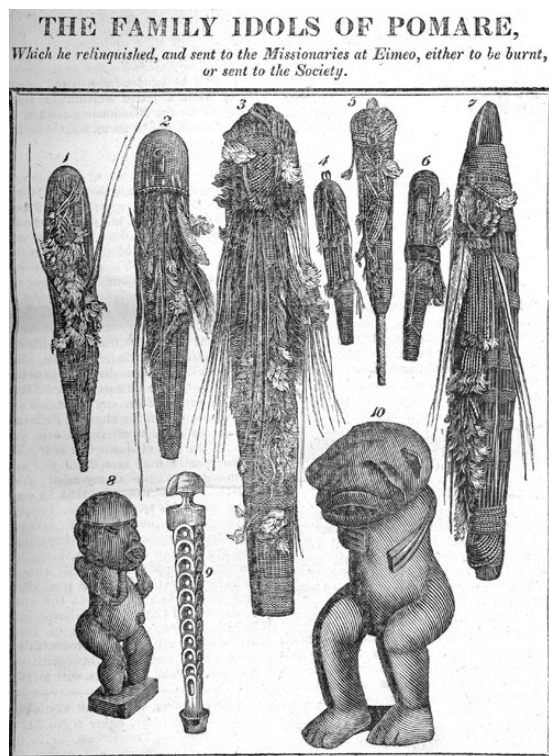


Fig. 1. 'The Family Idols of Pomare', image from the cover of *Missionary Sketches* no. 3, October 1818. © Council for World Mission / SOAS (CWML L50).

images of 'Hindoo deities' were to be 'accompanied by explanations from the Revd Mr Ward's *History of the Literature and Religion of the Hindoos* (1818). Ward, a Baptist missionary colleague of William Carey's at Serampore for twenty years, took a fairly unsympathetic attitude towards Hindu deities. With limited opening hours, only small numbers of visitors could have attended the LMS museum, but this did not prevent objects from its collection becoming familiar to supporters all over the world through images reproduced in missionary publications. While the dispatch of models of 'Hindoo deities' from India may be an example of competition between different mission fields, it is also suggestive of the way in which the LMS museum was regarded as a repository for things to be used in the production of imagery for missionary propaganda. The dispatch of objects to the LMS museum enabled them to become the prototypes for two-dimensional representations, and circulated globally as printed images.

At the same time, becoming part of the LMS museum collection in London did not preclude the continued circulation of the objects themselves. One example among many includes 'the principal idol of Pomare's family' being 'conveyed around the Chapel' at an interdenominational missionary festival at Penryn and Falmouth in Cornwall on 25 August 1819.<sup>27</sup> Encountering 'idols' from the South Seas moved at least some people to write poetry,<sup>28</sup> but many others were certainly sufficiently moved to make financial donations to the missionary cause. In February 1820, an American clergyman who visited the museum recorded that two rooms had been filled, but his attention was particularly absorbed by the Polynesian 'idols', suggesting:

There are a great many of them, arranged on the shelves of the museum. And truly they are an exhibition worth looking at. Westminster Abbey has shown me nothing that has produced in my mind so much excitement . . . Their figure is a combination of the human with the brutal shape, in a way to give effect to all that is ugly and frightful in appearance. Surely they are fit to represent the hatefulness of devils and correspond well with the shocking rites of devil worship. Who that has a heart to feel, can refrain from rejoicing that the mercy of God has rescued a portion of the human race from the horrors of such an idolatry! And who that has a mite to bestow would grudge to give it for a purpose so noble.<sup>29</sup>

It is possible that a significant increase in missionary donations during the first decade in which the LMS

museum was open may have been connected with the circulation of these items in Europe, both physically and as two-dimensional images.<sup>30</sup>

From May 1820, the museum was open on Thursdays and Saturdays between 10.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m., presumably to increase the numbers who could visit at the weekend. During the society's annual Missionary Week the museum was also opened every day, except Sunday, 'for the accommodation of the friends of the Society from the country'.<sup>31</sup> Many, it seems, came to the museum already familiar with various items through their depiction in missionary publications.<sup>32</sup> In May 1821, John Campbell returned from a second tour of mission stations in South Africa with a number of further curiosities, most notable of which was the skull and horn of a rhino.<sup>33</sup> The very long horn of the animal in question led to speculation that the 'unicorn' referred to in the Book of Job was in fact a rhino.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, it is significant that Campbell had departed for Africa in November 1818, shortly after Pomare's 'family gods' had arrived in Britain. By the time he returned with 'natural curiosities' including a wildebeest and various mineral specimens, these had to compete for attention with the now infamous 'gods' from the Pacific.

### Accounting for the collection, 1823–1835

In 1823, the museum moved along with the headquarters of the LMS to a new location at Austin Friars.<sup>35</sup> In August 1824, the *Missionary Chronicle* announced that the museum would be open on Wednesdays from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m., 'the articles contained in the Museum being now arranged, and a Descriptive Catalogue printed'.<sup>36</sup> According to LMS accounts, £417 had been spent on re-establishing the museum,<sup>37</sup> but the Directors felt that these expenses 'should not fall on the funds devoted to the support of the Missions'.<sup>38</sup> As a consequence, it was announced that a collecting box would be placed in the museum and that the price of the catalogue would be left to the 'liberality' of the purchasers 'in order to diminish the expense incurred by the preparation and support of the museum'.<sup>39</sup> The tension between supporting overseas missionary work and the costs associated with maintaining the growing collection were perceived as far away as the Pacific. A letter written by John Williams in 1823 suggested that:



Did you know the state of the surrounding islands, how ripe they are for the reception of the gospel, you would sell the very gods out of your Museum, if it were necessary to afford the means of carrying the glad tidings of salvation to those now sitting in darkness.<sup>40</sup>

The first reasonably comprehensive statement of the contents of the museum is provided by an 1826 version of this catalogue, which seems to have been updated to incorporate recent additions to the museum, including a number of items brought by William Ellis from the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in 1825. It is significant that the final page includes a bequest form, enabling museum visitors to leave a legacy to the society.

The catalogue begins with a title-page on which the main categories of object in the museum are listed: 'Specimens in Natural History, Various Idols of Heathen Nations, Dresses, Manufactures, Domestic Utensils, Instruments of War &c &c &c'.<sup>41</sup> There follows a statement about the museum under the title 'advertisement'. While many accounts of the museum appear to have been substantially based on this, it is perhaps useful to remember that it is, by its own admission, a statement of propaganda. It begins by stating that while most articles had been supplied by missionaries, 'a few others' were donations from 'benevolent travellers' or 'friendly officers of mercantile vessels'.<sup>42</sup> The main categories of material are then justified. The 'natural productions of the distant countries' are more or less dismissed as items of curiosity, of most interest to children. Meanwhile 'efforts . . . of natural genius, especially in countries rude and uncivilized', which seems to refer particularly to Africa, the Pacific and Madagascar in contemporary usage, are intended to prove the capacity of these people for Christian instruction.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless the real rhetorical weight of the 'advertisement' follows in a new paragraph:

But the most valuable and impressive objects in this Collection, are the numerous, and (in some instances) *horrible* IDOLS, which have been imported from the South Sea Islands, from India, from China, and Africa; and among these, those especially which were given up by their former worshippers, from a *full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry* – a conviction derived from the ministry of the Gospel by the Missionaries.<sup>44</sup>

For an evangelical missionary society, there was a very special significance attached to items 'given up . . . from a *full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry*' since this suggested a real change of heart accompanying conversion. The 'advertisement' states that in

exhibiting these things, the Directors 'comply with the wish of the late king of Otaheite'.<sup>45</sup> The principal message which ends the advertisement suggests that these idols, as 'trophies of Christianity' will inspire 'gratitude to God for his great goodness to our native land', and commiseration for 'the hundreds of millions of the human race, still vassals of ignorance and superstition'.<sup>46</sup>

