THE AUSTRALIANA SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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THE AUSTRALIANA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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The Australiana Society
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1. CONTENTS

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SYDNEY. N.S.W. 2007

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2. MEETINGS.

NEXT MEETING

Date: Thursday, 8th February, 1979, at 8.00 p.m.

Place: David Cloonan Antiques, 38 Neild Ave, Rushcutters Bay, NSW.

Speaker: Mrs Marjorie Graham

Subject: "Australian ceramics"

Marjorie Graham and her husband Don are well-known collectors of English and Australian ceramics. Marjorie is an Honorary Associate of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. She has contributed numerous articles to such publications as *Country Life* and the *Australasian Antique Collector,* has just published an Australian Society for Historical Archaeology Monograph entitled *Printed Ceramics in Australia,* and is currently preparing a book on Australian pottery, to be published by the David Ell Press (12 Mark St, Hunters Hill 2110) about the middle of 1979. Please bring along any interesting pieces of Australian pottery.

NEXT OUTING

Date: Sunday, 4th March, 1979

Place: Eskbank House, Bennett St, Lithgow, N.S.W.

Eskbank House is the headquarters of the Lithgow District Historical Society. The house was built in 1842 by Thomas Brown, the man who first established the coal industry in Lithgow, and given to the City of Lithgow by the late Eric Bracey. Four of the rooms have been set up as 19th century period rooms, while the rear courtyard has been enclosed and set up as a museum. Outbuildings in the extensive grounds contain more museum material. Eskbank House has a large collection of Lithgow pottery, which includes many unusual and rare pieces. Miss Margaret Klam, Librarian at the Lithgow Technical College and an expert on the factory and its production, will be on hand to talk about the pottery. Please contact the Secretary if you wish to go.

3. NOTES AND NEWS

MEMBERSHIP

The Secretary reports that membership now stands at over forty, which is quite gratifying at this stage. However, most members are professionals and dealers, and we would like to see more private collectors join, to balance the other groups.

SEMINAR ON HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

From the evening of Friday, 23rd March until the afternoon on Sunday, 25th March, the National Trust will be running a residential seminar on the theme "*Archaeological Sites in Australia — their significance, identification, recording and assessment*". The seminar is being held in Goulburn at the Goulburn College of Advanced Education.

The programme includes lectures by Dr Jim Allen (A.N.U.) Professor John Mulvaney (A.N.U.), Dr Dennis Jeans (University of Sydney), Clive Lucas and others, as well as field trips to sites in the Goulburn area. Chairman of the conference is Judy Birmingham, Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Sydney, and Chairman of the National Trust (N.S.W.) Committee on Industrial Archaeology. Brochures on the conference are available from the National Trust Centre, Sydney (phone 02-27 5374).

SUMMER SCHOOL "HISTORIC BUILDINGS OF SOUTHERN TASMANIA"

This is an Adult Education Summer School, directed by George Burrows, to run from 15th-22nd January at Christ College, Hobart. Excursions will be run in and around Hobart, Bothwell, Pontville, Kempton, Richmond, Port Arthur and Saltwater River. The course fee, which includes accommodation and meals, is $185.

For further information, write to:

Adult Education Summer Schools
P.O. Box 84
North Hobart, Tas. 7002.

FUTURE EVENTS

Your Committee is in the process of putting together a calendar of meetings and events for 1979. Suggestions already put forward include talks on maritime artifacts by Vaughn Evans, and one on early Australian painters by Jocelyn Hackforth-Jones (author of *The Convict Artists*, published by Macmillan in 1977). An excursion to see the historic buildings of Parramattaa — the Lancer Barracks, Elizabeth Farm Cottage, Hambledon Cottage, and so on — is another possibility.

We also plan to have an occasional collectors' evening, for members to bring along interesting pieces.

Your ideas for outings and meetings are welcomed. We would like particularly to hear from anyone prepared to make their own collection the subject of a meeting.

PREMISES

The Society will soon be looking for new premises where we can hold meetings, as David Cloonan will be moving.

Any suggestions or offers of a meeting place would be most welcome. Please contact the Secretary, Andrew Simpson (02-33 3762).

CONTRIBUTIONS

More short articles and notes on aspects of Australiana — furniture, silver, architecture, painting, sculpture, numismatics, pottery, glass, memorabilia and so forth — are required to keep the Society and *Newsletter* alive.

Send your contributions to:

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Broadway NSW 2007
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THE DANNY DRAKE SALE

Highlights of the sale of the Drake Collection of Australiana, held at Geoff K. Gray in Sydney on 28th November were the record prices fetched for some of the pottery. The highest was that paid for a glazed Bendigo Pottery water filter, for which a Victorian private collector bid $1600; this makes it the most expensive piece of Australian pottery ever. A Lithgow bread plate also made a record for a piece of Lithgow pottery, being knocked down for $1000 to Jim Berry acting on behalf of the Shepparton Art Gallery in Victoria. Shepparton also acquired an early salt glazed stoneware ginger beer bottle with the impressed mark of early Sydney potter Jonathan Leak for $850.

