

RESEARCH PAPER: ASIA/PACIFIC

A Voyage Round My Grandfather: Australian Antiquarianism and Writing the History of Aboriginal Australia

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This paper discusses the background to and consequences of a collecting expedition into the Darling River area of western New South Wales, Australia. The expedition was funded by the Museum of Victoria and was undertaken to expand the Museum's collections from this significant area of Aboriginal occupation that had only recently been supplanted by European settlement. The paper focuses on the practices and attitudes of a local pastoralist, Hubert Murray, whose activities provide a window onto the world of early twentieth century antiquarianism in Australia.

This paper connects an episode in the history of antiquarianism in Australia with a more general inquiry into the development of prehistoric archaeology as a significant imperial science, especially through the lens of race theories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My purpose here is to contribute to a more precise calibration of the 'local' context of Australian antiquarianism – in this case the report of a collecting expedition to Western New South Wales in 1917 – with the more 'global' context of theories developed to explain the history of humanity more generally. This broader discussion will only briefly focus on conceptions of the prehistoric connections between Australia and India, and is based on a partial history of the collecting activities of my grandfather Hubert Murray, the links he created with others who shared his interest in Aboriginal languages, and in the material culture of indigenous communities on the Darling River in New South Wales. It is a point of fact that he and his father Thomas Murray can be numbered among the most active agents of their dispossession (**Figure 1**).

Naturally this complicity sparks an interest in Hubert's motivation as a collector of indigenous artefacts and student of Aboriginal languages, but at this point in my research I can only offer a very sketchy account of these important matters. What does seem clear is that his motivation and interests go beyond the currently accepted trope of the antiquarian pastoralist seeking to possess *all* elements of the country they took from local indigenous communities (see e.g. Moseley 2011). In this paper I do not have the opportunity to more fully expound the connections between Murray and the views held by Baldwin Spencer and others on the past, present and future of

Aboriginal Australia, but I think that their proposition that indigenous material culture provided strong evidence for arguments about Aboriginal origins can be supported (Smithers 2008). Several letters written by Hubert which are reproduced below exemplify this view.

Nonetheless in many ways Murray shared many of the attributes of the Australian antiquarian so effectively described by Griffiths (1996), Byrne (1996), and later by Leo (2003) and Mosely (2011). Indeed he was directly linked with A.S. Kenyon (1867–1943), one of the leading practitioners in Victoria, and had earlier facilitated a collecting expedition by Robert Etheridge (1846–1920) from the Australian Museum in Sydney. However, my grandfather also corresponded with Baldwin Spencer and collaborated with other Australian antiquarians such as Lindsay Black (1886–1959) and Harold Rainy Balfour (1875–1962), whose interests went well beyond typologies of axe heads or spear points. The necessarily brief investigation of these contexts of antiquarianism in this paper supports a move to broaden the current conceptualisation of the social and cultural context of antiquarian activity in Australia – a tendency that more closely aligns with recent studies of antiquarianism on a global scale (see e.g. Schnapp et al. 2013).

My very brief discussion of these important matters might also be seen as a kind of 'personal history' of my own development as an archaeologist (see e.g. www.personalhistories.arch.cam.ac.uk), which really began as a child awestruck by my grandfather's collection of local Aboriginal material culture, particularly widow's caps, cylcons, and stone and bone artefacts. This then grew into an interest in the artefacts that littered our family properties (Lucas 2007). I can recall as a child that these were still being actively collected by people such as the late Tom Austen-Brown of Broken Hill, New South Wales, who subsequently endowed a Chair of Australian Archaeology at the University of Sydney. That snippet of personal history



Figure 1: Group of Aborigines at Dunlop Station, nearby Bellsgrave, Louth, New South Wales. Photographer Charles Bayliss, 1886. Public domain.

explains my title here, which makes an obvious reference to John Mortimer's autobiographical play *A Voyage Round My Father*. It also reflects my own attempts (doubtless prompted by increasing personal antiquity) to understand the breaking of the 'great Australian silence' (see e.g. Attwood 1996; Murray 2004; Stanner 1969) about the history and consequences of indigenous dispossession, a voyage that all Australians should take.

An inquiry into the history of antiquarianism west of the Darling River in New South Wales also continues a more general exploration of the importance (both past and present) of antiquarianism in Australian society, especially as a framework within which people and organisations outside the academy can pursue history making in ways most meaningful to them (see Murray 2013). This is not just a rhetorical gesture to the supposedly long-standing conflict between the profession of archaeology and the 'unprofessional' activities of antiquaries, be they in Europe or Australia. There have been significant discussions around this agendum in recent publications from North America (see e.g. Baron, Hood & Izard. 1996; Halttunen 2011; O'Brien 2010). I have recently argued that it is high time that both archaeologists and antiquarians moved beyond this risible over-simplification of a complex relationship that has changed greatly over the past 400 years (Murray 2013). This paper might also be seen as a contribution to that broader project.

