

RESEARCH

Museum Victoria is responsible for the maintenance of a vast collection of approximately 16 million items. The collection is developed through research and acquisition, and accessed by scholars and communities.

During the year, the Museum focused on identifying future directions and strategies for both research and the ongoing development and management of the collections. Access to collections was enhanced through the development of online projects, and support was given through the production of exhibitions and multimedia.

A Research Strategy was approved by the Museums Board in September 2001 and sets out the existing strengths and future directions for research in the Museum. Museum Victoria is seeking to expand its research capacity by building on its existing research partnerships with key universities and research institutions, increasing the level of research grants awarded to the Museum, and by increasing Museum Victoria's involvement in undergraduate and postgraduate education.

A research and collections website detailing the Museum's research programs and current projects was developed. The site is due to be rolled out with the new Museum Victoria website in August 2002.

The Collection Working Group developed a Collection Development and Management Policy and a Collection Deaccession Policy in May 2002, and continued work on Collection Development and Management Strategies for implementation in late 2002.

Research Highlights:

- Museum Victoria was successful in attracting external funding for 17 research projects, plus another 10 collaborative research projects administered by other institutions (details listed in Appendix).
- Museum staff were involved in the organisation of four major conferences that attracted Australian and international visitors to Melbourne: Centenary Anniversary Symposium: A Celebration of Anthropologist Donald Thomson; 5th International Crustacean Conference; Joint Conference of the Society of Australian Systematic Biologists and the Australasian Evolution Society; and Challenging Histories: Reflections on Australian History.
- The 2002 Thomas Ramsay Science and Humanities Fellowship was awarded to Mr John Gertsakis, whose project, *'Innovating with Water'*, includes an investigation of the social, cultural, technological and ecological aspects of water use in Victoria.
- The 2001 Crosbie Morison Memorial Lecture was presented by Dr Steve Morton, Chief of the CSIRO Division of Sustainable Ecosystems. Dr Morton's lecture, *'Encounters with Nature'*, focused on Australia's biodiversity and ecology.

Graduate and Postgraduate Student Supervision Highlights:

- Six honours and 21 postgraduate students were supervised by Museum Victoria staff (details listed in Appendix).
- Funding for two PhD fellowships was obtained by the University of Melbourne, with top-up funds from the Museum. The studentships will be overseen by the University and the Museum for projects involving the Australian Children's Folklore Collection and innovation in Australian agriculture.

Publications Highlights:

- Over 80 papers, reports, books and theses were produced, and 106 lectures and talks were presented (details listed in Appendix).
- Staff members contributed specialist chapters to two major publications: *A Museum for the People: a History of Museum Victoria and its Predecessors 1854–2000* and *Forests of Ash: an Environmental History*.
- The 2001 Thomas Ramsay Science and Humanities Fellow, Mr Gary Presland, completed a manuscript on *A Guide to the Collections of Museum Victoria*.
- The *Memoirs of Museum Victoria*, Volume 59(1), was produced, featuring a monograph on a cumacean group of marine crustaceans.

Blue and white crockery recovered from the Little Lonsdale Street excavation.



AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY AND TECHNOLOGY

The Museum through the Australian Society and Technology Department aims to improve our understanding of Australian and Victorian history and the relationships between technology and society.

Highlights:

- Content was developed for a range of public programs, including *Espresso Comes to Melbourne*, a temporary display at Melbourne Museum of espresso machines and related items that illustrate Melbourne's long coffee history.
- Staff contributed to an exhibition located on the mezzanine level of the Royal Exhibition Building entitled *Royal Exhibition Building: First 21 Years: World's Fairs to Federation*, which includes significant objects from the opening of the first Federal Parliament in 1901.
- The Museum was commissioned by the Trustees of the Shrine of Remembrance to complete a curatorial brief on the history and contemporary significance of the Shrine for its new Interpretation Centre. The project will be completed by early 2003.
- Watches and clocks from the Museum collection were used to supplement the touring exhibition *Clockwise* at Scienceworks, and four letters (G, H, I and J) of the popular ongoing exhibition program *A-Z of Collecting* was also undertaken at Scienceworks.
- Research efforts were primarily linked to public program requirements, including research on a new exhibition at the Immigration Museum on the history of immigration policy in Australia (due to open in December 2002), and a major travelling exhibition being developed on the history of travelling tent boxing shows. A monthly seminar series was presented on history and material culture, the *History and the Meaning of Things*, commencing in May. The series provides an opportunity for students, academics and museum professionals to discuss material culture as historic source material. Undergraduate and graduate students are being actively encouraged to undertake research on the collections, and two PhD fellowships have been jointly funded with the University of Melbourne.
- Several online projects were completed, including *A History of Museum Victoria* to accompany the recent book published on the Museum's history, and *Imagining Australia, 1914 – 1918*, based on collection material relating to the experiences of Australians at home and overseas during the First World War. Online content that supplements the historical exhibitions at Melbourne Museum has also been produced for the Museum website.
- Significant acquisitions included the Frodsham Regulator Clock No. 1062, one of the most important scientific clocks used by the Melbourne Observatory in the 19th century. Its purchase was assisted by a grant from the Commonwealth Government's National Heritage Account and contributions from the Royal Botanic Gardens and from the Museum's Askew Bequest. A 19th century Fergusson and Urie stained-glass window from a house in Kooyong was also acquired as a donation through the Cultural Gifts Program.
- Components of the Australian Society collections were relocated from the Moreland Annexe to new storage facilities at Melbourne Museum, and curatorial staff now have ready access to these collections for the first time in many years.
- The Cowley Steam Traction Engine acquired by Museum Victoria in 1985 has undergone a 10-year restoration project. It has been returned to a working condition and appearance similar to that of its prime years, around 1920. Twenty-one volunteers at the Scienceworks Engineering Workshop helped restore the engine, contributing approximately 5,000 hours in total.
- Information on the Numismatics collection is now available through KE EMu™, and this represents the first of the cultural collection databases to be transferred to the new electronic collection management system. Documentation and image capture of the Greek coin collection continued as part of an international project, the *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*, to catalogue major collections of Greek coins.

Advisory Committee

- Dr Kate Darian-Smith, The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne.
- Professor Graeme Davison, Department of History, Monash University.
- Professor Peter Thorne, Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering, University of Melbourne.
- Dr David Turnbull, School of Humanities, Deakin University.

INDIGENOUS CULTURES

Museum Victoria aims to work with indigenous peoples in Australia and the South Pacific to improve our understanding of indigenous peoples and cultures.

Highlights:

- The Museum, together with the University of Melbourne and the School of Anthropology and Archaeology at the Australian National University, hosted the *Centenary Anniversary Symposium: a Celebration of Anthropologist Donald Thomson*. Twenty-three papers celebrating the life and work of Donald Thomson, including his biological and environmental interests and his contribution to Aboriginal policy and social justice issues, were presented by local, interstate and overseas academics. The symposium proceedings are due for publication in 2003.
- The Museum toured the exhibition *Thookay Ngaweeyan, Young Voices of Victoria: Aboriginal Children's Art from the Collections of Museum Victoria*, and produced an accompanying exhibition catalogue. The exhibition was installed at two Aboriginal community centres and at regional galleries throughout Victoria and interstate. The exhibition will be shown at Melbourne Museum at the completion of its regional tour in late-2003. The Museum also contributed collection objects to two touring exhibitions, *Bush Colour* and *Art on a String*, and provided photographs for the installation of *Reversing the Negatives* by Ricky Maynard at Gasworks Sculpture Park, Port Melbourne. It was also heavily involved in the touring exhibition, *Spirit Country*, and contributed several works from the Museum's own collections. The exhibition also featured the first ground painting to be completed in Melbourne, commissioned from Warlukarlangu Aboriginal Artists Association at Yuendumu, NT.

- Major acquisitions during the year included the *Spirit Country* collection of contemporary Australian Aboriginal art (donated by the Myer and Gantner families), and the vividly painted *Bush Mechanics* car from the popular ABC TV series. The Christensen Fund donated a major collection of 328 objects from Africa and the Pacific that were previously on loan to the Museum. A large fibre mat from Ramininging, two bush footballs from Utopia and two limited-edition linocuts by Torres Strait Islanders were purchased.
- Research work on the art and culture of the Gulf of Papua was concluded and will be published in a monograph next year. New research projects have begun on the history of the Pintubi people, bark paintings in the Donald Thomson Collection from north-east Arnhem Land, and Aboriginal community organisations in Melbourne.
- Work continued on unpacking and organising indigenous collections previously relocated into Melbourne Museum, and further organisation of the collection stores at the Moreland Annexe.
- External access to the collections, information, photographic orders and outward loans continue to be in very high demand by family history researchers, academics and community organisations.

Repatriation

The Museum made major progress in the area of repatriation of ancestral remains and secret/sacred objects to Aboriginal communities, with funding assistance for the Return of Indigenous Cultural Property Program from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Ancestral remains were returned to a number of indigenous groups including the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, clans of Northwest Nations of Victoria, and the Riratjingu people of Arnhem Land. Approval was given for return of remains to Latje Latje/Wergaia/Robinvale people, Yorta Yorta people and Framlingham Gundjitmara-Kirrae Wurrung. A new Repatriation Policy is currently being developed.