In all, Shepparton bought about 30 pieces for around $12,000. Peter Timms, Director of the Shepparton Gallery has built up the Gallery's collection of Australian 20th century ceramics, and has, with the acquisitions from the Drake Collection, extended the collection back into the 19th century.

Shepparton's purchases were made possible with a grant from Caltex, and corporate support for the preservation of Australia's heritage for the public benefit is to be commended.

Much of the Drake collection seems to have gone to Victoria, to the Shepparton Gallery and to a private collector from Melbourne. Sydney collectors clearly refused to pay the prices which the Victorians set, and it is unlikely that these levels can be maintained by the market.

PLASTER RELIEF OF SIR REDMOND BARRY

Frank McDonald, of Thirty Victoria Street, Potts Point, 2011, has acquired a plaster relief of Sir Redmond Barry (1813-1880), prominent Victorian juror. The half life size relief was made by Margaret Thompson, a pupil of the British sculptor Charles Summers, and exhibited in Sydney in 1847. Frank will let you take it home for $800 (phone 02-357 3755).

ABORIGINAL ROCK ENGRAVING MUSEUM FOR SYDNEY

In 1978, the Aboriginal Arts Board made funds available for a feasibility study, administered through the University of Sydney's Macleay Museum, for the creation of an Aboriginal Rock Engraving Museum in the Sydney region.

The Sydney area, with its large flat expanses of Hawkesbury and Narrabeen sandstone, is one giant gallery of Aboriginal art. Already some five hundred sites have been recorded, most by dedicated anthropologists working at night using oblique artificial lighting, to show up the outline engravings. This art is in great danger of disappearing under the suburban sprawl, and as a result of vandalism and neglect — lately exacerbated by trail bike riders.

Dr Peter Stanbury, Curator of the Macleay Museum had the idea of preserving some of the best carvings by covering them with an environmentally sympathetic building, which would also have exhibition galleries, a theatre, and other Museum facilities. Like some of the Romano-British villas such as Fishbourne and Bignor, the site would be under cover, and visitors would be able to move around it by means of walkways.

Sites already examined by the committee investigating the proposal include Bantry Bay, Wheeler Heights and Maroota, all north of Sydney.

WEDGWOOD MEDALLION

Replicas of Wedgwood's buff jasper Sydney Cove medallion, produced in a limited edition of 500, are almost sold out. These are exact replicas of the original medal made by Josiah Wedgwood in Staffordshire from clay sent back to England by Governor Arthur Phillip. The medallions are available from Old Sydney Town, Somersby, N.S.W., 2250, for $42.00 including postage.

The Wedgwood Society, N.S.W. Chapter, has published a limited edition monograph on this topic. The book is $5.00 from the Secretary, Alan Landis, 167b Castlereagh Street, Sydney, N.S.W., 2000.

4. EXHIBITIONS

1. "*Sir William's Exhibition*" — a brilliantly conceived exhibition on Sir William Macleay's voyage to New Guinea in the *Chevert* — at Elizabeth Bay House, Onslow Avenue, Elizabeth Bay, 2011 (Tel. 02-358 2344).

2. "*Australian Pottery 1900-1950*", at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 18th January to 8th February, and the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 24th February to 25th March.

3. "*Australian Flora in Art*", at Banyule, 60 Buckingham Drive, Heidelberg, Victoria until 28th January, and the Wollongong Art Gallery from 5th February.

4. "*Frederick B. Menckens, Architect*" (Ervin Museum, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill, Sydney). Newcastle architect Brian Suters arranged this exhibition of the work of Menckens (1855-1910) who left Germany for Australia in 1876, and set up an architectural practice at Newcastle in 1882.

5. "*History and Restoration of St. James from 1819 to Today*" (St. James Church, King St, Sydney). Plans, photographs, graphics and artefacts illustrating the history of the Church, put together by Rosemary Annable (until February 3rd).

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS

1. 1879 Exhibition — the Centenary of the Sydney International Exhibition 1879 (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, organised by John Wade).

2. Gothick Furniture in N.S.W. (Elizabeth Bay House, Sydney, organised by the Curator, James Broadbent).

3. Sydney Unearthed, an exhibition on the archaeological excavation of Old Sydney (Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, organised by the Curator, Dr Peter Stanbury).

4. The Western Australian Museum will be mounting special displays to commemorate the sesquicentenary of European settlement in the state. We will have further details in forthcoming issues.

5. BOOK NOTICES

1. *Australian Colonial Architecture*, by Philip Cox and Clive Lucas, published by Lansdowne. Illustrated with more than 500 photographs, 280 pages, 30 by 25cm, hard covers, $45.

2. *Printed Ceramics in Australia*, by Marjorie Graham, published by the Australian Society for Historical Archaeology (ASHA Occasional Paper no. 2). Eight illustrations, 42 pages, offset 29.2 by 20.7cm, soft cover, $2.50 (from the Secretary, A.S.H.A., Department of Archaeology, University of Sydney, 2006).