Given the sermonizing focus of this introductory statement, presumably penned by a professional preacher, it is perhaps curious that it is followed by five pages on which most of the items described are natural history specimens. The juxtaposition of these with 'articles of natural genius' led Sivasundaram to speculate that the museum was 'from one point of view . . . a storehouse of the products of people who lived in unity with nature'.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, it is also possible to regard the disjuncture between the advertisement and the contents of the catalogue as evidence that an original rationale of the museum, that of general 'curiosity', was in the process of being overtaken by a new focus on objects associated with religious practice and superstition. The text of the 'advertisement' suggests that the rhetorical significance of this new focus had been recognized by 1826, but the rest of the catalogue makes it clear that this had not yet led to overwhelming changes in the organization of the museum. The catalogue also suggests that the collection was beginning to be arranged and classified in relation to the chief mission fields of the Society, with sections devoted to the 'East Indies', 'China' and 'South Africa'. While this form of classification was not rigidly applied in 1826, it nevertheless suggests an emerging method of classifying the collection geographically, according to the administrative divisions of the society's work. At the same time, the main classification of objects in the museum seems to have been in terms of the three categories outlined on the front page, and reinforced by the 'advertisement': 'specimens in natural history', 'idols of heathen nations' and 'efforts of natural genius'. While items of one type were placed on top of cabinets containing material of another, the contents of most cases described in the catalogue suggests that they were intended to contain only one of these three types of material. The most significant exception to this general organizational principle is a praying mantis that was displayed alongside artefacts from South Africa. This was discussed in the catalogue in terms of 'the superstitious

reverence' in which it is held by 'Hottentots', as well as 'the general veneration in which it is held among uncivilized or superstitious people', a category which seems to have included the ancient Greeks as well as the 'common people of Languedoc'.<sup>48</sup> While the discussion of the mantis as 'almost a deity' might be read as suggestive of an imposed European notion of people living at one with nature, it matches remarkably well with more recent accounts by professional anthropologists describing the significance of the mantis for South African Khoisan peoples.<sup>49</sup> This suggests a degree of ethnographic accuracy in at least some of the ways in which material was presented at the museum. It was, after all, professionally useful, if not essential, for evangelical missionaries to have some understanding of the existing religious views of the people they were attempting to convert.

While many of the catalogue descriptions are fairly brief, a number include longer descriptions. In most cases these were substantially based on the accounts that had featured in missionary publications. These included descriptions of the 'mantis',<sup>50</sup> 'idols' from India,<sup>51</sup> as well as Pomare's 'family gods', all of which had featured in *Missionary Sketches*.<sup>52</sup> Other entries with longer descriptions related to Campbell's published accounts of his travels in South Africa, or were items that could be discussed in the light of biblical passages, such as the rhinoceros, or zebra, both of which were considered in relation to passages from the Book of Job.<sup>53</sup> While many descriptions of Indian 'idols' drew on Ward's *Hindoo Mythology*, for those who failed to grasp the intended message, the catalogue was explicit: 'These are specimens, Christian Reader, of the gods of the heathen in India, worshipped by more than a hundred millions of deluded people.'<sup>54</sup>

The longest commentary in the catalogue related to the 'household idols of Pomare', and included an account of missionary work in Tahiti since 1797. A translation of the 1816 letter from Pomare that had accompanied his 'family gods' was quoted, to the effect that:

I wish you to send those Idols to *Britane*, for the Missionary Society, that they may know the likeness of the gods that Tahiti worshipped . . . If you think proper, you may burn them all in the fire; or, if you like, send them to your country, for the inspection of the people of Europe, that they may satisfy their curiosity and know Tahiti's foolish god!<sup>55</sup>

The commentary that followed suggested that 'great additions have since been made to the number of idols

now in the Museum, from other islands which have now embraced Christianity'.<sup>56</sup> The number of islands was put at about twenty, with 6,000 adults and 3,500 children baptized. Nevertheless, the achievements of the LMS were also discussed in relation to the 'large and handsomely built' churches, as well as the books of the Bible that had been translated and printed. Even more significant than baptism as a demonstration of true conversion, however, was the adoption of modes of missionary activity by South Sea islanders themselves. The catalogue referred to the 'nearly thirty native teachers . . . labouring in fourteen islands where no European Missionaries are yet settled'. A model of the 712-foot-long church built by Pomare was displayed behind the 'idols' as a visible indicator of the enthusiasm of converts for Christianity, and the catalogue noted that meetings of the 'Otaheitian Auxiliary Missionary Society were held there on the same days on which the Parent Society assemble in London'.<sup>57</sup>

Rather than simply understanding the LMS museum in terms of the rhetorical emphasis of these catalogue descriptions, it is also possible to attempt an analysis of the numbers of objects of different types in the collection. If the numbers of objects of each category, as outlined on the first page of the catalogue, are calculated, it becomes clear that in 1826, idols were outnumbered by specimens of natural history, and significantly outnumbered by 'manufactures' (Fig. 2). When the same figures are compared according to the mission field from which they came, it becomes clear that more items in the collection came from Africa than from other parts of the world in 1826, especially given that many of the things with unknown geographical provenances are likely to be specimens of African natural history (Fig. 3). The museum was dominated, at least numerically, by what the 'advertisement' referred to as 'efforts of natural genius'. Given the suggestion that these could prove the capacity to receive the Christian message of 'even the most uncivilized on mankind', it is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of these come from Africa, the Pacific and the Americas.<sup>58</sup> 'Idols' on the other hand predominantly came from the Pacific, India and China. While people in the areas of southern Africa where the LMS were active did not produce artefacts that could easily be described as idols, these were effectively replaced in the museum's collection by large and charismatic animals, such as rhinos and giraffes, many of which came to London following Campbell's journeys of inspection.

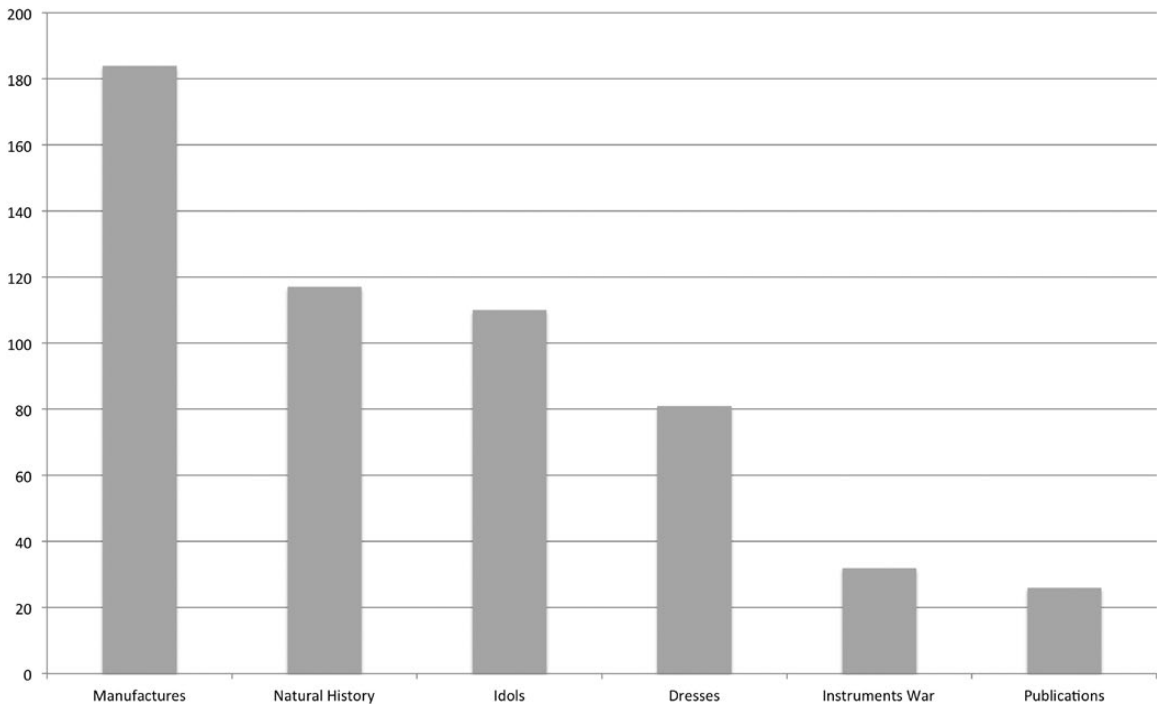


Fig. 2. Quantitative analysis of the 1826 catalogue, broken down into the main categories of material listed on the title-page of the catalogue.