Hubert Murray Antiquarian (1867–1957)

Hubert's obituary, which appeared in the *Pastoral Review and Graziers' Record* (16 March 1957: 271) and is pre-

served online as 'Murray, Hubert (1867–1957), Obituaries Australia, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/murray-hubert-756/text757>, is worth quoting from at length. It describes him as a grazier, born into a world where (and at a time when) traditional indigenous societies were still functioning in the area west of the Darling River in New South Wales. I have yet to uncover any autobiographical writings which might give some clue as to the origins of his interest, but family stories about him all stress that his desire to learn local dialects and to ponder the indigenous histories of west of the Darling happened early and lasted with him for the rest of his long life. Significantly this interest in the traditional owners of the land his father selected, and which he then massively expanded over the next 80 years, did not in any way (at least so far as I have been able to discover) cause him to reflect on the consequences of the dispossession of the Darling communities. Business was business, and as a first generation descendant of people from the Irish west coast counties of Galway, Mayo and Clare who had fled starvation in the Great Famine, and who had themselves been regarded as 'white chimpanzees' by educated Englishmen such as Charles Kingsley (Curtis 1968: 84), I have little doubt that he could effectively separate an interest in things Aboriginal from his desire to expand his land holdings and the number of sheep he could put on them. However, it is also quite possible that in Hubert's case there was no separation from the business of dispossession and the desire to record the presence of indigenous people who had occupied the lands he now possessed. In

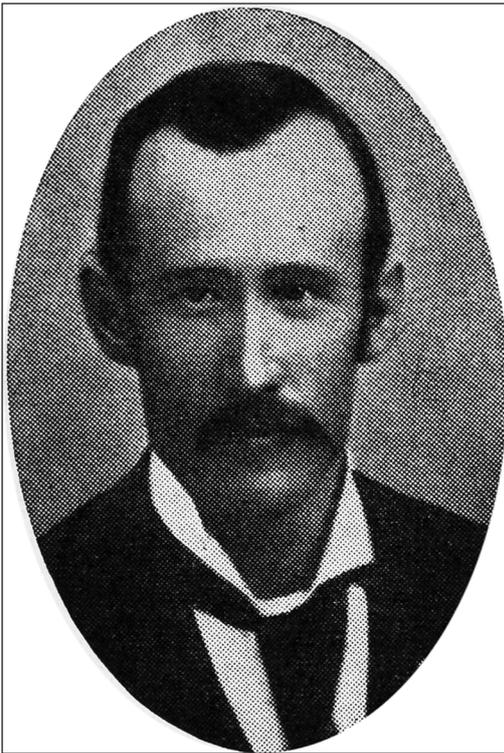


Figure 2: Hubert Murray as a young man. Taken from a family photograph around 1875.

this sense Murray, and others like him, could see themselves as the primary agents of civilization by reshaping the indigenous world and thereby transforming traditional societies into membership of a harmonious, white, Australian society. I will return to this proposition later in the paper (**Figure 2**).

One of the grand old pioneers of western New South Wales, Mr. Hubert Murray, of Bells Grove, Louth, died on 17th February in his 90th year after a very full and successful life devoted to the pastoral industry. He witnessed most of the important early developments in that area, including the sinking of the first artesian bore, Mulyeo bore, on Kallara, and the first machine shearing, at Dunlop, and had a wide knowledge of pastoral affairs.

Mr. Murray was born on 13th May 1867 and at the age of nine months was taken to Newfoundland, Louth, where his father, Thomas Murray, had selected land some years earlier. His primary education was by private tuition, but later he attended St. Stanislaus College, Bathurst, the journey to college taking two weeks.

When his father died in 1883 Hubert Murray, then 16 years of age and the eldest of a family of three boys and one girl, left school to manage his father's estate. This he did successfully, and subsequently bought out the interests of his mother, brothers, and sister. To this holding of some 20,000 acres he added Bells Grove, where he made his home after marrying Helena Mary Egan, of Springvale, Cudal, N.S.W., in 1897. Mrs. Murray died on 1st January 1953 and they had three sons and three daughters.

Mr. Murray was a keen judge of sheep and wool, and his flocks were well known to buyers. They were founded originally on stud rams and ewes purchased by his father from Mr. Cox, of Mudgee, and the droving of those stud sheep from Mudgee to Louth was a considerable undertaking. Another great droving feat accomplished by Mr. Murray during his father's life was the taking of a mob of wethers, without loss, from Newfoundland, on the Darling River, to Adelaide, where they topped the market at 16s. 10d. per head.