3. *Historic Churches of Australia*, by Thomas Reed, published by Macmillan. 150 pages, $24.95.

4. *A Question of Polish. The Antique Market in Australia*, by Terry Ingram, published by Collins. Illustrated in colour and black and white, with a chapter devoted entirely to Australiana. Due in March, with a retail price of around $19.

5. The Library of Australian History, 17 Mitchell Street, North Sydney, NSW, 2060, has produced the following titles recently.

William Noah, *Voyage to Sydney in the Ship Hillsborough 1798-1799 and a Description of the Colony.*

John Windross and J.P. Ralston, *Historical Records of Newcastle 1797-1897.*

W.H. Shaw, *The Newcastle Directory and Almanac for 1880 and 1881.*

Augustus Earle/Robert Burford, *View and Description of the Town of Sydney, 1827.*

W & F Ford, *Sydney Directory 1851*

N.K. Macintosh, *Richard Johnson, Chaplain to the Colony of NSW.*

J.W. Waugh, *The Stranger's Guide to Sydney 1861.*

The titles and some back titles are available from the publishers, or from the National Trust bookshops in Sydney and Melbourne.

6. *Paddock Full of Houses. Paddington 1840-1890,* by Max Kelly, published by Doak Press (5 Heeley Street, Paddington, 2021). Soft cover, 208 pages, maps, many illustrations. The Macleay Museum is selling copies at the reduced price of $7.50.

7. *Sydney since the Twenties,* by Peter Spearritt, published by Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1978. About $11.

8. *Nineteenth Century Sydney,* a collection of papers by the Sydney History Group, published by Sydney University Press. Soft cover, 144 pages, about $6.

EXHIBITIONS AT THE STATE LIBRARY OF N.S.W.

As part of the Festival of Sydney, the State Library of N.S.W. has mounted three exhibitions open to the public. Gallery hours are Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm, Sunday 2pm to 6pm.

1. *Sir Joseph Banks 1743-1820.* Portraits, correspondence, prints, plant specimens, plans, books & mementoes (January to June).

2. *A Century of Portraits 1820-1920.* (January to June).

3. *Australian Photography.* Includes daguerrotypes, ambrotypes & stereoscopic views. Also early studio photographs of Aborigines, the half-built Harbour Bridge and the magnificent Garden Palace. (January only.)

STOP PRESS

Robert Hutchinson, our President, won the Colonial Gentleman of Fashion Award at Manly's Colonial Day, held at St. Patrick's College, Manly on Saturday, January 27th, 1979.

AUSTRALIANA & THE PRIVATE COLLECTOR

Kevin Fahy

The widespread public interest in Australiana is a relatively recent phenomenon that springs from a nostalgia for the past and an awakening national chauvinism. By definition it embraces a vast range of objects related to Australia both of local and overseas origin, the latter including items made especially for the local market or possessing local historical associations. Australiana in its broadest sense is all those tangible reminders of our collective past.

Until recently the reluctance of many collectors to appreciate the extent of their local scene has been due to a lack of awareness to our rich and varied heritage. This can be explained by its obvious rarity and insufficient documentation of its many facets which has resulted in its recognition by only a handful of collectors, dealers and institutions.

It is true that certain fields of Australiana have long been happy hunting grounds for the collector and are already well documented, to the extent that they have lost their challenge to the ordinary collector who has been completely priced out of the market by the wealthy collector and institution. Even today few have realized just how extensive is the world of Australiana. It is certainly not exhausted. The cup might no longer runneth over but there are still a few drops to attract the attention of the collector no matter the size of his purse.

Obsessed as we are with the pressures of supply and demand economics it should come as no surprise to discover that the awakening interest by collectors in Australiana, both serious and superficial, has led to a skyrocketing of prices for the good as well as the indifferent, the old as well as the not so old. They are only surpassed by the prices paid for more recent Australian art, which no one describes as Australiana, perhaps because artistry, parochial or otherwise, is considered to have triumphed over mere historic interest.

But the collecting of Australiana is nothing new. Eighteen years before the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788 and the beginnings of the European settlement of Australia, Lieutenant James Cook reached our shores. A member of his expedition was the naturalist Joseph Banks. Later known as Sir Joseph Banks, it is he who can lay claim to being its first serious collector.

It was Banks who first formulated the ideal of intelligent specialization for collectors. He realized that a collector who chose to pursue his hobby with discrimination might well perform a specific service to any one of several branches of knowledge. His advice to book collectors that they should renounce their former haphazard ways and specialise applies equally to all collectors. By confining their libraries (collecting) to one individual branch of human knowledge a great number of particular collections each complete in its kind could be brought forward for the purpose of instruction and avoid the situation of indiscriminate collecting which resulted in unnecessary competition, precluding the possibility of assembling a complete and useful collection.