There are fairly large numbers of objects from China that cannot be characterized as either 'idols' or 'specimens in natural history', and given that the 'civilization' of the Chinese was widely regarded as more of an obstacle to missionary success, it seems unlikely these items were intended to demonstrate the capacity of the Chinese to understand the Christian message. Many of the objects from China straightforwardly fulfil the category of 'curiosity', although a number are books in the Chinese language. Some Chinese objects listed in the catalogue are, however, also suggestive of a category that would become extremely significant in the LMS collection later in the century: the relic. Eleven objects were associated with Dr Robert Morrison, an early LMS missionary to China, including a number of things presented by his servant Poon a Sam. Although Morrison was still alive in 1826, having recently returned to China following a visit to Britain in 1824, he had already become famous through his five-volume Chinese dictionary, printed by the East India Company, as well as his translations into Chinese of the Old and New Testaments. Copies of these books were displayed at the museum and the

catalogue suggested 'By this great achievement, many millions of the human race may be enlightened in the knowledge of God our saviour'.<sup>59</sup>

What I have called an 'archaeological' approach, with a focus on the collection itself, rather than the rhetoric surrounding it, makes it possible to gain a better sense of the way in which items in the collection were connected to specific histories of missionary activity in different parts of the world. If the story of Morrison's work in China shaped the Chinese collection, the dominance of 'idols' among the Indian artefacts is suggestive of incipient campaigns by missionaries and their supporters against complicity with 'idolatry' by the East India Company.<sup>60</sup> If material from both the Pacific and Africa included a large number of objects suggesting the 'natural genius' of their inhabitants, these collections were also shaped by specific histories of missionary engagement involving religious idols and large mammals. Though the museum had been open for only twelve years when the earliest surviving copy of the catalogue was printed, its collection had already begun to bear the imprint, not only of the specific histories of LMS work in their

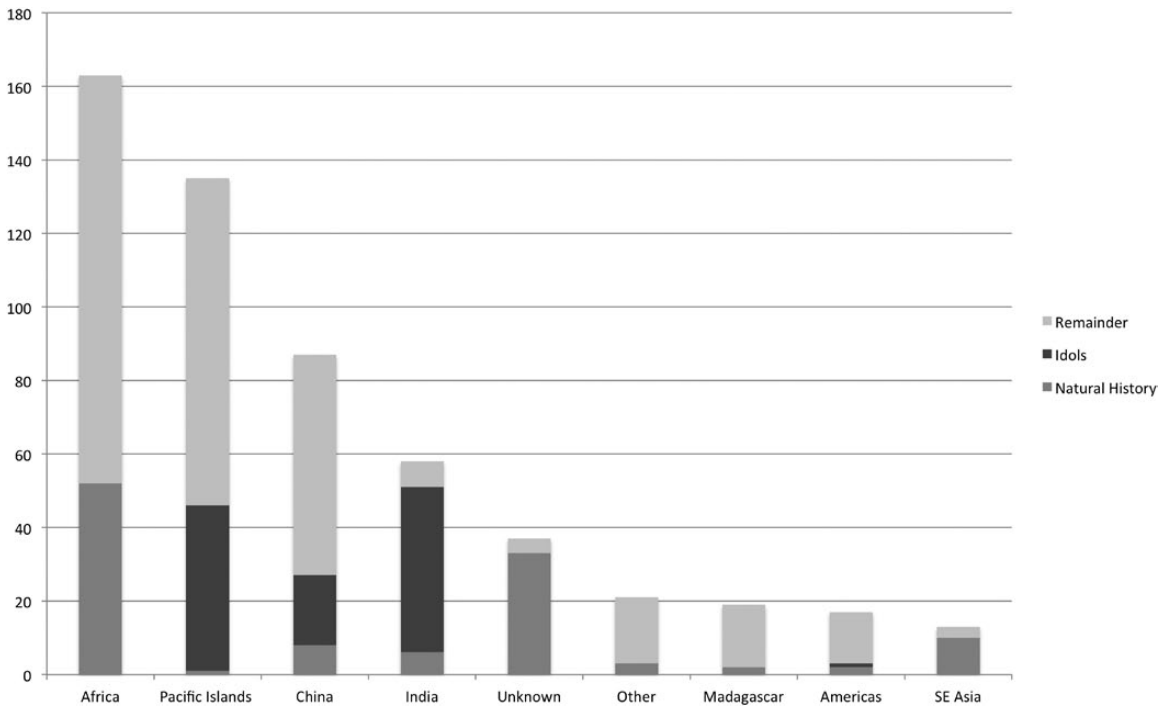


Fig. 3. Quantitative analysis of the 1826 catalogue according to region of origin and subdivided according to three main categories listed in the catalogue's 'advertisement'.

different fields, but also of the rhetorical effects by which this work was made to appeal to supporters in Britain. It is even possible to discern the beginnings of a focus on heroic male missionaries and their journeys of discovery, which would come to dominate the public image of the LMS and its propaganda for generations to come.<sup>61</sup>

### Depicting the museum, 1835–1859

In 1835, just over two decades after the Missionary Society first took a set of rooms, a new 'Mission House' was built at a cost of over £3,000 in nearby Blomfield Street, where it would remain for next sixty-eight years.<sup>62</sup> The museum was established in the midst of land at the back of the new building, with a degree of physical separation from the administrative functions of the society, although it could be entered through glass doors at the far end of the main entrance hall.<sup>63</sup> The museum had one main room, lit by a pair of skylights, as well as a lobby in which additional items were displayed. Nevertheless, the museum continued to be haphazardly arranged following its relocation and in

April 1839 Henry Syer Cuming, whose family collection would form the basis of the Cuming Museum in Southwark, wrote to the LMS directors about 'the miserable state of the Missionary Museum . . . not only of utter confusion and Chaos, but in a state of ruin and decay'. Having inspected the collection personally, Cuming suggested that objects in the collection were:

. . . fast going to decay, the damp walls have generated mould . . . the Moth has committed its ravages . . . leaving hairless skins to mark its progress . . . the spider has spun its web in every corner, and the extraordinary works both of God and Man are alike obscured, and disfigured with dust and cobwebs.<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, he seems to have been aware of which arguments would most appeal to the LMS directors, asking 'Is it so much to ask, that those Idols to which the Heathen once paid divine honours, be preserved in England as a monument of the glorious triumphs of the Cross, achieved by the Christian armies of our Country?' Cuming volunteered his services in 'identifying localities', but also offered to undertake the 'Augean task of arranging the Missionary Museum', should he be remunerated for his services.



This prompting may have had an effect, since an account published in January 1840 suggested that 'although the arrangement of the numerous specimens is at present very imperfect, and no catalogue has been published, we obtained every necessary information from the labels affixed to the different articles, and from the intelligence and attention of the curator'.<sup>65</sup> If earlier visitors had been impressed by the height of the stuffed giraffe, by this time it had competition from a twelve-foot 'staff god' from Rarotonga which had been brought to Britain by John Williams in 1834. An image of the museum from 1843 shows these two central attractions alongside one another, with a zebra, crocodile and a number of antelope in the background (Fig. 4). Above the cases on the back wall are several drums, spears and other assorted objects. Next to the giraffe is a model African house, constructed by the missionary Robert Moffat and now in the British Museum.<sup>66</sup> The image also shows portraits of missionaries and native chiefs that are mentioned in the visitor's account.<sup>67</sup> Although the article that accompanied this image in the *Illustrated London News* suggested that 'after their meetings, the friends of mission are wont to repair, to revive their

sympathies by an actual inspection of those idol gods which it is the first aim of the society "utterly to abolish"', these do not appear to be especially prominent in the image, apart from a Buddha next to the staff god.<sup>68</sup> Another account of the museum, also published in 1843, describes it as 'an awful yet glorious place!', suggesting that there is not another 'connected with Protestant missions, in England, in Europe, or in the world'.<sup>69</sup> The focus of this description falls clearly on 'idols' and 'objects of superstition', although a number of items connected with the recent death of Williams are also mentioned. A number of natural history specimens are also noted, including Campbell's giraffe, but these are largely referred to in terms of their connections to famous missionaries, such as two large crocodiles that had been presented by Robert Moffat, one of which is visible in the 1843 image.

Another image of the museum was printed in 1847 to accompany a series of articles about the museum in the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* (Fig. 5).<sup>70</sup> This offers a slightly different perspective to the 1843 image, but the contents and locations of the museum appear to be essentially the same. One of the articles accompanying this image describes the glass cases



Fig. 4. 'Missionary Museum', printed in the *Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1843, p. 342.

