"Tales of a flying Dutchman": An Exaugural Lecture

IN MEMORY OF MICHAEL KENNETH HYDE (1957-2003)
WHO FLEW HIGHER THAN ANY OF US

Vincent Megaw

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Vincent Megaw's was the first Professorial Inaugural Address to be published in AA. Since the suggestion to publish such lectures came from Betty Meehan, not only a past Editor of AA but also a former student of (now Emeritus Professor) Megaw, it seems fitting that she adds here a brief introduction to what is believed to be a world first.

In Honour of a great teacher, colleague and friend

I became an undergraduate at the University of Sydney in 1962 at a mature age. After considerable thought I decided to study Anthropology (which included Prehistory, Ancient History and Archaeology – then mainly Classical). Fortunately for me Vincent Megaw had joined the Archaeology Department and immediately began carrying out excavations on the south coast of NSW. I decided to take some of Vincent's courses on European archaeology – what a great decision that was. Here was this tall, slim interesting man with a Modigliani-like head, elegantly dressed often in richly coloured corduroy, and friendly and helpful to boot! His classes, being small, were usually held in his book-lined room located in Sydney University’s beautiful quadrangle. Here we all relaxed in comfortable chairs and sat enthralled while Vincent unravelled the complexities of European archaeology. A lecture never passed without us being directed to many scholarly papers in at least three or four of the languages with which he was familiar. Unfortunately, I was never one of Vincent’s best students but I remember his lectures with pleasure for they certainly expanded and enriched my vision of world history. We have remained friends and colleagues since that time as we both pursued our separate ways. I wish him well in his exaugural status though I doubt if his life will be any different from what it has been up to now – busy, broadly-based and forever enquiring.

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Exaugural: of a discourse delivered at the close of a term of office' (Oxford English Dictionary). This paper is an edited version of a public lecture marking the author’s retirement as Professor of Visual Arts and Archaeology given at Flinders University on 29 May 2003. In place of the usual disclaimer, I can only blame my colleague, Dr Clare Smith, Convenor of the Flinders Archaeology Public Lecture Series for persuading me to indulge – I confess not for the first time – in scholarly exhibitionism. The reader will gather that, as delivered, this was very much a paper intended to be read aloud. Let alone illustrated by some 118 images and four musical excerpts. Only a few references have been added but no prizes are offered for the detection of some blatant cases of self-plagiarism. This is after all, an exercise in – to quote once again the great English antiquary, William Camden’s memorable phrase – ‘back looking curiositi’. True, sensibilities have become dulled over the past sixty years and such images are now almost media clichés. But for me at least the horror of these scenes are not assuaged but rather heightened when, for example, observed against the background of Henry Purcell’s Musik on the death of Queen Mary, music first heard in Westminster Abbey in March 1695 and then again in the same place in November of the same year – for Purcell’s own funeral. Beauty and terror are often not far apart.

Iraq, Gulf War I mass grave uncovered in 2003. Photo: © News Ltd.

The horrors of Auschwitz revealed; Srebrenice, a shocking memorial of ethnic cleansing; Iraq, an ancient land despoiled by modern cruelty and global Realpolitik...

One might think these are odd images to conjure up at the beginning of the musings of a kangaroo Celt, the disjointed thoughts of an archaeological wanderer between many worlds, both past and present. But visual evidence for one of Saddam’s Kurdish death pits of the 1990 campaign has added and ironic significance when one realises that it was intentionally located on the edge of a scheduled archaeological site in an attempt to avoid subsequent detection. True, sensibilities have become dulled over the past sixty years and such images are now almost media clichés. But for me at least the horror of these scenes are not assuaged but rather heightened when, for example, observed against the background of Henry Purcell’s Musik on the death of Queen Mary, music first heard in Westminster Abbey in March 1695 and then again in the same place in November of the same year – for Purcell’s own funeral. Beauty and terror are often not far apart.