The late Mr. Murray was a firm believer in the preservation of native flora and fauna, and he had one great hobby—the study of anthropology, which he did thoroughly. He was particularly interested in the Darling River aboriginals and much of his extensive knowledge of their customs was gleaned during his youth from head tribesmen with whom he made frequent and friendly contact when they roamed the country in their native state. He owned a valuable collection of aboriginal stones and widows' caps gathered mostly on his own and adjacent properties.

It is clear enough that Murray's interest in indigenous language and culture predates his first contacts with Robert Etheridge (Walsh 1981), who led a collecting expedition to the west of the Darling in August 1903, and who stayed with Hubert. Indeed, his collecting fell squarely in the scope of Etheridge's primary ethnological and palaeontological research into the antiquity of human beings in Australia, and the nature of indigenous material culture (Etheridge 1891, 1899, 1896, 1905, 1916). Etheridge's significant role in the history of archaeology in Australia remains sadly under-researched, but surely must be rectified in due course. Most thoroughly recorded is Murray's donation to the Museum of Victoria, but he also donated to the Australian Museum in Sydney (Patricia Egan, *pers. comm.*). It is Murray's donations to the Museum of Victoria (of objects collected, before, during and after the Kenyon expedition), and his letters to Spencer and Balfour (also archived at the Museum of Victoria) that most concern us here. The accession registers of that museum show that he directly donated some 60 objects (mostly axes, pounders, grinders and cylcons) during his lifetime.

There were also a significant number of similar objects donated by him to collectors such as Balfour and Lindsay Black, that found their way into the collections of the Museum of Victoria. Black's collection, largely sourced from the Darling, was particularly extensive and was purchased by the Melbourne Museum in 1951 (Robert McWilliams *pers. comm.*). The size and composition of this collection is indicative of the scale of collecting activity in western New South Wales in the first 50 years of the twentieth century: Flaked implements 4,000, cylcons 500, millstones and widow's caps 500, axes 1000, grinders and pounders 500, miscellaneous 3500.

The bulk of Murray's correspondence with Baldwin Spencer and Balfour archived in the Museum relate to those donations. One interesting sidelight is that the

registers show that at least four of these were exchanged with international museums, such as the US National Museum and the Royal Historical Museum in Stockholm.

Hubert's early letters to Baldwin Spencer in 1917–1918 indicate a real interest in Aboriginal languages and ethnography, without any direct reference to his collecting activities. They certainly reveal his desire to explore the connections between Australian groups and Indo-Europeans. Nonetheless he is straightforward in his desire to assist Spencer (and Kenyon) in building collections in Melbourne.

For example:

Bellsgrove
Louth
Sept. 11th 17.

Baldwin Spencer Esq
Museum
Melbourne

Dear Mr Spencer,

I have your letter also your book on the classing of the various Aborigine objects for which I thank you very much.

I will do what I can for you in the collecting of these curios. I have already written to Mr Kenyon on the subject.

Thanks very much for your invitation to see the Aborigine museum and will avail myself of it on my next visit to Melbourne.

I have read work on the Central Australian tribes and know that our blacks had ceremonies of much the same character.

The Weembutcha's (blacks) in this locality differed from the Centrals in their "Balu" (penis) phallic burial stones, but had the same "Kilpara" totem system, and spoke an allied tongue. I think that from your description our "niggers" had a better counting system, which was that each fifth number had a different name and the numbers between were filled up by the numerals 1 and 2 or in combination where necessary. "Nitchi" is one "Barcoola", Barcoola Nitchi three, Barcoola Barcoola four. Yantamarco five, Yantamarco Nitchi six and so on up to ten which is "Morangula". Morangula Nitchi eleven and Dingangula nitchi would be twenty one.

Wishing you success in your Aborigine Museum collection.

Yours truly
Hubert Murray

And:

Bellsgrove
Louth
Jan 23rd 18

Mr Baldwin Spencer Esq
Melbourne

Dear Sir,

I have your letter of the 14th inst. And have to thank you very much for the two nice vols. of Brough Smyth's works which have arrived in good condition.

They contain a lot of information and note the great number of dialects around this locality it was the same within 60 miles three distinct languages were spoken.

A complete collection of these dialects may reveal their connection with the Aryan and Davidian tongues.

Again thanking you for the trouble you had in securing me the works.