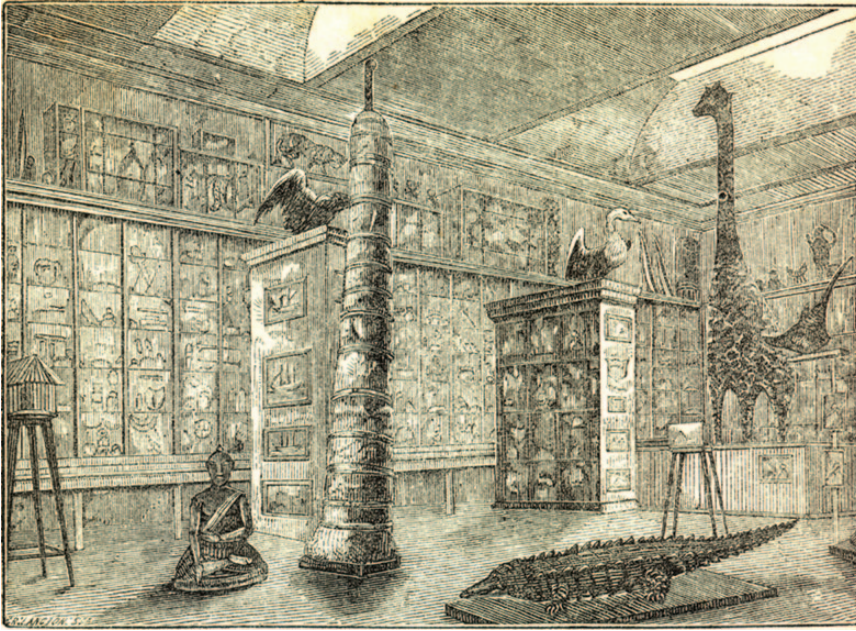


Fig. 5. Recently discovered image printed alongside a series of articles about 'The Missionary Museum' from the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* 6 no. 41 (1847), p. 219.

lining the sides of the room, the shelves of which were 'well stored with objects, all of which have been suitably classified, as shewn in the Society's catalogue'.<sup>71</sup> It also stated that 'If a still larger room could be spared for it, a better arrangement might be made of its many curious and highly interesting objects. They are now much too crowded'.<sup>72</sup> This account describes the Buddha in the centre of the floor, as well as the 'gigantic idol-god' that stood alongside it at the centre of the room, quoting at length an account of its origins by Williams. Campbell's giraffe was also mentioned, although by 1847 it appears to have been regarded as essentially out-of-place at the missionary museum. Nevertheless, the author suggested that 'a plea for its continuance in the Missionary Museum must rest on the ground of its connexion with Missionary history and the name of John Campbell, the African traveller'.<sup>73</sup> Another article in the series described in detail the 'collection of idol-gods' in the 'first case (marked A.)', noting that:

. . . in the very midst of all these idols from the southern isles, is placed the beautiful model of the Missionary ship, the 'John Williams,' – and surely a more appropriate place could not be found for it. The ship is destined to voyage about just in that part of the world from whence these idols come, and to carry the Messengers and the Message of Mercy among the very people who for ages have been left to darkness, cruelty, and death; but among whom a great light now shines, and a glorious change is taking place.<sup>74</sup>

A model of Pomare's chapel had served to emphasize the changes that Christianity had brought to the Pacific in 1826, but in 1847 a model of the missionary ship, launched three years previously in memory of its namesake, fulfilled this function.

A third image of the interior of the museum appeared in the *Lady's Newspaper* of 1853 (Fig. 6), ten years after the first. This shows a broadly similar scene with the giraffe and staff god in the same locations. The crocodile appears to have been removed, while one of the rhino horns has been replaced by a bust and possibly moved to the top of one of the cabinets on the rear wall. These no longer feature the zebra and antelopes pictured ten years previously, and instead contain a number of what may be religious images. The differences between the two images, which take a very similar perspective on the museum, are suggestive of the way in which the museum was a place in which things were re-arranged fairly routinely. While the larger and more prominent objects may not have left the museum, items were regularly sent on loan for use in missionary meetings of various kinds – a notice in 1846 requests the return of items that had been borrowed from the museum.<sup>75</sup> Cuming's letter of 1839 suggests the decay of some items, perhaps particularly natural history specimens, and this may account for why certain items were removed from display. The shift in the location of some items in the





Fig. 6. 'Museum of the London Missionary Society', printed in the *Lady's Newspaper* no. 329, 16 April 1853, p. 237.

museum is also suggestive of new arrivals. The 1853 image shows a glass case in front of the giraffe featuring 'an alligator encoiled in the crushing embrace of a Boa Constrictor'. This had been 'joyfully presented in 1849 by the pastor and deacons of the Independent Church . . . at Providence New Chapel, Georgetown', Demerara, a former missionary church, 'in token of continued attachment to the London Missionary Society in principle and objects'.<sup>76</sup>

The text accompanying the 1853 image suggested that the museum was 'in some respects . . . unequalled in the world – particularly in the collection of idols of worship'.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, it also acknowledged that 'The various objects here grouped have at the present day become in most of the South Sea Islands objects of greater curiosity than in this country'. This suggests an increasing awareness that the collection represented a fairly outdated perspective on parts of the world where missionary endeavours had been successful, such as the Pacific. In the process of being transported from the Pacific to London, 'idols' had become remnants of a pre-Christian state that no longer existed in the places from which they came. At a missionary meeting in 1855, the Revd William Gill, visiting from the Pacific, emphasized the point by

noting that the young Rarotongan who was with him had not seen an idol before his visit to the Missionary Museum, where he encountered a Rarotongan 'staff god' at the centre of things.<sup>78</sup>

### Careful and intelligent rearrangement, 1859–1885

Though there may have been an increasing awareness in the 1850s that the 'idols' in the museum's collection were no longer representative of life in the Pacific, this does not seem to have prevented 'idols' in general from becoming an even more explicit focus of the museum at the end of that decade. A fourth image (Fig. 7), printed in the *Illustrated London News* of 1859 is suggestive of a comprehensive re-organization of the museum. The staff god is still centrally positioned, but is flanked by a number of prominent religious figures from India. The image suggests these are the main focus of interest for a family of visitors to the museum. Meanwhile, the previously prominent specimens of natural history, including Campbell's giraffe, are no longer in evidence. The publication of this image was accompanied by an announcement that the museum ' . . . has recently been rearranged



Fig. 7. 'The Museum of the London Missionary Society', *Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1859, p. 605.

in a most careful and intelligent manner by a son of the late Reverend John Williams, who was so barbarously murdered . . . These objects are now carefully labelled, so that we can pass along with both pleasure and instruction'.<sup>79</sup> While earlier images are suggestive of a room that functioned as much as a storeroom as a space of display, in 1859 the museum appears to have been deliberately arranged to create a visual spectacle. Compare, for example, the fans of weapons above the cases to the horizontal storage of spears in earlier images. This transformation should undoubtedly be connected to wider shifts in exhibition practices, including the emergence of conventional modes of display that became associated with the exhibitions that proliferated in the years following the 1851 Great Exhibition in London.<sup>80</sup>

While the second catalogue of the museum has previously been undated, its description of the ordering and contents of the cases bears a close relation to those depicted in this image, suggesting that it was produced after the reorganization referred to as 'recent' in 1859. The printers of this catalogue, 'Reed & Pardon', ceased to operate under that name in 1862, further indicating that the catalogue dates to between 1859 and 1862.<sup>81</sup> An entry in the catalogue suggestively refers to an 'idol taken in the late war, from the Chief temple at Chusan', but since Zhoushan was occupied by British forces in both 1840 and 1860, theoretically

this could refer to either opium war. Dating the second catalogue to around 1860 is reinforced by images and descriptions of individual cases that were published in the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* during 1860 and 1861. These essentially match the catalogue descriptions, as well as the cases depicted in the 1859 image (Fig. 8).<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, apart from the Blomfield Street address, the opening pages of the catalogue, including the 'advertisement', were essentially the same as those of the 1826 catalogue, except that opening hours of the museum were listed as Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, from 10.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m. during the summer and from 10.00 until 3.00 p.m. during the winter. In addition, alongside the 'advertisement', a note was added about the classification of the museum:

There are two divisions, in the arrangement of the Museum;— HISTORY AND NATURAL HISTORY. The specimens, illustrating the former, are subdivided according to the Missionary Stations from whence they have been received, and are distinguished by the colour of the paper on which the number is printed, as under:

- GREEN — South Sea Islands. In Cases A and C.
- YELLOW — China and Ultra Ganges. Ditto D, E, M and I.
- BLUE — India, including the three Presidencies. Ditto F and G.
- RED — Africa and Madagascar. Ditto G, H and N.
- PINK — American, North and South. Ditto O.
- WHITE — The Miscellaneous Articles, and Natural History. Ditto B and Lobby.<sup>83</sup>



The careful labelling and re-arrangement of 1859 explicitly shifted the focus of the museum away from natural history, to the extent that most of these specimens were now listed at the very end of the catalogue, on white labels with other 'miscellaneous articles' and positioned in the liminal zone of the 'lobby'. Even though an attempt was made in the catalogue to classify natural history specimens according to genus and species, it is clear that the primary function of the one such case (B) which remained in the main museum was not primarily to illustrate biology: an image from the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* shows that its most prominent feature was a large boa constrictor, wrapped around a tree (Fig. 8). The snake had been sent to the museum in 1836 after it was killed in Kristnapore, when the story of its death featured on the cover of the *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, its prominence and setting in the case would surely have reminded Christian visitors to the museum of Satan's presence in the Garden of Eden. When thinking about the contents of the museum, readers of the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* were even asked to consider 'the power which Sin and Satan have in the world!'.<sup>85</sup>