Banks did not carry his principle to its ultimate conclusion of specialising within a speciality but he did apply it in his own case to the extent of limiting himself to the field of natural history collecting books, plants, specimens, drawings, etc. from a few selected parts of the world, particularly Australia and the South Seas. The age of "curiosity" collecting was now tempered by those that showed a certain amount of intelligent direction that give the collector both pleasure and a worthwhile objective, making his collection potentially useful to a much wider public.

Down through the years a long list of distinguished private collectors of Australiana entered the lists with personal interests as diverse as natural history, bibliography, aboriginal artefacts, numismatics, historical prints and pictures, and philately to mention some of the more obvious areas of their endeavours which often predated

public and institutional interest in them. Even if their purposes were different all were united by the common bond of their interest in and emphasis on Australiana, carrying Banks' principle of specialising within a speciality towards its ultimate conclusion.

Many of these major private collections have fortunately found their way into public ownership — such as those of Sir William Macleay, David Scott Mitchell, Sir William Dixson, Sir John Ferguson and Rex Nan Kivell. The public have much to be grateful for, to these collectors as well as to many others whose collections now rest in museums and institutions throughout the country. The reasons for their generosity are no doubt many and varied but they did realize that they were only temporary custodians of the objects they had assembled — a point many collectors often tend to overlook. Shrouds don't have pockets, and despite what the Pharoahs thought you can't take it with you.

The private collector of Australiana is in something of a quandary. Torn between the enrichment of the National Estate at the expense of his personal estate, what is he to do about the ultimate fate of his collection. To disperse a significant collection that has taken a lifetime to accumulate could be regarded by some as a national tragedy. Despite certain incentives by the government a more equitable method of public acquisition of worthwhile private collections remains to be devised. Often displaying a marked lack of faith in the quality of their collections, some collectors contive to control their collections from beyond the grave with bequests to one or other institution bound by stringent conditions often with disastrous results to everyone and everything concerned. Institutions do not always seek, nor do they want, whole collections. They are more likely to be interested in individual items from one collection to complete their own and avoid unnecessary duplication. The collector could be well advised to listen to the words of the French collector Edmond de Goncourt *"My wish is that my drawings, my prints, my curiosities, my books — in a word, these things of art which have been the joy of my life — shall not be consigned to the cold tomb*

of a museum, and subjected to the stupid glance of the careless passer by, but require that they shall all be dispersed under the hammer of the auctioneer so that the pleasure which the acquiring of each and every one has given me shall be given again, in each case, to some inheritor of my own taste."

One should bear in mind that most museums are no longer tombs and the general public today are not only better educated but generally more appreciative. The point to note is the last few lines. They would satisfy any collector.

Today few collectors of Australiana, if any, can aspire to collecting in the range and on the scale of their predecessors. Individual resources, availability, not to mention the demands of space preclude the likelihood of a latter day Dixson, Mitchell or Nan Kivell. But changes have taken place, narrower and further specialization and new areas have opened up. Australian furniture, silver and pottery have only recently received their due. Earlier collectors had not discovered the world of Australian decorative and household arts. A growing interest in this area led by the work of the National Trust in restoring and furnishing historic houses such as Experiment Farm Cottage and Old Government House at Parramatta together with the publication of several specialist articles and books on the subject culminated in an exhibition of Australian 19th Century Silver in 1973 followed by an exhibition of 19th century Australian antiques in 1976, both in Sydney, has resulted in an Australiana boom in the decorative and household arts. This year has seen several major exhibitions in three states, the establishment of the Australiana Fund for the furnishing of official government residences and the publication of some half a dozen books on the subject not to mention the formation of the Australiana Society.

The earlier concentration by collectors on the work of relatively sophisticated craftsmen particularly in the furniture of early New South Wales and Tasmania and silver from those two states together with Victoria and South Australia

has begun to spread further afield. The current exhibition of Colonial Crafts of Victoria at the National Gallery of Victoria has pushed the frontiers still further to include even post and rail fences, a wire mouse trap, crutches, not to mention an artificial leg! A year or two ago they would have raised the eyebrows of even the most dedicated Australiana collector. No longer is even the question raised of an arbitrary antiquity by those brought up on a diet of English and European antiques. The Australiana collector has already passed Federation and Art Nouveau and on current count is ready to break out from Art Deco and discover, God alone knows what, from the 1940s and 50s on the path to our bicentenary in 1988. Australiana if nothing else is not static.

What is the future for the collector? The rivalry between fellow collectors and between collectors and institutions will no doubt continue. All can co-exist to their mutual advantage and have a part to play as custodians and interpreters of our Australian heritage. It should be mentioned that institutions do have a slight edge over the private collector. They do tend to exist longer.

The full study of Australiana is still in its infancy and much remains to be discovered and written so that it can make its proper contribution to our social history. Who knows, some Australiana might yet be elevated from the realms of craft, history and technology into the more rarified world of Art — fine, folk, primitive, applied, naive, decorative, vernacular, industrial or otherwise. I am not always sure where the division lies!