Yours sincerely
Hubert Murray

The Kenyon expedition 1917

The purpose of the Victorian expedition to western New South Wales was simple – to collect lithic artefacts from local landowners who had themselves collected them. Significantly the expeditioners (led by Kenyon) had responded to an invitation from Mr Officer of Kallara Station near Louth New South Wales, who was a neighbour of Hubert Murray, a student of Baldwin Spencer, and who also corresponded with Robert Etheridge. Drawn by the possibility of very large numbers of artefacts, and forgetting to mention the priority of Robert Etheridge in this endeavour (Officer 1901), the expeditioners reached the Darling via Adelaide and Broken Hill (after stopping to view the sites *en route*) (**Figure 3**). There followed a journey of almost a month traveling by motor vehicle up the Darling from Wilcannia to Bourke, and concluding with side trips to the Australian Museum (a severe disappointment to Kenyon) and the Cronulla Kitchen Middens (somewhat less disappointing). The report is essentially a diary of where they went, who they met, and the artefacts they saw (and often succeeded in having donated to them). Apart from these 'facts' we are not informed about motivation of the collectors – just what they had around and what they were prepared to give to Kenyon. Interestingly some collectors would only part with their artefacts if there was a cash settlement, which at this time was clearly beyond Kenyon's remit from the Museum.

Kenyon's overall impression of the west was of a landscape littered with artefacts and obviously a fertile ground for collectors. There were no conclusions about what this lithic bounty might represent or the historical information that anthropologists might derive from it. Kenyon and his colleagues were clearly more interested in typology than much else. Nonetheless the collections of the Museum were mightily expanded and the Trustees very happy with the outcome (Kenyon 1917).

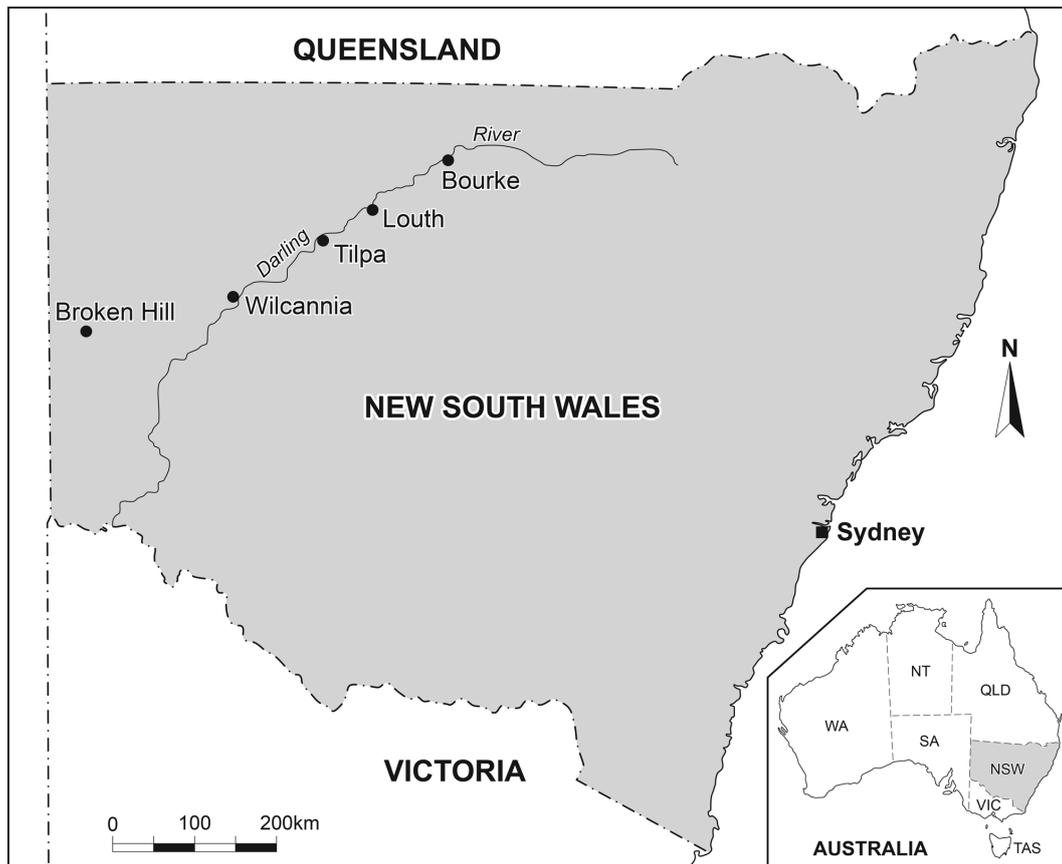


Figure 3: Map of the Western Division of New South Wales, Australia. Map drawn by Wei Ming, Department of Archaeology and History, La Trobe University.