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Of course, those who have been personally affected by evidence of the seemingly unending readiness of humankind to erode its own humanity never forget atrocities, be they those perpetrated in Belsen or Bosnia — or remarked (Megaw 1997), the past is a funny thing: it has a sixteen-year-old girl who died in the Netherlands 3500 years ago (van der Sanden 1994), no doubt which of the two has done better for himself. Recently retired from the Disney Chair of Archaeology in the University of Cambridge, the former Master of Jesus College and Fellow of the British Academy — but also, it is true, failed Tory candidate for Sheffield East — Colin, Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn only recently reached the pinnacle of his career when he was heard recently being interviewed by Philip Adams on ABC National's Late Night Live. I shall return to Colin and the subject of that programme a little later.

The Leitmotiv — to borrow a suitably Wagnerian term — of what I have to say will be to demonstrate that archaeology, like the visual arts, far from being a rarefied and elitist pursuit of no relevance to contemporary society, is an essential tool which assists us to understand, if not where we are going, then from whence we have come. Archaeology supplies us not with a road map but rather a series of beacons which illuminate the voyages that we have taken. Douse those beacons and we are plunged into a cultural black-out, devoid of a past and in which the future starts to look even grimmer than it now is. A society robbed of its past is adrift like the Flying Dutchman’s ship — as so many of our own Indigenous people would bear witness.

Stereotypes of what archaeologists are and what they do certainly change with time. When I was a student at Edinburgh in the mid ’fifties, the London Underground ran a series of large posters bearing the catch phrase ‘Top People Take the Times’ — remember, this was the Times before Rupert Murdoch. And there he is, solar toppee on head, spade in hand, and broken Grecian urn appearing from the sand. This image reminds me of Sir Max Mallowan, who as a young man was assistant to Sir Leonard Woolley, excavator of Ur of the Chaldees and second husband to Agatha Christie. Her experiences in the field undoubtedly set the scene for such books as Death on the Nile (first published in 1937) and Death Comes as the End (which appeared in 1945) and in turn fostered a image of an archaeologist largely as wished for and as such
Sometimes art imitates archaeology. When going through some old files for this lecture I came across the speech I gave in 1978 on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary Dinner of the Cambridge University Field Club; what I said then seems now a classic example of cringe-making inanity and does not bear quoting. On the other hand, included in my file is a contemporary issue of that great literary and artistic journal, the *Beano*, where the Bash Street Kids take to excavating a bone yard; this bears an uncanny resemblance to the excavations carried out in 1999 by my colleague Dr Mark Stanforth at the site of a 1870 butcher’s yard at Divett Street in Port Adelaide. The image of the archaeologist as glorified garbo seems hard to shake off.

The fictional archaeologist of a past generation was born again when in 1981 Indy first burst upon the silver screen. I refer of course to Dr Henry Jones Jr. I have noted before how there is clear evidence that Steven Spielberg did his homework; the unforgettable sequence of the German excavations at the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* must have been based on photographs such as those taken for Matthew Flinders’ grandson, Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie while he was excavating in the 1900s the Temple of Ptah in Memphis – Memphis, Egypt, not Memphis, Tennessee (Megaw 1997: 41). Once more fiction blurs into fact in such British television reality series as *The Time Team* (Taylor 1999; Aston 2000) where archaeologists have only two weeks to carry out an excavation of their own choosing. Such temporal restrictions on sites threatened by developers are the norm; to choose to do this kind of archaeological racing against the clock for the delectation of tv millions smacks of worse than carelessness.