This is the text of the first of two addresses given at the inaugural general meeting of the Society held in Sydney on Saturday, 2nd December 1978.

COLLECTING FOR A MUSEUM

John Wade
Senior Curator
Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences

The basic aims of museums are simple: to collect and preserve objects; to carry out research on those objects and in related fields; and to educate, enlighten, enrich and uplift its audience, which is generally the public.

I think most people would agree that museums (and I do not distinguish between art museums and other museums) are a necessary cultural part of our society. Most criticism of museums centres on their being merely classifiers, collectors only of obsolete material, or just plain boring. This is partly an image problem brought about by attitudes such as that typified by calling any old junk "a museum piece", but it is also due in part to museums themselves not knowing what they are trying to achieve, and lack of financial support for them. Still, attitudes towards museums will keep changing for the better, and you can see by the attendance figures of our three major N.S.W. museums — about 1.5 million last year — that we are doing as well as Rugby League in drawing crowds, and much better than Soccer or cricket.

Every museum tries to build up the best collection it can. A museum has some distinct advantages over a private collector (apart from a longer average life-span), as well as some disadvantages. The chief advantages might be as follows:

Firstly, it obtains much of its collection from gifts and bequests, either of goods or money. There are those private collectors who, as Kevin mentioned, disperse their collections on their death, but there are also those who see the holistic value of the collection, and cast around for the right institution to receive it. The opportunities for these gifts have been increased by the new Tax Incentives for the Arts scheme, which allows donors to claim as a deduction the full value of objects donated to public museums, libraries and galleries.

Secondly, we have a lot of contact with the public. People can see what the museum has got, and if they have something to sell, sometimes offer it first to the museum (a desire to by-pass a middleman accounts partly for this). Sister institutions can pass on relevant information — last November the Mitchell Library told us of an exciting piece of scrimshaw with an early view of Sydney which had initially been offered to them. We also come across material brought in for identification — although usually such items are not exciting, hence the name "junk day" for the day set aside for this activity in most museums.

Thirdly, we can call on our expert friends for help and advice.

Some museums have other advantages — good library facilities, well-catalogued and accessible reserve collections, research files and photographs, and so on — with which my own institution, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney, is not blessed. We hope the present Government's feasibility study to provide new accommodation will produce a satisfactory result, for good working facilities would not only benefit staff in the Museum, but also the public who would, of course, be able to use them too.

Museums also have a number of disadvantages vis-à-vis the private collector.

Some dealers do not seem to like selling to museums, since often the museum, apparently arbitrarily, rejects relevant objects brought in good faith to its attention; museums, as public service institutions, can be slow to decide on an acquisition, and slow to pay; and objects entering museums may go off the market forever (although I believe that many museums are realising that they cannot go on collecting forever, and are looking more rationally at the process of decessioning). Hence dealers may prefer to keep their best pieces for their private clients.

Secondly, the decision to acquire can be a complex process. It is much easier deciding to buy something for yourself. For a museum curator, who only in some instances can make decisions on his own, it is usually necessary to submit suggestions to higher authorities, in my case a Director and Board of Trustees. Often things are rejected, with no opportunity of quick appeal to redress what the curator feels is a wrong decision (sometimes they are right!). Rejections in my experience are generally of expensive items, which is a point I raise to show that because a museum may appear to have great buying power, this can be mitigated in the exercise of purchasing, especially in an institution such as my own where many fields are to be covered. In some museums, curators have a stated budget for the year, which makes it a lot easier to plan purchases and arrange cash flow, and usually there is a slush fund of some kind to allow for the unexpected item of special relevance. A few museums even have the problem of Trustees buying things off their own bat, which is an impossible situation for a curator trying to build up a collection according to a policy.

A number of other factors deserve a few quick comments.

a. *Choice of the object.* The private collector knows the area he wants to collect in, knows whether he likes an object, and knows that he can always return it to the market later. Buying for a museum generally has to be much more deliberate. Obviously, some things are so desirable that you "rush in with your ears back", as Kevin often advises me to do! But in most cases, one weighs up many factors:

- does it fit in with acquisition policy?
- is it for display, or for the reserve collection of back-up and research material?
- can the money be spent better elsewhere, or not spent at all?
- is any damage (which can significantly reduce the price, up to 90%) acceptable? Recently we bought a Roman glass mug, which has no base, but it can easily be displayed in such a way that no-one will ever notice.
- is it well-documented? For museums, maker's marks, dates or reliable history (especially for furnishings) are very valuable, assisting the museum's aims of educating, research, and providing reference material.