Mad about cylcons

The term cylcon is derived from the title of Etheridge (1916), where he described stones that were cylindro-conical in shape and frequently decorated by scratched marks on their surface. Cylcons attracted significant attention among collectors and their purpose (and the meanings of the scratches) was much debated, leading to them being frequently described as ‘mystery stones’ (see e.g. Black 1942). Many (including Hubert Murray) assumed that they were related to sacred ceremonies, a view which remains current among indigenous communities in the area where they are found (**Figure 4**). Access to cylcons held in museum collections, and publication of their images is restricted. This restriction does not currently apply to the collections of lithic artefacts sourced to western New South Wales.

Antiquarians (or anthropologists as they described themselves) such as Murray, Balfour and Black saw the cylcon as material evidence of the sacred, but also of a long-standing connection with Dravidians and Indo-Europeans. Black’s distribution map also clearly demonstrated what he and others saw as cultural variations linked to distinct tribes in the Darling Valley, clearly drawing parallels between these and the meat-and-drink of European culture histories that had been at the core of European pre-historic archaeology since the 1880s. A.P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, also saw this variation in the distribution of material culture types as

having cultural significance, although he did not embrace arguments about the Indo-European roots of indigenous Australian culture. In his preface to Black’s book on Bora Grounds (1944) Elkin observed:

Australian Anthropology owes much to those who, without training in anthropological schools and methods, have devoted zealously their spare time to the collection and collation of information and material on one or other aspect of aboriginal life. To mention only a few, Brough Smythe, E. M. Curr, R. H. Mathews, John Mathew, C. C. Towle, W. J. Enright and C. P. Mountford, we realize our debt, and how much poorer our reservoir of material would be without them. In this valuable band, Mr. R. L. Black occupies a worthy place. He has concentrated on that most interesting and culturally important region of New South Wales, which is watered by the Darling River and its tributaries.

Mr. Black has devoted much labour, time and expense to a careful examination of much of this great region for what may already be called recent archaeological evidence of the ritual life of the aborigines who, only a hundred years ago, were practising that ritual and gaining ‘life’ and confidence thereby. In addition, he is publishing in very pleasing form the results of his labours. Booklets on Burial Trees, Cylcons and Art Galleries have already

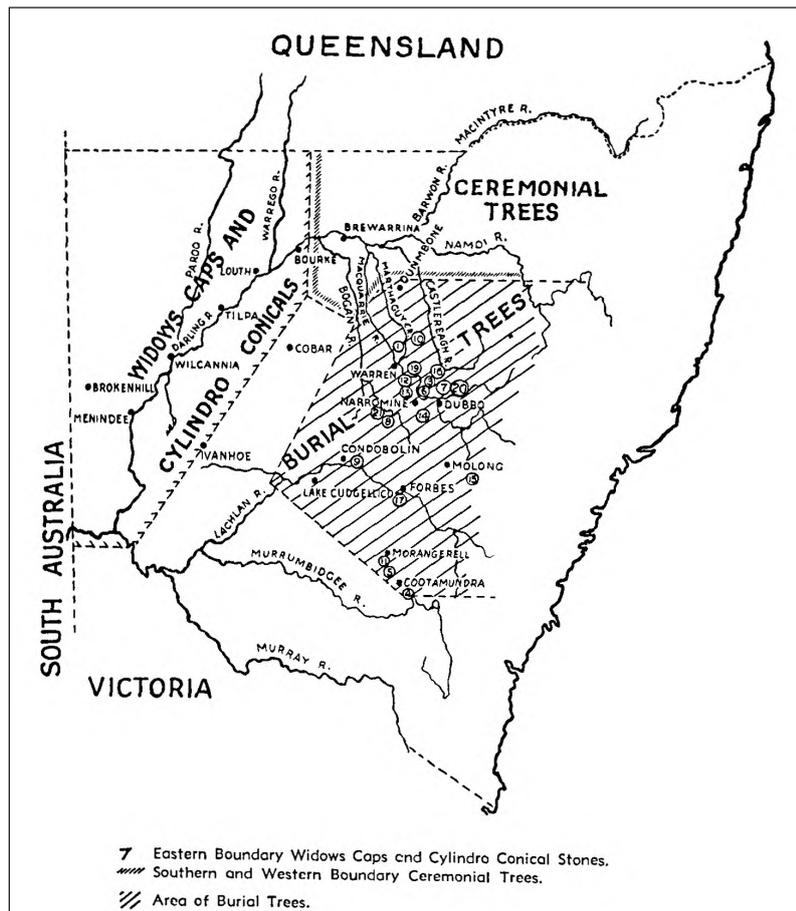


Figure 4: Map showing distributions of Cylcons, Widows Caps and Carved Trees in New South Wales. Published in 1941 by Lindsay Black *Burial Trees, Being the First of a series on the Aboriginal Customs of the Darling Valley and Central New South Wales*, p. 8.

appeared and more is premised. In this way Mr. Black is providing data which will help future students to make valuable generalizations concerning aboriginal culture in Eastern Australia (Black 1944: 1).