But how did it all start? Not when did archaeology itself start, a matter which on another occasion might take us to a time long before the collecting sprees of the Emperor Hadrian and before him Naboronidas, King of Babylon back to the Bronze Age of Shang Dynasty China and the mammoth hunters of Upper Palaeolithic Central Europe more than 20,000 years ago (Daniel 1967; Bahn 1996: chap.1). No, I mean when did it start and why? Why? – well, I suppose by accident. I spent the early years of World War II with my grandparents in Northern Ireland, much loved and looked after particularly by their Scottish housekeeper. My grandfather, a solicitor who had never practised, was for many years Honorary Secretary of Belfast’s Linen Hall Library, one of the oldest borrowing institutions extant in Europe. My grandfather’s publisher and friend was the Left Wing’s idol, Victor Gollancz, one of that extraordinary group of Jewish refugees without whom British publishing would not have become what it is today. Included in their number was Walter Neurath, founder of Thames and Hudson, later to be my first employer. When in Belfast, I was immersed in a surfeit of the classics of English, Scottish and Irish prose and poetry. By the age of six I devoured everything and anything written by Walter Scott, Rudyard Kipling and E. Nesbitt (of *The Railway Children* fame), all three much concerned with re-creations of past times. And then there was the family museum to order, to catalogue, to display, and an honorary uncle who was curator of the County Museum and Al1 Gallery in Armagh to consult. In retrospect, the Megaw Museum with its mummi fied ibis – trophy of an ancestor who had fought at the Siege of Khartoum – Neolithic polished axes and Mesolithic flints which I had collected with one of my two archaeological uncles as surface scatters on midden sites on the Antrim coast, all of this now looks like little more than a twentieth century version of the sixteenth and seventeenth century cabinets of curiosities from which all modern museums are descended (Impye and MacGregor 1985). Indeed, as Colin Renfrew has recently demonstrated in a fascinating study of the interrelation of contemporary art and archaeology, the artist Mark Dion is today fastidiously constructing his own cabinets of curiosity, thereby
I remember being happy at school, doing, as our son would put it, "not very much". Despite the lack of formal teaching in either music or English literature - "Anyone may learn either without formal tuition" was our Headmaster's view - I studied the early Romantics, sang and learnt to play the violin, a skill which I have largely lost. After two years in the Classical Sixth Form, I failed spectacularly, if predictably to gain a scholarship to Peterhouse, Cambridge, my uncles' college. My Headmaster then suggested that there might be a career for me in retail marketing - with Harrods, for example. Thus encouraged, I first of all flirted with the idea of a joint degree in Drama and English offered by Bristol, largely I think, influenced by the fact that my parents' circle of friends was dominated by actors as well as artists.

And so to Edinburgh, which was strongly recommended by my Cambridge-trained uncles. Edinburgh had the added bonus that it was as far from London as I could imagine one could go. They were golden years when successive Directors of Studies warned me unsuccessfully of the evils of 'the dramatics' - my Banquo was highly thought of in the arts pages of the *Scotsman* newspaper. Those were the days when student protest, as over the Suez invasion of 1956, was more like the battle of Bannockburn than a decorous march down Adelaide's King William Street. If it wasn't the dreaded dramatics it was student affairs, both the high and the low point being Edinburgh's success right up to the finals in the 1956 Commonwealth Quiz, a radio precursor of BBC TV's popular *University Challenge*. I note that the caption to a publicity shot taken just after the last recording was 'Members of the Edinburgh team enjoy a joke'. Not true: we had previously beaten a Melbourne team only to go...
down ignominiously before a team of lawyers from the University of Tasmania—beaten in a general knowledge quiz by lawyers? From Tasmania? Could there be greater humiliation?

If this was not shame enough, I also managed to fail Elementary but, alas, compulsory Geomorphology three times. Notwithstanding, it was a charmed time especially for a Sassenach in a Scottish university. Our student grants were larger than those of the indigenous population and the Archaeology staff/student ratio improved from about 30:1 in First Year to 2:1 in our Honours Year. The professor, Stuart Piggott, who died in 1996 (Mercer 1998), had succeeded Vere Gordon Childe, the foundation professor and Australia’s greatest archaeologist: the second Abercromby Professor received the invitation to take the Chair before he had even obtained a degree. Wessex born with a Welsh mother, prone to colourful waistcoats and small fast cars, an internationally renowned scholar before he reached 30, poet and painter and exquisite draftsman, Stuart taught his students to approach the study of the past like the present, from as wide a possible geographical as well as temporal basis; he held the outrageous opinion that a reading knowledge of at least two European languages other than English was essential to all arts disciplines. He also encouraged all his students to gain as much field experience as possible. Thus, in Denmark I shook hands with Grauballe Man (Glob 1969:chap. II) and learnt to ride a bicycle but literally lost the hand of the chief telephone operator on the Baltic Island of Bornholm—but that is another story. Stuart Piggott also first fired in me a desire to study the elusive, allusive art of the European Iron Age, conventionally called ‘early Celtic art’, a study which I still, with Ruth, my historian wife’s help, pursue. One undergraduate claim to fame was the correct identification of a gold ring displayed upside down in the Victoria and Albert Museum and attributed not as a masterpiece of Iron Age craftsmanship, which it is, but as Mycenaean. And so was the Disney Style in early Celtic art born (Megaw 1966; 1970).