- is the price reasonable? It may be other peoples' money we are spending, but we have just as many things to do with our money as anyone else, so it should not be thrown away. I often apply the principle that if we sold it next year, will we make a profit? - and most times the answer would be yes.
- is it a good, representative example of its type? Buying to a policy often demands that *types* of object be bought. The poor museum cannot afford to pay extra for rarity.
- will it fit into a display? There are two aspects to this. It should be aesthetically and physically compatible to a display in the museum (my curatorial assistants chide me that "big is beautiful"). It should also be possible to use the piece educationally, as part of a story, or preferably several stories. Our museum is basically a Technological Museum, so we tend to buy pieces which are illustrative of techniques, in addition to any other qualities they may have.

b. Areas of collection. Museums collect in wide fields. Our applied arts collection covers Europe, Asia and Australia, with special reference to Doulton ceramics and to Australian industrial ceramics. In some areas we are very thin; Australian furniture is one of these, but at least there is Old Government House at Parramatta. We cannot afford to get too specialised, or we will not be satisfying many people. The collection must maintain a balance between its areas of specialization and its general themes.

One interesting aspect here is that in my museum's 98 years, some areas of collection have become "dead". I think that museums will move much more to disposal of objects from their collections which are no longer relevant, or which have been superseded by a better example. Museums, like everyone else, cannot afford to store useless things forever. The controversy over the Metropolitan Museum of Art's de-cessioning a few years ago has died down, and at the recent Museums Association conference in Melbourne, one prominent museum director suggested that ten years after an acquisition, its *retention* should be considered. Museums should not be static, and why shouldn't they realise on their stock to re-finance, and cut running costs?

c. Size of the collection. There are few private collections which match the sheer size of museum collections. The V&A accessions 30,000 items a year, while our own collection has over 10,000 objects of applied arts — most of which I have never seen because they are all in packing cases. Hopefully, these shall see the light of day soon, and then the staff will be buried for several years in checking and recording. It is rarely appreciated by non-specialists how difficult it is to manage large collections of objects, and how expensive it is to do so. Curatorial priorities do not seem to rate very highly.

d. Loans. Most art galleries and some other museums have programmes of temporary exhibitions, which bring objects out from the reserve collections (such as our "Australian Flora in Art" display). These are usually filled out with objects from private collections. I hope that in 1979 some of you will lend me things for an exhibition to commemorate the centenary of the Sydney International Exhibition held in the Garden Palace in 1879-80.

This is the kind of co-operation which should exist, and I am happy to say *does* exist, between the private collector and museums. Museums cannot exist without the goodwill and support of the public which they serve. Museums exist for the benefit of the public, which includes the private collector. If we don't measure up, it is not from want of trying.

This is the slightly revised text of the second of the two addresses given at the inaugural general meeting of the Society held in Sydney on Saturday, 2nd December 1978.

In the next issue the author will survey the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences' purchases of Australiana in 1978.

ALEXANDER DICK — SILVERSMITH. A COLLECTOR'S NOTES

Bernard Caillard

The first name that comes to mind in early Australian silver is Alexander Dick of Sydney. Perhaps because of this he has been described in a variety of terms, not all in agreement. On the one hand he has been described as a "master" and as "the Australian Paul Revere" while other authorities refer to him as "the Australian Tinker". One of several character witnesses at his trial described him as "an honest, fair dealing man", but this same trial found him guilty of receiving known stolen property, erasing its hall marks and replacing them with his own. He got his assigned apprentice sent to the tread mill and later had him sentenced to 25 strokes of the lash, but generally was well liked by the Sydney business community.

Kevin Fahy has written an excellent series of articles and biographies on Dick, including his carefully researched and detailed biographies in *Descent* (Vol. 6 Part 2) and his article on Australian Silversmiths in *Australasian Antique Collector* of Feb-Mar 1967.

I do not propose to trespass on his scholarship further than to record that Dick arrived in Sydney as a free settler in 1824. He was tried for receiving stolen goods in 1829 and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment on Norfolk Island. In fact, he only served 3 years, being pardoned in February 1833, when he returned to Sydney, till his death in 1843.

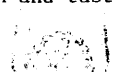
Well then, who was Alexander Dick?

Firstly he was the owner of a complete set of dies for making silver forks and spoons. Table silver was then more important than at present, now that we use stainless steel, silver plate or plastic. In fact the only alternatives to silver then were pewter and wood, neither of which was very practical. Even the poorest of families were likely to use a spoon or two and no one could entertain without using a full canteen of cutlery.

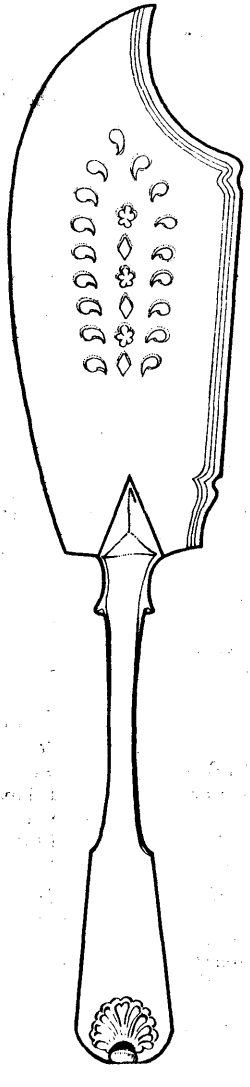
For obvious reasons many migrants of this period did not arrive with complete sets of silver, but by 1820 there would have been enough prosperity in the colony to show a real need. In many cases, this would have been supplied from England, or even India. But there would have been a problem when silver became worn or out of date. In England it would have been traded in with his local silversmith, but this could not have been easy for an Australian customer. There was an obvious need for an Australian Smith with a set of dies who could make use of scrap silver or even remodel existing pieces.