Black’s collecting activities extended beyond lithics and widow’s caps to include carved trees (Black 1943, 1950). He has gained lasting notoriety as the instigator of an expedition to remove some 48 carved trees from the garden at Collymungle Station in the north west of New South Wales, which were later distributed among museums in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland (Leo 2008; State Library of New South Wales 2011; Rhodes 2007). He was joined in this endeavour by Norman Tindale (Adelaide), Donald Tugby (Melbourne) and Balfour, and there is a charming photograph of Norman Tindale clutching a dendroglyph in an article reporting the expedition (*The Australian Women’s Weekly*, 12 November, 1949). Naturally this collecting was presented as being in the interests of science and in documenting the culture of a people who were doomed to pass from the earth.

Murray was clearly convinced that cylcons in particular provided strong support for what was taken to be linguistic evidence for ancient connections between Aboriginal Australians and Indo-Europeans. His letter to Spencer of January 23rd 1918 mentions this, but the letters reporting a focus on cylcons as the material expression of those

connections seems to have developed after that time. His large correspondence with Balfour provides the clearest account of his thinking. The following letter is exemplary, but there are many others archived in the Melbourne Museum that explore these connections in greater depth.

Bellsgrove
Louth
Sept. 1st 48

H.R. Balfour Esq

Dear Mr Balfour

I have been away from home attending to the crutching of sheep and have barely time to turn around on account of the shortage of labour hence the delay in replying to your good letters. The four cylcons arrived in good order thanks to your good packing. You must have been pleased to have our friend Mr Black with you to have a good talk over matters. I had a letter from him in reply I advised him to be very careful in talks over various subjects with the natives. They take a delight in making the white man filled with rot. Under cover registered parcel is sent to you via this mail which contains a cylcon on the emu food supply, the double triad is shown by 6 circles of endless power one very heavy

marked the other 5 in light scratches but the subject is clear up near the point you will notice the incubation period marked by light marks, a small cylcon is also enclosed probably in relation to some part of the "history of life" it is the neat line of markings. I want you to see it is the best I have seen yet after showing these around put them in your collection. Hope you are keeping well.

With kind regard in haste. Yours sincerely
Hubert Murray

This letter refers to item X059897 (a cylcon) which was acquired by the Museum from the Balfour collection. It is associated with objects X59903 and X59969 (also cylcons and also in the Museum), which were given by him to Balfour between 1946 and 1948. His other letters to Balfour (for example XM 1257, 1264, 1265, 1301) all discuss what he believed were the links between the imagery of the cylcons and the Assyrian tree of life and the worship of fire, water and wind. It is worth noting that this correspondence was happening some 30 years after the Kenyon collecting expedition and when Hubert was in his 80s!

What were the sources Hubert and Balfour drew upon for this focus on Indo-Europeans and Aboriginal Australians? Here we need to make a very brief and tentative descent into the mire of nineteenth century race theory. I say tentative because it is a frighteningly complex area full of ambiguities and inconsistencies and an almost limitless array of perspectives, positions and interests among the social, cultural and political players – all of which changed in the century between 1850 and 1950. Thus the early nineteenth century accounts of the Indo-European (or Aryan) origins of western civilization which were fundamentally based on linguistic analysis, such as those by Crawford (1861) and Mathew (1889, 1899), but see Mueller (1862) for a dissenting view, differed significantly from later discussions where the evidence from archaeology and physical anthropology is brought into play (see e.g. Huxley 1870).

Given its great significance there is a vast literature on the history of race as a concept, with the best points of entry being (Augstein 1996; Gossett 1963; Gould 1996; Harris 1968; Stocking 1968). Specific histories of anthropology such as Hiatt (1996), Kuper (1973, 1988) and Stocking (1987) shed further light on the varying impact of race theory on contemporary anthropology in Australia and elsewhere. By far the most detailed discussion of its impact on Australian discourse can be found in Smithers (2008) which makes a real contribution to tracing out the impact of evolutionist thinking on the race theories of the late nineteenth century, particularly as they applied to Australia and the United States.

John Mathew, in his prize-winning essay given to the Royal Society of New South Wales in 1889 provides an excellent local statement of the core issue.