Prophetically, Stuart Piggott warned me against getting involved in discussions of the validity of belief in an ancient Celtic culture and the danger of entering what James Joyce in his description of Butt in Finnegans Wake called ‘the celtic twaddlight’ (FW 344.12). Such arguments centre on the nature of ethnicity, modern perceptions of the past and the manner in which ideas of identity can be shown to be variable constructs. And Piggott was right; these are debates which have lately taken too much time out of our working lives (Megaw and Megaw 1999; Carr and Stoddart 2002:5–50).

During my undergraduate years, the Edinburgh Department excavated the Neolithic long barrow of West Kennet near Stonehenge (Piggott 1962). And—mindful of current susceptibilities concerning disturbing the ancient dead—we had no compunction in removing and studying the burials contained therein. And over three seasons we were also digging at Stonehenge itself while some of the great uprights carved from local sarsen were once more set upright (Cleal et al. 1995). Indeed I can say that I have been at Stonehenge every hour of the day and night; for two weeks I was responsible for preparing a contour survey of the site following in the footsteps of Flanders Petrie, the first accurately to plan Stonehenge. At dawn on Midsummer’s Day we got to see the descendants of the first Bards of the Isle of Britain, that product of misinformed romanticism and incipient Celtic nationalism launched on Primrose Hill in North London in 1792 by that arch-forgery and Welsh patriot, Iolo Morganwg, Iolo of Glamorgan, aided and abetted by David Samwell, ‘Dafydd Ddu Feddyg’, ‘Black Dave the Doctor’, ship’s surgeon on HMS Resolution during James Cook’s third and final fatal voyage of discovery. Today, the Arch Druid wears robes and accoutrements which once more are largely a nineteenth century invention.

In 1990 the late Rhys Jones, himself a Bard of the Gorsedd, wrote an article entitled - in translation from the Welsh - “A British Aboriginal’s land claim to Stonehenge” (Jones 1990). Stonehenge, the ancient monument which attracts more visitors than any other site in State ownership with the exception of the Tower of London, now stands a monument to nothing more than a half-century of official procrastination and misplaced priorities on the part of successive governments. There is of course absolutely no evidence that the Druids, that priestly class of successive governments. There is of course absolutely no evidence that the Druids, that priestly class of the British, had anything to do with the 4500-year-old Stonehenge. But before one scoffs too much at the Druids, it is salutary to think how meaningful to Indigenous South Australians are the current protocols of - for example - the Kaurna on whose land Flinders University now stands. Contemporary Kaurna customs and, even more, Kaurna language are largely modern artefacts - but who would deny their importance in assisting the rebirth of a largely lost sense of identity?

“Archaeology is sexy: what we want is more blood, more death, more war” thus in 1958 enthused to me the managing director of one of New York’s most successful publishing houses. As a fledgling editor at Thames and Hudson, a job for which I was interviewed at Stonehenge by Walter Neurath, Stuart Piggott and Glyn Daniel, I was the researcher and (self-styled) Archaeological Assistant for one of the first great ventures in copublication, a volume entitled, in homage to Gordon Childe, The Dawn of Civilization (Piggott 1961) - such was the demand that there was even an Icelandic edition. Not only did I learn much about the nuts and bolts of publishing and book production but I was working with some of the great archaeologists of the day - in addition to Stuart Piggott, and Max Mallowan, amongst others Graham Clark: Sir Mortimer Wheeler, a kind of pre-Indiana Jones Indiana Jones; Geoffrey Bushnell, the Peruvian expert: and the Sinologist William Watson - while in the background as a young archaeological migrant. In my case, however.