There is no great skill needed to mass produce flatware, whose form can only follow the die. Fairly large numbers would have been made over the years and quite a few still survive. Forty five pieces of flatware were exhibited by the National Trust of Australia (NSW) in 1973 and there may be many more still in use whose owners have not studied their marks. His dies were a fiddle pattern with a single shell on the handle, unlike the more usual type with shells on both sides of the handle and at the heel of the bowl. I find this simple form more appealing than the fully developed form and preferable to the plain fiddleback, but at the time it was probably out of date in Europe, and he could have been able to procure a cheap set of dies for Colonial use.

His dies did not cover all the less needed pieces, and some improvisation was needed. The National Gallery of Victoria has a soup ladle, whose bowl seems to be hand raised separately, and I have a butterknife whose handle has been brazed to a separate silver blade. Another variant in my collection is a fish slice made in two parts with a cast and pierced blade. In this case a thread has been added to update the design and it is designed to stand on its side as an ornament, perhaps showing that its first owner was sufficiently proud to display this evidence of his new-found wealth and taste.



Silver fish slice made by Alexander Dick, and drawing of the marks.



Dick's flatware exists with and without the applied shell on the handle. But at his trial it was shown how he had removed the shell motif from *Macleay's silver, and there would have been no difficulty in doing the same for more legitimate reasons. Indeed, this could have been the reason for his use of the single shell die.

His fame mainly rests on this flatware and the 1973 exhibition included only seven other pieces.

The quality of his other work seems to vary. For instance the mug illustrated in Geoff K. Gray's auction report in the 1977 *Australasian Antique Collector* (p.165) is very inferior to the Potts presentation mug in the 1973 exhibition (and illustrated in Hawkins item 20, p.25) and it is hard to believe that they are by the same hand.

Even at this date it was possible to obtain a wide range of silver castings and parts from Birmingham and elsewhere, and with a limited market it would have been better business to import these than to purchase the necessary tools, patterns and dies. Of course the assembling would need to be in Australia to avoid liability for English assay and duty, and so would be the decoration and engraving.

Incidentally the same remarks would apply to the jugs, cups and vases of a later period, marked with the names of Adelaide and Melbourne silversmiths, that it is most unlikely that the owners of successful businesses would have carefully made standard parts that were being more cheaply turned out in the factories of Europe and America. There is of course nothing fraudulent in putting your signature on a product that you have assembled and are offering for sale especially when this procedure means that it cannot bear an overseas hallmark. But such an article would not be truly Australian in either design or workmanship.

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*Alexander Macleay (1767-1848) was Colonial Secretary of New South Wales from 1825 to 1837, and the man for whom John Verge built Elizabeth Bay House between 1835-38.

Dick's marks are unique and most interesting. His earlier mark consists of a three-towered castle and an anchor. This castle mark is clearly a replica of the Edinburgh mark. The anchor is commonly known as the Birmingham mark but as Mr. Fahy has pointed out, it is also part of the less common Greenock system. His choice of Edinburgh — where he probably served his apprenticeship — is a natural one. Taken alone this mark would be deceptive but in conjunction with another assay mark it is meaningless, but nevertheless in the British system and he apparently chose the Greenock anchor for this purpose.

The use of the same mark by James Robertson would either be an attempt to standardize on a NSW mark or be an indication that Dick was the actual maker of the pieces. As is noted in Hawkins, he seems to have worked for Robertson from 1824-1826.

One of his late marks consists of a lion passant, a leopard's head crowned, the King's head and his initials A.D. This is a clear and detailed forgery of the London mark for 1800, even the use of initials (A.D.) as required to the British Assay Office, in place of his usual signature in full. The sovereign's head is a government receipt for the payment of duty, and it is surprising that this was tolerated. It may be significant that this stamp of King George III was only used during the reign of William IV. In any case, the forgery of these marks in general was a transportable offence and one witness at Dick's trial stated "I know the Hallmark well, as I came to this colony for imitating it, in order to cheat the Government of the duty which is 1/6d. an ounce". Later Australian silversmiths used various combinations of British marks and both Steiner and Wendt used fairly close imitations, but this Dick mark appears to be the only exact copy.