'That a true relationship subsists between the Australians and the Dravidians of India is now admitted by investigators generally on grounds too firm to be controverted, as I cannot help thinking notwithstanding

Dr. F. Muller's stout assertions to the contrary' (Mueller 1862). Mathew explained this connection in terms which, while being heavily dependant on linguistic analysis, also marshalled evidence from physical anthropology in a manner strongly reminiscent of the race-war model so favoured by Boyd Dawkins and others (Murray 2016). Noting that there was considerable divergence of opinion about the racial history of Australia and the process of colonisation over what might be considered to be a long period of time, Mathew was clear enough about *his* views:

The theory which the writer enunciates accounts for the difficulties which give rise to these divergent views and may be stated briefly as follows:— Australia was first occupied by a homogeneous people, a branch of the Papuan family, and closely related! to the Negroes. They came from the north, but whether from New Guinea or any other island of the Eastern Archipelago is a matter of indifference and impossible to decide, as probably at the time of their arrival the islands to the north were all inhabited by people of the same blood. These first-comers, the veritable Australian Aborigines, occupied all the continent, and having spread right across to the southern shores they crossed, what is now Bass' Strait, but which at that distant date may have been dry land, and their migration terminated in Tasmania.

He then embarked on a quite straightforward discussion of process:

Then followed one invasion, if not two, by hostile people of much fairer complexion. The un-Papuan element now discernible in the Australian race is not the trace of one pure race, but is composite, the constituents being Dravidian and Malay blood. Of these the Dravidian was the first to arrive, the Malay coming later, and in a desultory way by detachments at irregular intervals. It is more convenient than accurate to designate one of these components as Dravidian, it would be more precise to speak of it as of the same stock as the Dravidian, or perhaps better still as Central Indian. There are features observable in Australian marriage laws and indelibly fixed in Australian language which attest a real affinity between the Australians and the people of Southern and Central India. The different batches of fair-skinned invaders may have had different landing places. Mainly from linguistic evidence I incline to think that the people, who for convenience may be called Dravidians, first touched on the northwest coast about the part now known as the Kimberley District and advanced inland, eastward and southward. It seems to me that this ingredient of the population came not in one boat-load, but in an unintermittent stream for many years, probably being forced southwards through Java and Timor by the attacks of a more powerful race.

He then developed the critical argument that these invaders were not negroid:

Coming as a later off-shoot from the first home of humanity, this invading band was of higher intelligence and better equipped for conflict than the indigenes of Australia. Physically they were more lithe and wiry and of taller stature. They were lighter in colour, though a dark race, less hirsute and the hair of their head was perfectly straight. Their language was not very dissimilar in phonology, but differed greatly in vocabulary. There is a natural highway easily traversed across Australia from the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria to the south, by first ascending: the rivers on the northern watershed and then descending: those on the southern watershed until the ocean is reached at the mouth of the Murray. If we suppose the Dravidian invaders to have gained the rivers that flow into the Gulf of Carpentaria on its southern side, thence they would rapidly pour southward in a strong stream fighting their way with the aboriginal population, part of which they would absorb—chiefly by the capture of women—part they would destroy, the remainder would keep retiring. The stream of invasion would here and there send forth branches which reaching the coast at various points would rebound and eddy backwards. If this process of settlement corresponds to fact we should expect to find greater differences in appearance, language and customs between the people of the interior and the people of the coast, than between those on the seaboard at points widely apart. Neglecting irregularities, which must be anticipated to occur here and there owing to inequality of distribution of the population, we should expect to find a shading more or less marked from the interior outwards, in complexion, physique, and other-respects; the outer fringe of population, excepting along the north and north-west coasts, being most distinctly Papuan. And the facts correspond with the requirements sufficiently close to strongly support the above hypothesis.

Mathew was certainly not alone in his views (see e.g. Lang 1887; Trutmann 1981), and Smithers (2008) has charted in great detail the links evolutionist anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor and W.H. Morgan were to make of this, and the political consequences of their writings:

In settler colonial societies like Australia, the civilizing and harmonizing mission of late nineteenth-century anthropology went hand-in-hand with recording the languages and cultural traditions of “savage” races before they became extinct. In a sense, the quest for “authentic” savages reinforced the popular racial assumption of Aboriginal inferiority and inevitable extinction. However, the anthropological collection of data on indigenous peoples created an empirical foundation on

which anthropologists could construct evolutionary theories to elevate and harmonize Aboriginal intelligence with that of settler colonists. In this way, anthropologists became important agents for settler colonial governments and the creation of knowledge to exercise power and control over indigenous people (Smithers 2008: 141).