There followed other voyages to Central Europe - Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria and, though only much later, Poland. Though Western Europe was not neglected, maybe there was some reason for ASIO having maintained a file on me - or so one of my former Sydney students was kind enough to inform me. In New South Wales, as with all the handful of university archaeologists who then existed, irrespective of actual job description, I was fascinated by what was not so much terra nullius but rather terra incognita. I was receiving Federal funding - and use of a Commonwealth Land Rover - from the nascent Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to undertake field-work in the South Sydney region. The Institute’s founding Director was Fred McCarthy, former Curator of Anthropology at the Australian Museum and generous to a fault towards us brash young archaeological migrants. In my case, however, such work had to be carried out only at weekends and as annual leave since I was expressly forbidden by the Professor of Archaeology at Sydney to include it in my official duties which after all stipulated only European prehistory - times change. In an idyllic spot in the Royal National Park, scene of the recent disastrous fires, I was excavating evidence for the ancestors of those whose presence was recorded in 1796 by a enthusiastic young Naval Lieutenant, Matthew Flinders, his friend George Bass and the Boy Martin, Flinders comments how he and his companions ‘saw recent marks of natives everywhere but none of the natives themselves’ (Megaw 1974:1-12).

My last investigations of Indigenous sites - alas, still not adequately published - were also in an area of historic cultural contact. This was at Kurnell on the shores of what is now Botany Bay National Park where James Cook recorded his and Joseph Banks’ first encounter with the ‘natives’ on 29th April 1770. Between 1968 and 1972 with the cooperation of Ron Lampert and Martin Williams, then of the University of New South Wales and now at the University of Adelaide, we carried out a series of excavations aimed at revealing material evidence of this fatal event. Radiocarbon dating of the base of what turned out to be an extensive midden and evidence of exploitation of both the terrestrial and marine environment supported the interpretation that the midden would have been contemporary with the events of 1770. This view was backed up by fragments of early bottle-glass, a hand-made iron nail and a bone button mould which would have formed the base for the cloth covered buttons as seen on the dress uniform worn by James Cook in John Webber’s famous portrait, now in the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra. The ‘60s were indeed the years of innocence or.

Watamolla Lagoon, Royal National Park, NSW. Site W1J from the west. Photo: J.V.S.Megaw.

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in Rhys Jones’ less kind phrase, the years of cowboy archaeology. Certainly I had little or no contact then with living Indigenous Australians and the one keen Indigenous student I did get to know had other priorities on his mind. His name – Charles Perkins.

By 1972 we were in the East Midlands and I was residing in the Attenborough Tower, named after the first Principal of the then Leicester University College, father of Richard, David and John – the Attenborough one never hears of, John, used to run a very successful automobile concession in Leicester. I intend to say little of our decade in Leicester, though not because we shared the views of my predecessor, the foundation Professor of Archaeology, that the only thing that is good about Leicester is the speed with which one can leave it. No, on the contrary, as a family we loved touring the villages – and the pubs – of the region and made the most of Leicester’s famous covered market and the contiguity with the large Gujarati population, mostly refugees from Idi Amin’s Uganda. I spent much time making music in and around the delightful village churches of the East Midlands. With my Dutch biases and connections I set up with the lnstuwit voor Prehistorie of Leiden University a series of reciprocal field excursions that lasted until the exchange rate between the UK and the Netherlands got the better of us. I’m glad to say the continuing student exchange between the Leicester and Flinders Departments has fared better. But Leicester, with Ruth commuting as Head of American Studies to Northampton’s Nene College, didn’t seem particularly to suit our son and, I guess, in some ways nor did it suit me either. And in the late ’70s the storm clouds which heralded the severe crises which were to affect United Kingdom Universities were perilously close. I started thinking of returning to Australia just as the same clouds changed course and headed for the Antipodes.