During his trial it was mentioned that Dick had sold a silver teapot with plated copper spout and feet. At the time he blamed it on his assistant, but it is hard to believe that he was not aware of it. This use of base metal is fairly common with Australian silver. Both Wendt and Steiner

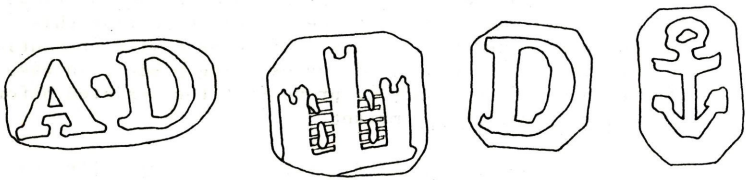
used silver-plated bronze figures on their silver centre-pieces. I have seen two examples of later church chalices with silver cups and plated bases. One was unmarked, but the other was fully marked as being sterling silver and signed by Steeth. This practice is an unfortunate aspect of early Australian silver and is not easy to justify on present standards.

There is no reason to assume that any of Dick's work has yet been forged. But it would not be difficult to have a set of stamps made and to impress them on English fiddle and shell flatware, and if prices continue to rise this should be considered as a risk. It seems a wise precaution to note the purchase date of any existing pieces, in case it ever becomes necessary to prove that they existed before forgeries appear on the market.

Little, if any, of Dick's work is any way better designed or made than that of other English provincial makers of the same period. Every English town of the size of Sydney had its silversmith, the only difference being they had to send their products to the nearest assay office for hallmarks and duty. English provincial work just before the Industrial Revolution was well made, and Dick's work is no exception. But it is equally false to compare his work with the great European silversmiths working under Royal patronage who had access to designers and craftsmen far beyond the resources of early Sydney.

The interest in Australian silver lies in a different direction. These pieces by Dick are among the first Australian articles ever made, and the fact that they are silver has ensured that they had been marked as such and not thrown away later. Their very existence and style tells us much about the background and culture of the early days of Australia and there is a pleasure in handling and using these early Australian pieces that cannot apply to the European counterparts. There is a similar historical interest in the late 19th century Emu Egg table centre pieces that reflect the taste and culture of their period that is denied to the more fashionable 19th and 20th century copies in mass-produced English silver.

It is hard to assess the value of Australian silver because so much depends on the historical interest of the piece which is independent of its artistic nature. However, over many years and a wide variety of pieces I have found the ratio of 10 times the Australian value of a similar English piece to be a fairly reliable guide. That is to say, I would expect a piece of Australian silver to be 10 times the value of an English piece by a normal competent maker, sold in the same shop and in the same condition.



Enlarged drawing of marks on a pair of silver sugar tongs by Alexander Dick, in the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences.

References:

Sydney Gazette, 28/5/1829 (account of Dick's trial.)

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WILLIS GONE WENDT

D. Tomsett

Recent research has now positively established that those little pieces of 9 ct. gold jewellery marked with a 'W' are not made by Wendt but in fact by a company called Willis and Sons Pty. Ltd. of Melbourne. For many years these pieces have been sold (in genuine ignorance I suspect) as Wendt pieces with the corresponding premium that goes with his name. These items were invariably name brooches, pendants, fobs, etc. often with Australian motifs or coats of arms. It was in fact a coat of arms fob that provided the lead by revealing, after cleaning, a registered number stamped on the back. Research at the Patents office turned up the Application form and design applied for under this R.D. No. 263 (see below). This was dated 1908. Information from the Victorian Companies Office established that the Company was incorporated in 1904 and, in fact, was still in business. Willis & Sons, however, is now a wholesaling jeweller and has been since pre W.W.1. They had no information of the company's early history, but fortunately, were able to direct me to a surviving member of the Willis family. His information, although scant, confirmed that the company manufactured jewellery from 1904 to approximately 1914 and then sold all their machinery to the Rodd Jewellery Company of Melbourne.

Mr. Willis identified the marks (see below) as the 'W' for Willis and a Unicorn which was the Willis family crest. The only other information he could add was that his Grandfather came to Australia in the 1860s and worked as a manufacturing jeweller, but did not know what marks he used, if any. Although Willis and Sons must have been a prolific producer of these small gold items (they employed over 100 people at their peak), it is extraordinary that so few examples have survived.

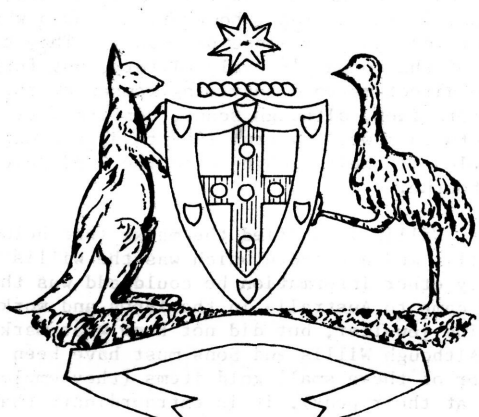
There will, no doubt, be people who will be disappointed that a piece they bought as Wendt is in fact made by Willis, but at the same time, I'm sure there will be others who will be delighted by the above information to discover they have an Australian made piece of gold jewellery.

WILLIS & SONS GOLD MARKS

Name of Applicants: Willis and Sons Proprietary Limited.

Number of Application: 263

Date of Application: 20th July, 1908



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Edited by John Wade.