Advisory Committees

The Museum continued to receive advice through three Committees:

- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee;
- Pacific Islands Advisory Group; and
- Donald Thomson Collection Administration Committee (in association with the University of Melbourne).



Bunjilaka Gallery,
Melbourne Museum.

SCIENCES

Museum Victoria aims to promote an understanding of the natural sciences, the human mind and body, and science communication.

Highlights:

- The Museum's established track record for innovative DNA-based research into the conservation, evolution and diversification of Australasian birds and mammals was expanded to include studies on reptiles, fishes, halictine bees, freshwater caddis flies and marine invertebrates (comprising crustaceans, polychaete worms, bryozoans and brittle-stars). Media attention was generated with the publication of research results that placed the lyrebird at the base of the songbird evolutionary tree, and demonstrated that Australia was the cradle of origin for the world's songbirds.
- An agreement with Amersham Biosciences Pty Ltd provided partial sponsorship for the acquisition of a MegaBACE DNA sequencer. This state-of-the-art technology considerably increases the research capacity of the Population and Evolutionary Genetics Unit, and will enhance the international competitiveness of the genetic research undertaken by the Museum. It will provide the capability for establishing an Ancient DNA laboratory that will be used to unlock genetic information contained within the Museum's vast collection of natural history specimens.
- A multi-institutional study mapping environments in the continental slope and pelagic marine waters of south-eastern Australia modelled on fish distributions was completed. Based on the results of the study, the National Oceans Office has committed to provide additional funding that will enable the project to be expanded to include the entire Australian coastline.

- Major fieldwork was undertaken including the collecting of reptiles in Kenya, insects in South Africa, marine invertebrates from the Weddell Sea in Antarctica and Raine Island on the Great Barrier Reef, freshwater insects from the Otway Ranges and woodland birds from New South Wales and Victoria. Exploration of dinosaur fossil sites in Alaska, China and Argentina was also undertaken. Specialist techniques for collecting invertebrates from the forest canopy were demonstrated to staff from the Tasmanian Forestry Department.
- Other significant research outcomes included the description of new forms of minerals and taxonomic revisions of marine invertebrates and fossil trilobites.
- Museum staff played a leading role in fast-tracking work on an Australia-wide project aimed at making natural history collection databases accessible over the internet. A total of 320,000 specimen records, comprising natural history-type material and Victorian mammals, were added to the Museum's *Bioinformatics* website.
- The first instalment of the important Marrow Collection of Marine Molluscs (over one million specimens) was acquired under the Cultural Gifts Program. A comprehensive collection of bird specimens from Christmas Island was also received. Other significant acquisitions included deep water fishes, a giant squid, a goblin shark, a neonate pilot whale and two strap-toothed whales from Australian seas. A rare 1.6-carat diamond crystal from Victoria was purchased along with the Richard Brew Collection of Victorian faceted gem minerals.

Advisory Committee

- Associate Professor Janet McCalman, Department of History & Philosophy of Science, and, Centre for the Study of Health & Society, University of Melbourne.

- Professor John McKenzie, Faculty of Science, University of Melbourne.
- Professor Fred Mendelsohn, Howard Florey Institute, University of Melbourne.
- Dr Gareth Nelson, School of Botany, University of Melbourne.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

Highlights:

- A 10-year project to relocate the Museum's collections from old stores to Scienceworks (since 1992), the Moreland Annexe (since 1996) and Melbourne Museum (the past three years) was concluded with the transfer of parts of the Australian Society and Technology collection from the Moreland Annexe to Melbourne Museum in November. The process has also involved decommissioning three major sites as Museum Victoria collection storage repositories.
- Reconfiguration of the main storage area at the Moreland Annexe was initiated in order to extend the Museum's short- to mid-term capacity to store large collection items. This project will be completed by end-2002. A Cool Store facility was installed at the Moreland Annexe to house photographic and film material in a low temperature and humidity environment.
- Collections staff managed two major changeovers of collection material for Melbourne Museum's permanent exhibitions, as well as managing the collection elements for all temporary exhibitions across the Museum's three exhibiting campuses, including *Gold and Civilisation*, *The Italians* and *Spirit Country*.
- Museum Victoria has lent 17 major aeronautical items including three aeroplanes, six engines, a rocket and a satellite to the Australian Museum of Flight in Nowra, NSW. These objects will form a central part of a new display, and the loan represents a significant partnership between the two museums.



Diane Bray with shark jaw.