While the natural history collection became peripheral to the way the museum was catalogued and displayed, the 'History' division also seems to have been divided into two main categories 'Idols and Objects of Superstitious Regard' and 'Articles of dress, domestic utensils, implements of war, music &c'. If the 1826 catalogue had begun by listing natural history specimens from Africa, the emphasis was made clear in the later catalogue by commencing with idols from the Pacific.<sup>86</sup> The catalogue also listed 'Idols and objects of superstitious regard' for each of the mission fields before the rest of the material, except in the case of Africa where nothing was classified within this category. While the southern African missionary field had featured prominently in the museum when the collection included a large number of stuffed animals, by 1860 it was fairly peripheral. African artefacts were listed towards the end of the later catalogue, just before a smattering of objects from the Americas. It is significant that three of the five cases pictured in the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* of 1860 contained displays of 'idols' (Fig. 8). The two exceptions were the natural history case (B), mentioned above, and another that included 'Articles of dress' from the Pacific (C). A particular connection was made

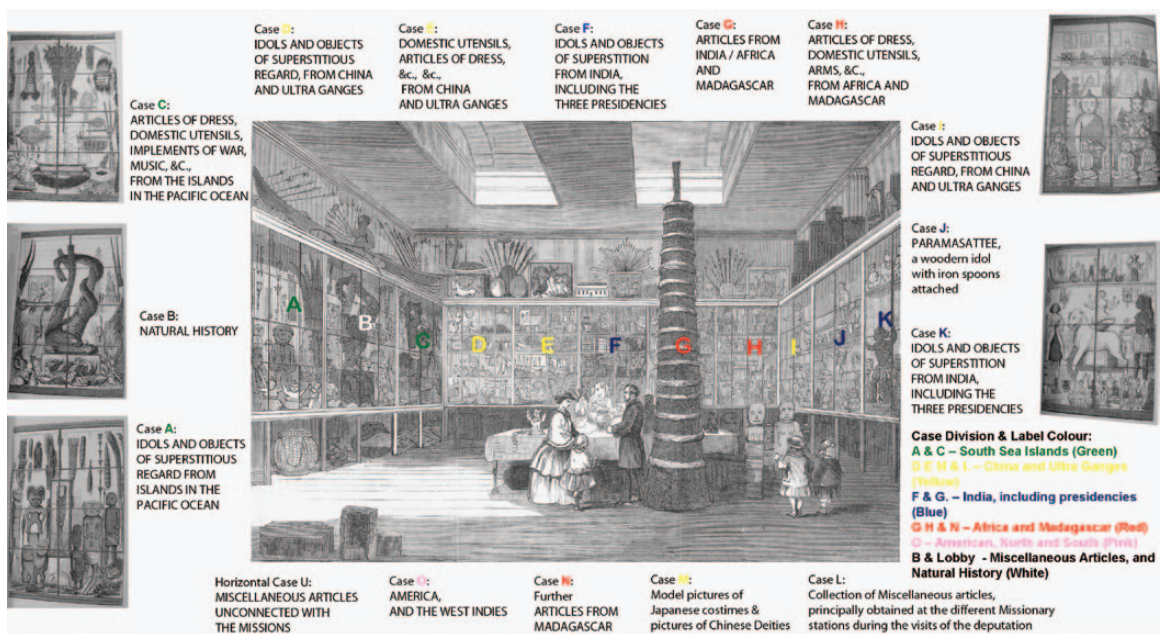


Fig. 8. Arrangement of the LMS museum c. 1860, constructed by relating the 1859 image from the *Illustrated London News*, depictions and descriptions of individual cases from the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* (1860) and the second surviving catalogue of the museum. © The Author.



between juvenile readers and this case since a model of the *John Williams* missionary ship was located there, rather than among the idols, as in 1847. Juvenile supporters of the mission had paid for and been nominally responsible for this ship since 1844. This case was given additional significance by the fact that it had, hanging over the ship, the club that reputedly had killed the eponymous hero, John Williams. The series of articles about the museum in the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* began by announcing that ‘the museum is altogether different from every other museum in the world’ and rather than containing curious, beautiful or valuable things ‘the chief purpose of the Missionary Museum is to show what men are without the Gospel’.<sup>87</sup> If this was at least partly true in 1860, it had certainly not always been the chief purpose of the museum. Nevertheless, this deliberate positioning of the Missionary Museum in relation to other museums can be understood with regard to the emergence of other institutions with similar collections during the second half of the nineteenth century. The way in which the museum was presented in 1860 might also be regarded as the culmination of the shift in focus, away from straightforward curiosity and towards idols and objects of superstition that began with arrival of Pomare’s ‘Household Gods’ in London in 1818.

If the total numbers of objects of different categories listed in the later catalogue are compared to those from the first catalogue, it is clear that there was a substantial increase in the number of objects in the collection between 1826 and 1860 (Fig. 9), numbers of natural history specimens increased by only a relatively small amount; indeed, they had been overtaken in numerical terms by the items classed as ‘idols and objects of superstitious regard’. This numerical shift undoubtedly contributed to the eclipsing of the African collections in favour of those from the Pacific, India and China, where ‘idols’ were more prominent. When the mission fields are compared, it becomes clear that the Pacific collections came to dominate the collections by 1860 (Fig. 10). Nevertheless, one of the largest areas of growth in the collection was in the number of ‘idols’ from India, presumably connected to the continuing campaigns in Britain against East India Company involvement in Hindu religious practices during the 1830s.<sup>88</sup>

If the rearrangement in 1859 marks the culmination of the LMS museum as a home for abandoned idols, it also marks the beginning of a new shift in its focus. This saw objects in the museum increasingly referred to as ‘relics’, with their connection to the history of the society and its missionaries

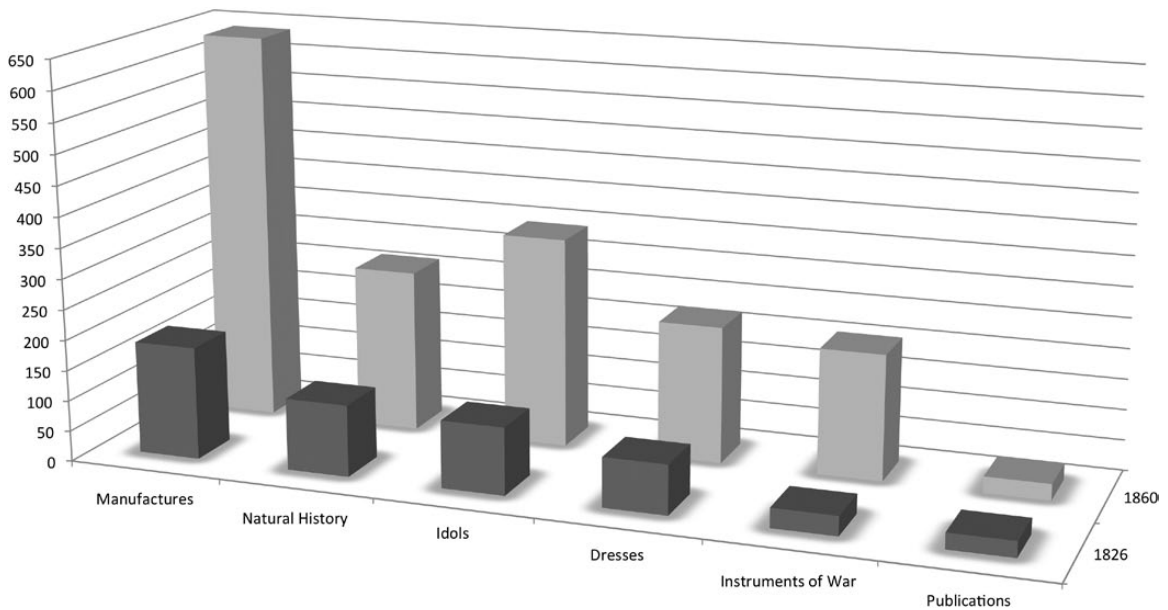


Fig. 9. Comparative quantitative analysis of the 1826 catalogue and the later catalogue, broken down according to the main categories of material listed on the title-page (cf. Fig. 2).