I have already hinted at the continuing opposition between archaeology and development. It was one such developmental threat that heralded the beginning of archaeology as an academic discipline in South Australia. I had been lured to Flinders from Leicester in 1978 by an old friend and former colleague, Donald Brook, Flinders’ first and alas, probably last Professor of Visual Art. My brief was to introduce teaching and research in prehistoric and ethnographic art. One reason for succumbing to temptation was, frankly, as a European prehistorian, I have paradoxically always found it easier to obtain research funding and the time to carry out work on the Iron Age Cells here in Australia than in Britain. It is from our Adelaide base and using our own library resources – evidence if evidence is needed of my suffering from long-term and incurable bibliomania – that for the last 20 years we have been able to study at first hand and publish such major pieces of early Celtic art as the remarkable Basse-Yutz find made in Lorraine in 1927 but ever since then to be found in the British Museum (Megaw and Megaw 1990), and the stone head – is he god or hero? – discovered by chance in World War II outside a ditched Iron Age settlement enclosure at Mšecké Žehrovice not far from Prague (Megaw and Megaw 1998). It is with the aid of major ARC grants that, together with my former colleagues at Leicester plus Thomas Stöllner, Head of Research at the German Mining Museum and a former Visiting Research Fellow here at Flinders, that I have been able to spend more than six seasons working in Sound-of-Music Land – or, more precisely, at the Iron Age salt-working complex on the Dürnberg just south of Salzburg with its unparalleled below-ground preservation and the wealth of superb craftsmanship evidenced in the grave goods of the contemporary burial places (Stöllner et al. 2003).
position which in some ways it still holds; witness the continuing stability of the South Australian Museum to appoint an archaeologist to its staff. But in 1982 there were in fact no archaeologists in tertiary positions in South Australia designated as such. However, in the person of Frank Sear, then Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Adelaide and now Professor of Classical Studies at the University of Melbourne I found a fellow enthusiast for the concept of a cross-institutional programme making use of available in-house expertise. Thus it was in 1983 on my 49th birthday I found myself together with two experts in Roman archaeology, a specialist in Bronze Age Cyprus, a historian of vernacular architecture and Justin McCarthy, now Director of Austral Archaeology, one of Australia’s foremost independent groups specialising in contract archaeology, and Marilyn Truscott, then of the Australian Heritage Commission whom I had taught in Sydney, as well as sundry local students, feverishly excavating the remains of a nineteenth-century drying house. Twenty years later one partial product of this work was a Flinders PhD thesis by Susan Piddock. A space of their own: 19th century lunatic asylums in England, South Australia and Tasmania, as much a pioneering study in land-based social archaeology as that recently published by my colleague Mark Stanforth (2005) is a model of the wedding of the methodology of maritime archaeology and economic history. The three weeks spent on the Destitute Asylum site provided South Australia’s first experience of urban archaeology. It was brought on by the first stage of construction of the new South Australian Museum complex; ironically in this case being the site of the State Centre for Conservation of Cultural Material – better known today as ArtLab (Megaw 1986). Sic transit archaeological... Lest anyone should wonder what I have actually achieved at Flinders, what I might lay claim to on the plus side, with one exception, these have been matters which, in the delicious Scottish academic usage, have been strictly outwith my formal remit. Following my experience at Leicester where I introduced Archaeology degrees in Science as well as in Arts, I discovered that, while it seemed impossible to make minor changes to an existing degree structure, the introduction of a unique Bachelor of Archaeology syllabus only took a little longer, leading in turn in 1999 to the creation of the independent Department of Archaeology. The down-side to this near-achievement of my professional dream – a joint development of Visual Arts and Archaeology – eventually led in 1996 to the virtual death of Visual Arts at Flinders, a personal disappointment and a major administrative and academic error which has robbed South Australia of the chance to develop full time academic study in the field.