Detail of eggs various sizes.

- A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Arts Victoria to manage a public loan program for the 2001 Federation Handbells for the next 12 months.

Collection Information Systems

An analysis of extant collection databases was completed, enabling the Museum to review and refine its Implementation Plan for KE EMu™. Four collection databases are now operating in KE EMu™, and another 41 will be transferred into KE EMu™ over the next three years.

The Numismatics database is now operating in KE EMu™, while ten other databases were prepared to different stages for transfer into KE EMu™ in the next year.

The Museum also worked with KE Software Pty Ltd to design tabs in KE EMu™ to accommodate the needs of 17 Image, Sound and Document collection databases. Metadata tabs were also developed in accordance with the Dublin Core Metadata standards, to enable a more effective means of managing information delivered to the World Wide Web.

The Museum enhanced data and images in the Multimedia Repository of KE EMu™ for Vertebrate Palaeontology, Invertebrate Palaeontology, Geology, Numismatics and Indigenous Cultures collections. Other discrete projects to be loaded onto the Multimedia Repository included Greek Coins, Victorian Volcanoes, Gold Nuggets and Fijian images, the latter three in preparation for World Wide Web projects.

The Collection Inventory System (CIS), developed by the Museum for compatibility with KE EMu™, its new electronic collection management system, moved from development to implementation. CIS involves the 'real time' management of collection locations in the building and

external stores, using hand-held radio devices. A total of 24,000 items were captured on the system in 2001/2002, representing a significant proportion of the Australian Society and Technology collection at Melbourne Museum and the Moreland Annexe. It is planned to roll out the system at Scienceworks in the forthcoming year.

CONSERVATION

Highlights:

- A pilot risk analysis project was carried out on part of the Australian Society and Technology collection. The project tested the suitability of a risk analysis methodology as a means of identifying risks posed to collections and determining priorities for preventive and remedial conservation programs to minimise those risks. The pilot program is also being tested in Natural Sciences and Indigenous Cultures collections to determine its application across other collecting disciplines.
- The Integrated Pest Management Program continued to demonstrate its preventative effectiveness through freezing of incoming collection material and applying periodic detection schedules across the Museum's collection stores. Very few outbreaks of pest infestation were detected, and all of these incidences were immediately and effectively contained.
- Intensive conservation work was applied to the documentation, treatment and preparation of works from the *Spirit Country* collection to prepare for its touring itinerary, and to addressing the conservation requirements of *The Italians* and *The Palestinians: Portraits Without Names* exhibitions.
- The rehousing and treatment of some 600 bark paintings from the Indigenous Cultures Collection continued, with a further 45 items replaced into standardised archival boxes.

PRODUCTION

Highlights:

- Significant projects included the articulation and repair of *Megalania*, *Genyornis* and *Diprotodon* skeletons for a new Melbourne Museum exhibit on Australian megafauna, the retrieval and preparation of two rare Strap-toothed Whale skeletons and the provision of taxidermy training for staff from the Australian Museum.
- In the area of Media Production and Copyright, approximately 700 Greek coins were digitally captured for publication; 600 secret/sacred objects were photographed, scanned and digitally printed for the Central Australia repatriation project; and some 1,500 negatives from the Seeger Collection were scanned under supervision for the Indigenous Cultures Department.
- With Image Management, work was completed for various publications, such as Education Kits, *Museum Victoria* magazine and *A Museum for the People: a History of Museum Victoria and its Predecessors 1854 – 2000*.
- Production on a number of major projects was completed, including the Royal Exhibition *Building: First 21 Years: World's Fairs to Federation* exhibition, the *Raincheck 3000* interactive multimedia exhibit, and a new interpretive centre at the Melbourne Water Eastern Treatment Plant. Production on the Melbourne Planetarium shows *Launch Pad: Tycho Stars Again* and *Guiding Lights: Navigating by the Stars* were completed.
- Bi-monthly production of the Museum Victoria Highlights Video was completed, providing a snapshot view of the activities occurring at all campuses of the institution. The videos were shown to staff, the Museums Board and Arts Victoria, and are available to view on the Museum intranet.



Detail of specimen box containing minerals.

Museum Victoria staff member Jane Melville.

Philip Batty

Senior Curator, Central Australia
Indigenous Cultures Program



As a Senior Curator within the Indigenous Cultures Program, I am involved in the repatriation of secret/sacred objects, the development of exhibitions, research, the publication of articles and books, field trips to Central Australia, the acquisition of objects for the collection, ethnographic film and photographic projects and a number of other related activities.

It always amazes me that I'm actually paid to do all these interesting things - in fact - it's a privilege.