emphasized. Though 'rejected gods' in the museum might show that 'multitudes' of the heathen 'have been turned from dumb idols to worship the blessed Jehovah', this nevertheless suggested that museum objects from particular mission fields were more illustrative of past successes than they were of present conditions.<sup>89</sup> Even objects from the Pacific not classified in the catalogue as 'Idols and objects of superstitious regard' were felt to 'show the condition in which the Polynesians were when the Missionary vessel first visited their shores'.<sup>90</sup> Items that had once suggested the capacity of Pacific islanders to receive the Christian message through the quality of their workmanship, now served to show that it was 'not surprising' that 'people who could do such work in such a way' would 'become good carpenters, cabinet makers, blacksmiths, and builders, when they learned the use of iron and had before them the example of missionaries'.<sup>91</sup> While the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* of 1860 suggested that 'the chief purpose of the Missionary Museum is to show what men are without the Gospel',<sup>92</sup> another article in the same series reassuringly pointed out that:

The instruments of cruelty, the weapons of war, and the horrid idols once feared and worshipped, are themselves proofs that old things have passed away, as most of these are relics and trophies – tokens that the wicked customs and abominable idolatries of former days have been abandoned.<sup>93</sup>

The LMS museum continued to acquire additional items, particularly when the LMS expanded operations into Central Africa and Papua New Guinea during the last third of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the passage of time seems to have made it increasingly hard to escape the sense that a significant role for the museum was to document the society's history. Extensions to the Mission House at Blomfield Street in 1878 involved relocating the museum to a newly built upper floor of the main building, where it was 'carefully arranged in the new cases provided for it'.<sup>94</sup> A short account of the museum at the time of this move noted that the collection had 'accumulated during a long course of years by the agents of the Society in all lands'. Attention was drawn to the 'especially rich' collection of 'South Sea Idols, the use of which has long since passed away from that sphere of the Society's labours'.

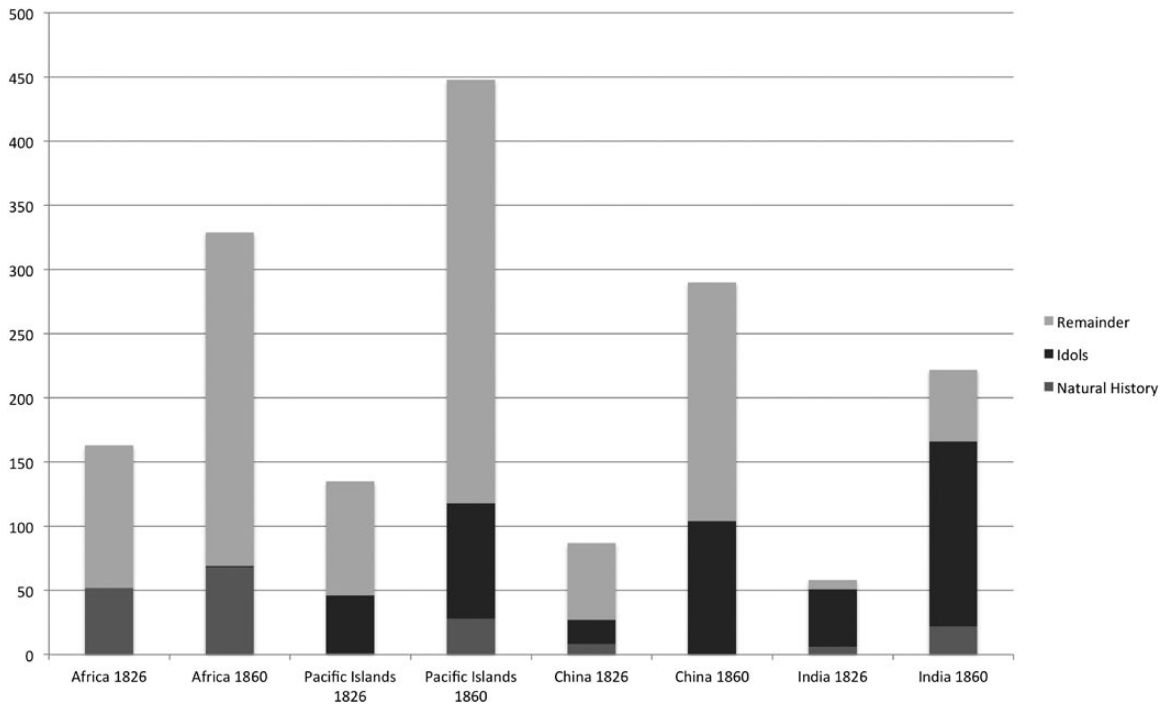


Fig. 10. Comparative quantitative analysis of the 1826 catalogue and the later catalogue, arranged according to the LMS's four main mission fields and sub-divided into the three main categories listed in the catalogue's 'advertisement' (cf. Fig. 3).

## Eclipse and dispersal, 1885–1910

The increasing connection between the museum and LMS history seems to have resulted in a growing appreciation of the value and rarity of its contents. Ultimately this fed into a proposal from the Literature Committee in February 1885: ‘That the Board sanction the selection of sets of objects of interest from the Society’s Museum for use when required for exhibition at meetings of various kinds.’<sup>95</sup>

A condition of this proposal was that ‘nothing shall be allowed to leave the Mission House for the purposes of such loan exhibitions except such articles as are definitely set apart as a loan collection’. This move resulted in the institutional separation of the loan collection from the museum collection, which by implication became static and confined to the top of the building. Objects from the collection had been loaned to missionary meetings and talks for much of the museum’s history, but ironically the establishment of a loan collection in 1885 put an end to this. It divorced the museum from what had once been one of its primary functions – appealing to the supporters of the LMS, the majority of whom were not situated in London and seldom if ever visited the Mission House. While the museum was increasingly regarded as important due to its connections with the history of the LMS, at the same time it made a smaller contribution to its contemporary functions.

In 1890, the directors of the LMS agreed to ‘lend under certain conditions objects of interest from the Society’s Museum for exhibition at the British Museum’, with the idea that they should be labelled as lent by the London Missionary Society and placed together in a separate case.<sup>96</sup> Of 241 items recorded as part of this loan, 234 came from the Pacific, reflecting the perceived significance of this material. In the same year, the Foreign Secretary of the LMS was authorized ‘to sell for the Society such objects from the Museum as are without any special missionary interest’, although it is unclear that much was sold at this time.<sup>97</sup> The museum was rearranged following these departures in late 1890, but attention increasingly appears to have been given to exhibitions.<sup>98</sup> These included an exhibition of around 2,000 items at the Crystal Palace in 1895 to celebrate the centenary of the LMS, including many from the museum.<sup>99</sup>

In 1903, the LMS headquarters moved from Blomfield Street, where they had been since 1835,

to temporary accommodation at Gray’s Inn Road. New headquarters opened at New Bridge Street in February 1905, and work began to re-arrange the museum, with a new catalogue promised in May 1905. However, this appears never to have been published, possibly because at precisely this time, the LMS embarked on a series of major exhibitions across the British Isles. It seems that the success of these exhibitions contributed to a recommendation in November 1909 by the museum and library sub-committee to close the museum and sell its contents ‘for the benefit of the Society, preserving, however, all articles of historic Missionary interest, and such as would be useful for the loan department’.<sup>100</sup> A report in February 1910, justified this on the basis of:

- (a) The difficulty of keeping the objects in the Museum clean and in proper order
- (b) The rarity of any visitors
- (c) The fact that there are now so many Exhibitions throughout the country of greater variety and worth.<sup>101</sup>

Further justifications given by the Home Board in March 1910 also linked the closure of the museum to the multiplication of museums in all parts of the country, and the arrangement reached with the British Museum in 1890.<sup>102</sup>

In April 1910, Charles Hercules Read was given the opportunity to select items for the British Museum before they were offered to others.<sup>103</sup> It seems that other items from the museum were then made available for purchase by directors of the society during the annual missionary meeting in the first week of May.<sup>104</sup> On 13 May, further selections were made by Henry Balfour from the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, and the private collector A. W. F. Fuller, who visited together and took turns to make their selections. Additional material was selected by the dealer W. O. Oldman on 18 May, and at some point by Dr Harrison from the Horniman Museum. The remainder was then sold at an auction at Stevens on 31 May 1910.