Another plus was born of ignorance. My given task when I arrived at Flinders was to introduce the study of Indigenous art, a subject about which actually I knew very little. However, with the aid of the then Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council, I decided to enlist the services of those who did know. Thus I initiated a series of residencies for Aboriginal artists through which, with the aid of Brian Callen, then Manager of the Visual Arts studio, we could learn from the people who really knew, the artists themselves (Megaw and Megaw 1999). The history of the building up of the Indigenous holdings of the Flinders Art Museum, in the early ‘80s largely a collection of Old Master prints and post-object art works, may be found in another place (Megaw and Megaw 2003). Assisted by a succession of enthusiastic - and often highly critical - students and research assistants with Ruth, now as exhibition curator and catalogue writer, re-inventing herself for the fourth time thanks to her husband’s inability ever to stay in any one place and with virtually no professional museum support, we put on what seems now an impossibly ambitious public programme of exhibitions. To mention but three: Dot and Cynthia in 1985, was the first attempt at a retrospective of the acrylic paintings of Central Australia and was opened at RMIT by the then Australian of the Year and now Visiting Professor at Flinders, Lowitja O’Donoghue (Maughan, Zimmerman and Megaw 1986). The Dreamtime Today in 1986 was a sesquicentennial survey of contemporary Aboriginal Arts and Crafts assisted by a $25,000 purchase grant made through John Moriarty, at the time Director of the State Office of Aboriginal Affairs (Maughan and Megaw 1986), while in 1991 the major touring exhibition The Heritage of Nangujarra was developed in conjunction with John Keen, then Visual Arts Co-ordinator at Tandanya (Megaw, M.R. 1991; Hardy, Megaw and Megaw 1986). It was John Keen who, when he was at Papunya in the late ’70s, was instrumental in bringing our first Indigenous artists to Flinders.

The past decade has seen the professionalisation of the Art Museum grow with successive Directors – Louise Dauth, Doreen Mellor, an Indigenous Australian whom we head-hunted from Tandanya, and, most recently Gall Greenwood – each making their own very personal contribution. From the seemingly continuing and exponential growth of the exhibition programme now centred on the City Gallery, accommodated within the State Library of South Australia on North Terrace. I will only pick one, the University’s main contribution to Encounter 2002. While I can claim absolutely no credit, this allowed me to re-visit yet again my hero, Matthew Flinders, this time when, between 1803 and 1810 he was prisoner on the Ile de France – present-day Mauritius. Elizabeth Gernsaks’ exhibition The Lost Letters of Ann Chappelle Flinders (Gernsaks 2002) for which she was author, artist and designer paid due acknowledgement to Flinders the...
Certainly, I may add this to my valued association with and fostering of campus music making, notably the University’s regular lunch-time concerts which is something I began totally selfishly when I found that my arrival at Flinders coincided with the dying days of formal music (or rather musicology) teaching.

In addition, I am sometimes asked – I cannot tell a lie, someone once asked me – if I had ever received any particular compliment or honour during my time at Flinders. Well, that at least is an easy one. Certainly, I have appreciated the honour of having been elected to Fellowship of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1985 and having had conferred upon me the degree of Doctor of Letters in 1992 by my alma mater, Edinburgh. Nor need I refer to the Commonwealth Centenary Medal which I am naturally delighted to share with only 1376 other South Australians. No, truly of greater personal value is the memory of one evening in 2001 when, during a ceremony in the Art Museum, and suitably attired, I received the singular distinction of being granted the first honorary life membership of the Flinders University Archaeological Society. As I said at the time and I meant it, it is one thing to

obtain accolades from one’s colleagues, but to be thus honoured by one’s students, that indeed is an honour. ...