## Conclusion

In many ways, Altick’s characterization of the LMS museum as a Christian trophy case is extremely apt. On the one hand, the museum contained a

large number of 'trophies of Christianity'; non-Christian religious objects secured from converts to Christianity and sent to London. The arrival of Pomare's 'family idols' in 1818 seems to have sparked a spate of 'trophy collecting' which saw missionaries in different areas of the world compete to supply the museum with 'idols and objects of superstitious regard' which would see the museum increasingly focused around these during the middle part of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that the museum continued to contain trophies of a more conventional kind. Many specimens of natural history were in effect hunting trophies from Africa. In 1826 this was still a numerically significant element of the collection, and the presence of Campbell's giraffe at the centre of the museum made these items visually significant until the late 1850s. Elements of trophy collecting also informed the formation of other parts of the collection, perhaps especially the weapons. A number of African battleaxes seem to have come from the 'Mantatees' who were defeated in 1823 by allies of LMS missionaries when their 'marauding hordes' threatened the LMS settlement at Lattakoo (Dithakong).<sup>105</sup> As well as these weapons, the 1826 catalogue records four neck-rings 'taken' from one of the wives of the Chief of the 'Mantantese'.<sup>106</sup> Whether they were removed from her body while dead is unclear, but in this case at least, the LMS museum seems to have been displaying trophies that were indeed the spoils of military victory. Nevertheless, in most cases weapons were displayed as trophies in order to suggest less militaristic processes of pacification. The club that killed John Williams was at one level a missionary relic, associated with the most famous missionary martyr of the nineteenth century, but at another was linked to the story of the man who had wielded it, who later converted to Christianity. Displaying it suggested that having become Christian, Pacific islanders had little use for such weapons.

Altick's analogy becomes even more interesting when one thinks about the institutional function of a trophy case. The removal of objects from the LMS museum, and their deployment as emblems of success at a range of events involving supporters is suggestive of the way in which sporting trophies are sometimes used. The depiction of objects from the museum in missionary publications alongside accounts of glorious victories is paralleled in the way in which certain

sporting trophies become ubiquitous through the widespread circulation of imagery depicting them. Even the way in which sporting trophies are often inscribed with the names of those who possess them is suggestive of labelling practices, through which both the LMS and its missionaries associated themselves with objects in the museum.<sup>107</sup> While Altick seems to have used the term 'trophy case' in a dismissive manner, the more the analogy is explored the more useful it becomes as a means of understanding some of the ways in which objects from the collection were used in institutional settings. The trophy cases of sporting clubs are significant markers of institutional identities and histories, but at the same time are rarely allowed to interfere with the primary function of these institutions. While it may be useful to revel in past glories, or to eulogize heroes of the past to inspire a new generation, institutions cannot allow themselves to lose sight of their situation in the present, or to continue the sporting metaphor, to 'take their eye off the ball'.

While the functions of the LMS museum as institutional 'trophy case' may be different from the 'scientific' museums of ethnography that emerged during the last third of the nineteenth century, and into which much of the LMS collection was subsequently transferred, it nevertheless seems important to counter Altick's assertion that 'the museum's purpose was not to advance learning'.<sup>108</sup> Jeffrey Cox has suggested that 'for most British children in the nineteenth century, the single largest source of information about what foreign peoples were like came from the foreign missionary societies of their respective denominations'.<sup>109</sup> The reach of the LMS, however, went further than this: missionary meetings at which objects from the LMS museum were displayed took place in the churches and schools of the established Church of England, those associated with Methodism, as well as the Congregational churches that formed the core support of the LMS. Publications by the LMS, and particularly books written by individual missionaries, circulated much more widely than the churches and individuals who regularly supported the society. While LMS exhibitions may have been staffed largely by those who attended Congregational churches, they were attended by people from many Christian denominations, and presumably also from those who did not attend church at all.

Given the wide reach of the LMS, at least in the mid-nineteenth century, it appears that the objects

that were assembled at the LMS museum became the basis on which a wide swath of the British public began to imagine other parts of the world. While the LMS museum and its collection may not primarily have been intended to ‘advance learning’ in a scholarly sense, it certainly played an important role in developing forms of knowledge about the lives of people in other parts of the world. Indeed, these may have been more significant in shaping the British views of the world beyond Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than other forms of knowledge developed in more scientific museums. When one considers the ways in which present-day tourist brochures use images of temples and temple statues to promote India and China, Easter Island figures and tattooed Maoris to sell the Pacific, but images of elephants, giraffes and herds of gazelles to attract visitors to Africa, it is hard not to be reminded of the ways in which the LMS museum and the objects in its collections projected similar images of these locations from 1814 onwards.

### Address for correspondence

Dr Chris Wingfield, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3DZ.  
[chris.wingfield@maa.cam.ac.uk](mailto:chris.wingfield@maa.cam.ac.uk)

### Acknowledgements

Underlying research was undertaken through a doctoral studentship at the University of Birmingham, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Award no. 126750). The resulting thesis is: C. Wingfield, ‘The Moving Objects of the London Missionary Society: An Experiment in Symmetrical Anthropology’ (University of Birmingham, 2012).

### Notes and references

- <sup>1</sup> R. D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), pp. 298–9.
- <sup>2</sup> *Catalogue of the Missionary Museum, Austin Friars* (London, 1826), p. iv.
- <sup>3</sup> Including the famous ‘Tipu’s Tiger’ from the East India Company’s museum, now at the V&A.
- <sup>4</sup> S. Hooper, *Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia 1760–1860* (London, 2006), pp. 65–6; D. S. King, *Food for the Flames: Idols and Missionaries in Central Polynesia* (San Francisco, 2011), pp. 53–7; D. S. King, *Missionaries and Idols in Polynesia* (San Francisco, 2015), p. 43; R. Seton, ‘An overview and analysis of missionary collections in the United Kingdom relating to South Asia’, in *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding, Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical, in honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg* (Grand Rapids, 2009), p. 262; R. Seton, ‘Reconstructing the museum of the LMS’, *Material Religion* 8 no. 1 (2012), pp. 98–102.
- <sup>5</sup> See Hooper, op. cit. (note 4), p. 27.
- <sup>6</sup> A. E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1994), p. 161.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- <sup>8</sup> S. Sivasundaram, *Nature and the Godly Empire: Science and Evangelical Mission in the Pacific, 1795–1850* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 179.
- <sup>9</sup> See C. Wingfield, ‘Reassembling the London Missionary Society collection: experiments with symmetrical anthropology and the archaeological sensibility’, in S. Byrne, A. Clarke and R. Harrison (eds), *Reassembling the Collection* (Santa Fe, 2012), pp. 61–87.
- <sup>10</sup> N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 243, note 259.
- <sup>11</sup> R. Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society 1795–1895* (London, 1899), p. 90.
- <sup>12</sup> C. S. Horne, *The Story of the L.M.S.* (London, 1904), p. 13.
- <sup>13</sup> ‘Missionary Rooms’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (October 1814), p. 405.
- <sup>14</sup> See Lovett, op. cit. (note 11), p. 91.
- <sup>15</sup> See ‘Missionary Rooms’, op. cit. (note 13), p. 405.
- <sup>16</sup> J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa: Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London, 1815), p. viii.
- <sup>17</sup> See: C. Wingfield, ‘Giraffe, South Africa’, in K. Jacobs, C. Knowles and C. Wingfield (eds), *Trophies, Relics and Curios? Missionary Heritage from Africa and the Pacific* (Leiden, 2015), pp. 24–7.
- <sup>18</sup> ‘Missionary Museum’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (April 1815), p. 171.
- <sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between curiosity and museum history more generally, see: A. MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 2007).
- <sup>20</sup> D. Hughson, *Walks through London* (London, 1817), pp. 68–9.
- <sup>21</sup> ‘Otaheite’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (February 1818), p. 84.
- <sup>22</sup> ‘Missionary contributions’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (May 1818), p. 228; ‘Missionary contributions’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (August 1818), p. 363.
- <sup>23</sup> ‘Otaheite’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (September 1818), p. 401.
- <sup>24</sup> J. Griscom, *A Year in Europe: Comprising a Journal of Observations in England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Switzerland, the north of Italy, and Holland. In 1818 and 1819* (New York, 1823), p. 239.
- <sup>25</sup> T. Smith, *The History and Origin of the Missionary Societies* (London, 1825), p. 334.
- <sup>26</sup> ‘India’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (September 1819), p. 385.
- <sup>27</sup> ‘Missionary festival in Cornwall’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (November 1819), p. 477.
- <sup>28</sup> ‘Poetry: On viewing the relinquished Idols of Otaheite in the Missionary Museum’, *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (February 1821), p. 92.