I started on a sombre note and I shall raise as a final topic, one which could hardly be more topical. Here we traverse another often depressing, storm-tossed area that links past and present. I refer to the much disputed and related questions as to who owns the past and whose past is it anyway (McBryde 1985; Megaw and Megaw 1991; Greenfield 1996). First, just to point out that in terms of threats to our institutions nature can be as red in tooth and claw as any military invasion as the recent fires in Canberra have reminded us. On 14 August 2002 flooding in Central Europe resulted in the level of the Vltava rising some 2.8m as it flowed through the centre of Prague. The Archaeological Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences is located in an eighteen-century heritage listed building in the Malá Strana district below Prague Castle. The Library was established more than a century ago and only shortly before the floods had moved to the ground floor as a structural report indicated there was too much stress on the fabric in its previous location on the first floor of the Institute. Up to 80% of its book stock has now been lost and the situation with the monuments and sites records and the photo archives is just as serious. But how do you gauge such cultural crises against those caused by famine and political and religious unrest? It seems easier to focus on problems affecting the portable relics of the past.

Many will have read, heard or seen news of the return to the Coorong from anatomical collections in Edinburgh University, Cambridge and London, of skeletal remains of the Ngarrindjeri. This is simply the latest of a series of restitutions to indigenous peoples in many parts of the world, a programme incidentally where our own South Australian Museum has, if not a perfect, then as good a record as any in the Commonwealth. But there does remain for archaeologists the concern that lack of access to human remains may prevent important research into related aspects of diet, health and physical development some of which is being carried out by my colleagues and which may be of major value and not just to Indigenous Australians. The clue here to this seeming impasse is continual cooperation with the Indigenous community – and the training of Indigenous archaeologists, of which there are still too few.

Looking at a series of newspaper cuttings and websites from the past month’s press reminds me of a topic which

\[\text{JVM suitably attired in Austrian miner’s helmet and Edinburgh University DLitt gown on the occasion of his receiving the first life membership of the Flinders University Archaeological Society, June 2001. Photo: Multimedia Services, Flinders University Library.}\]

\[\text{Coorong, South Australia. Smoking ceremony in 2003 during the return from the United Kingdom of the remains of some 300 Ngarrindjeri people. Photo: Lindsay Mollar © News Ltd.}\]

\[\text{While this number of AA was in press, the Editors learnt in the Queen’s Birthday 2004 Honours List that Vincent Megaw has been made a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia ‘for services to archaeology and art history as an educator, researcher and writer’; Vincent joins the handful of Australian archaeologists to have been so honoured.}\]
has resulted in more media cover than any other event involving archaeology that I can think of. The subject I refer to is of course the looting – destruction is a more accurate word – of not just the Baghdad Museum but the National Library and Archives, not to mention other museums and sites in Iraq. Evidence is mounting to support claims that this was not just a mob reaction to the collapse of the former Socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe (Gamboni 1997: chap. 3). While one is drawn inevitably to images of US forces ‘liberating’ in 1945 Hermann Goering’s massive loot from the tomb robbers of ancient Egypt; the havoc one might go on to use Flinders Petrie’s description, is this just one of many ‘ghastly charnel houses of murdered evidence’?
John Betjeman, to see if he would consider offering something for the occasion which the then Poet Laureate kindly agreed so to do (Megaw 1976:11; Daniel 1976:180-181). Flinders too has its poet laureate who previously provided my Flinders Inaugural with its closing stanzas, written when in 1992 I was convalescing kindly agreed so to do (Megaw 1976: 11; Daniel Shoe/ess 1996). Of the moon’s gravitational pull of wetness, dryness; of passion integral; of the moon’s gravitational pull magnetically doing the colour-in bits of these Clifford Possums in dry sand).

Does that signify he’s not immortal? Or is this just one more fudging foolish question that disguises the true presence of spies in our dreams where tears and laughter swap places, like twins in the renaissance bard’s ingenious comic-sumptuous plot?

Our questioner walks, toes dug in, upright to the end of the strand. A froth of guIlIs and paddling ampersand footprints, & this phosphorescent tug and incandescent sigh that disguises the true presence of spies in our dreams where tears and laughter swap places, like twins in the renaissance bard’s ingenious comic-sumptuous plot?

The way ahead… Street sign in Victoria. Photo: Andrew Hollitt.

References


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