- Could man, who boasts his reasoning power,  
 Form the strange things we here survey –  
 Then praise them at the evening hour,  
 Or in the morning kneel and pray?  
 Yes – man debas'd his lofty mind –  
 That mind which the Creator gave:  
 His reasonings vain, perverse, and blind,  
 He form'd the gods which cannot save.  
 Oh! mournful thought! affecting sight!  
 Spirit of grace! thy influence shed,  
 Disperse the gloom of pagan night,  
 And light, and truth, and wisdom spread.  
 The light appears; its glory gleams –  
 Fair presage of an endless day!  
 Over 'Taheite's isle it beams,  
 She flings her 'foolish gods' away.
- <sup>29</sup> An American Clergyman of the Synod of Philadelphia, 'Travels in Europe for Health in 1820', *Christian Advocate* 5 (February 1827), pp. 65–9.
- <sup>30</sup> J. Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (New York, 2008), p. 97.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Missionary Museum', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (May 1820), p. 289.
- <sup>32</sup> 'Missionary Museum', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (May 1821), p. 205.
- <sup>33</sup> 'The Unicorn', *The Babler* 1 no. 17 (1822), pp. 266. When in St Helena on his return journey, Campbell sent samples of blue asbestos from beyond the Orange River in South Africa to Napoleon Bonaparte, just months before the former emperor's death in May of that year.
- <sup>34</sup> See *Catalogue*, op. cit. (note 2), p. 12.
- <sup>35</sup> 'Recent miscellaneous intelligence: London Missionary Society', *Missionary Register* 11 (February 1823), p. 119.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Missionary Museum', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (August 1824), p. 365.
- <sup>37</sup> 'London Missionary Society: Thirtieth Report', *Missionary Register* (October 1824), p. 425.
- <sup>38</sup> See 'Missionary Museum', op. cit. (note 39), p. 365.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Missionary Museum', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (July 1824), p. 333.
- <sup>40</sup> 'South Seas', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (October 1824), p. 457.
- <sup>41</sup> See *Catalogue*, op. cit. (note 2), p. 1.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>43</sup> See Lovett, op. cit. (note 11), p. 650.
- <sup>44</sup> Emphasis in the original.
- <sup>45</sup> See *Catalogue*, op. cit. (note 2), p. 3.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>47</sup> See Sivasundaram, op. cit. (note 8), p. 177.
- <sup>48</sup> See *Catalogue*, op. cit. (note 2), p. 41.
- <sup>49</sup> A. Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa: A Comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan Peoples* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 84–5.
- <sup>50</sup> 'The Mantis or Hottentot's God', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (August 1818), pp. 346–7.
- <sup>51</sup> 'Representation of the Indian idol of Ganesa', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (March 1818), pp. 125–6.
- <sup>52</sup> 'The family gods of Pomare', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (December 1818), p. 539.
- <sup>53</sup> J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa: Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London, 1815); J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society: being a Narrative of a second Journey in the Interior of that Country* (London, 1822).
- <sup>54</sup> See *Catalogue*, op. cit. (note 2), p. 31.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iii.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- <sup>60</sup> See P. Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698–1858* (Woodbridge, 2012).
- <sup>61</sup> One has only to think of the enduring image of David Livingstone. See Cox, op. cit. (note 30), p. 14.
- <sup>62</sup> Report of the Directors to the Forty-Second General Meeting of the Missionary Society', (London, 1836), p. xlii.
- <sup>63</sup> 'The London Mission House', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (January 1878), p. 10.
- <sup>64</sup> SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, Special Collections): CWM/LMS/Home/Incoming correspondence, Box 7, Folder 5 – Henry Syer Cuming to Bennet Esq., 20 April 1839.
- <sup>65</sup> 'The London Missionary Museum', *London Saturday Journal* (25 January 1840), p. 40.
- <sup>66</sup> British Museum, inv. no. Af; LMS.3. See: C. E. Weinberg, 'Moffat's model house, South Africa', in Jacobs, *et al.* op. cit. (note 17), pp. 146–50.
- <sup>67</sup> See 'The London Missionary Museum', op. cit. (note 65), p. 40.
- <sup>68</sup> 'The London Missionary Society', *Illustrated London News*, 11 May 1843, p. 342.
- <sup>69</sup> J. Campbell, *The Farewell Services of Robert Moffat, in Edinburgh, Manchester, and London* (London, 1843), pp. 134–5.
- <sup>70</sup> 'The Missionary Museum', *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* (September 1847), pp. 195–8; (October 1847), pp. 219–21; (December 1847), pp. 265–9.
- <sup>71</sup> 'The Missionary Museum', *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* (September 1847), p. 196.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197–8.
- <sup>74</sup> 'The Missionary Museum', op. cit. (note 71), p. 221.
- <sup>75</sup> 'Notice respecting articles lent from the Missionary Museum', *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle* (April 1846), p. 62.
- <sup>76</sup> SOAS: CWM/LMS/Home/Incoming correspondence, Box 9, Folder 8 – Joseph Ketley to the Board of Directors of the London Missionary Society, 14 December 1849.
- <sup>77</sup> 'Museum of the London Missionary Society', *Lady's Newspaper* 329 (16 April 1853), p. 237.
- <sup>78</sup> W. Gill, 'Fifty-first anniversary of the British and Foreign Bible Society', *Christian Observer* (May 1855), p. 554.
- <sup>79</sup> 'The Museum of the London Missionary Society', *Illustrated London News* (25 June 1859), p. 620.
- <sup>80</sup> Displays of ethnology were arranged by Dr R. G. Latham for the first time as part of the Natural History Department at the

- Crystal Palace in 1854. According to Latham, ethnology was a new science 'not exactly of the different nations of the world, but of the different varieties of the human species': *Handbooks to the Crystal Palace: Natural History* (London, 1854), p. 5. For the wider context see especially Coombes, *op. cit.* (note 6).
- <sup>81</sup> Reed & Pardon operated under this name between 1849 and 1862: see E. C. Bigmore, *A Bibliography of Printing with Notes and Illustrations* (London, 1884), p. 117 etc; Edward B. Reed, *Memoir of Sir Charles Reed* (London, 1883), p. 23. Sir Charles Reed (1819–1881) of Reed & Pardon was a director of the LMS, the son of a Congregational minister, as well as an antiquary in his own right.
- <sup>82</sup> 'The Missionary Museum', *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* 17 (1860), pp. 12–18, 44–7, 88–94, 102–5, 158–64, 179–81, 230–32, 246–9, 270–72; *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* 18 (1861), pp. 6–11, 56–61, 79–82, 102–4.
- <sup>83</sup> *Catalogue of the Missionary Museum, Blomfield Street, Finsbury* (London, c.1859–62), p.ii.
- <sup>84</sup> G. Gogerly, 'East Indies. Kristnapore. Peril from the boa constrictor', *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle* (July 1836), pp. 21–2.
- <sup>85</sup> See 'The Missionary Museum', *op. cit.* [vol. 17] (note 82), p. 12.
- <sup>86</sup> It is not clear whether this was the case prior to 1859, but Polynesian idols certainly had been displayed in Case A since at least 1843.
- <sup>87</sup> See 'The Missionary Museum', *op. cit.* [vol. 17] (note 82), p. 12.
- <sup>88</sup> For a discussion of the 'Pilgrim Tax' see Carson, *op. cit.* (note 60), pp. 212–17.
- <sup>89</sup> See 'The Missionary Museum', *op. cit.* [vol. 17] (note 82), p. 15.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- <sup>94</sup> 'The London Mission House', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (January 1878), p. 10.
- <sup>95</sup> SOAS: CWM/LMS/Home/Literature Committee Minute Book, Minute 99, 27 February 1885 – Loan Museum.
- <sup>96</sup> SOAS: CWM/LMS. Home Board Minutes. FBN 7 (1877–1890) Box 44, p. 450, 19 March 1890.
- <sup>97</sup> SOAS: CWM/LMS/Home/Literature Committee Minutes/Box 1 1866–1915, p. 143, 13 June 1890.
- <sup>98</sup> SOAS, *op. cit.* (note 96), p. 146, 8 January 1891.
- <sup>99</sup> 'Children's centenary demonstration at the Crystal Palace', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (September 1895), pp. 236–7.
- <sup>100</sup> SOAS, *op. cit.* (note 96), pp. 111–12, 29 November 1909. 'Museum & Library Sub-Committee'.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113, 14 February 1910. 'Report of Museum & Library Sub-Committee'.
- <sup>102</sup> SOAS, *op. cit.* (note 100).
- <sup>103</sup> British Museum, Department of Prehistory and Europe archive correspondence 1910, T-Z box.
- <sup>104</sup> SOAS, *op. cit.* (note 96), p. 113, 14 February 1910. 'Report of Museum & Library Sub-Committee'; British Museum, *op. cit.* (note 103), Jones to Joyce, 9 May 1910.
- <sup>105</sup> J. Cobbing, 'The Mfecane as alibi: thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', *Journal of African History* 29 (1988), pp. 487–519.
- <sup>106</sup> See *Catalogue*, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 38–9.
- <sup>107</sup> K. Jacobs, 'Inscribing missionary impact in Central Polynesia: mapping the George Bennet collection (1821–1824)', *Journal of the History of Collections* 26 (2014), pp. 263–76.
- <sup>108</sup> See Altick, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 299.
- <sup>109</sup> See Cox, *op. cit.* (note 30), p. 101.