Anthropologists such as Fison and Howitt were keen to apply the ‘lessons’ drawn from the evolution of Indo-European (read Aryan) societies to take charge of the future of Aboriginal people in Australia. For them the Indo-European heritage of indigenous Australians (flowing from the ‘fact’ that they were descended from Dravidian peoples) made them particularly susceptible to civilization (unlike Asians or black Africans). The conversion of indigenous Australians from being of Negroid descent to Dravidian (as outlined by Mathew) was critical to establishing the case for civilization, and to ‘evolving’ them into white people. As Smithers (2008: 144) observed:

A small but vocal contingent of white Australians and Britons believed that they had the power to collect empirical data about humankind and, if they chose, to act as a wise and benevolent “Evolver” to harmonize the Aborigine with Australian settler society. But if Western scientific knowledge was going to help the Australian Aborigines evolve, and not simply become extinct, anthropologists knew that they needed to rethink the early nineteenth century categorization of the Aborigines as a race of “Negroes.”

The goal here was to effectively hasten the inevitable demise of traditional Aboriginal society (while documenting its particulars prior to extinction) by it becoming white through inter-breeding with the settler population and being educated in the ways of the Anglo-Saxon descendants from a common Indo-European stock. The use of child removal and mission schools as policies and institutions underwriting the program to ‘harmonise’ Australian society, which were so prominent in the twentieth century, take on additional significance. There is at least a possibility that Hubert Murray, with his interests going well beyond collecting ‘mystery’ artefacts from west of the Darling River, and his role as an agent of dispossession and transformation, may well have tacitly (if not openly) subscribed to this thinking. I am hopeful that further research will shed some more light on this issue.

Now if these revelations about ‘breeding out the black and breeding in the white’ make confronting reading, consider the truly bizarre situation where Australian crypto-Nazis became, in the years prior to World War II, very strong supporters of the need to enhance the rights of indigenous Australians. Bird (2012) has described in great detail the activities of Australians who had much in common with the message of National Socialism in the years prior to World War II. Although it is disconcerting to find that literary luminaries such as Miles Franklin and Xavier Herbert might be numbered among Bird’s

enthusiasts, this is only a minor matter compared to the revelation that Nazis (and their sympathizers) could take very seriously the idea that indigenous Australians were fellow Aryans, and that their racial rights and interests should be defended! Bird, and Foley (2013) sustain a case that Aboriginal activists seeking rights for their people in the 1930s were in part funded by Nazi sympathisers and ultra-nationalists – surely one of the most prominent examples of ‘truth being stranger than fiction!’

Unintended consequences: the greenstone axes of Bellsgrove

It is clear that Hubert Murray was particularly fascinated by cylcons and their potential as evidence of connections between the indigenous inhabitants of the Darling River and what he (and others) thought was the cultural and genetic seedbed of the Indo-Europeans. Notwithstanding this interest in what he probably thought of as the broader conception of Aboriginal origins, he maintained a strong interest in indigenous material culture as a collector and donor of common items such as widow’s caps, cylcons and axe heads. The presence of such a large number of axes among his many donations raises the question as to what use we can make of them, apart from documenting the collecting practices of people like him (see Moseley 2011).

One obvious inquiry relates directly to sourcing and distribution studies comprising the ‘axe trade’ in south-eastern Australia originally undertaken by Isabel McBryde (1978). Initial examination of axes donated by Murray, Balfour and Black during the first half of the twentieth century indicates that a significant number of these were made on greenstone, but in the absence of more detailed analysis I cannot be more specific than this (Figure 5).

Early discussions with Dr Rebecca Kurpiel (La Trobe University) indicate the potential for non-invasive sourcing analysis that will first more accurately describe the stones and then provide data as to their source. Naturally these studies can only proceed with the permission of the relevant communities in Western NSW and Mt William (Victoria), understood as being a major regional source for greenstone. The potential to expand our understanding of the ‘axe trade’ using find spots recorded by antiquarians seems very real indeed. This, at least, is one way in which the results of all that collecting activity can usefully contribute to an expansion of our understanding of the social and cultural histories of pre-invasion Australia in the absence of discussions of race, language and culture connecting Aboriginal Australians with the Dravidians and by extension, the Indo-Europeans. This can only be a positive development.

Concluding remarks

I began this brief discussion with some observations about the need to return to an exploration of the nature of antiquarian activity in Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the ‘professionalisation’ of archaeology in Australia was in large measure seen as a strong reaction against the methods and approaches of local antiquaries (see Murray and White 1980), Griffiths’ comprehensive discussion of antiquarians based in Victoria (1996) has provided a richer and more nuanced account of their activities. Notwithstanding that important work, there is still much to be done to reveal the social and cultural context of Australian antiquarianism, especially in the long period prior to the 1960s. My point of entry into this long and quite complex history has been the collect-

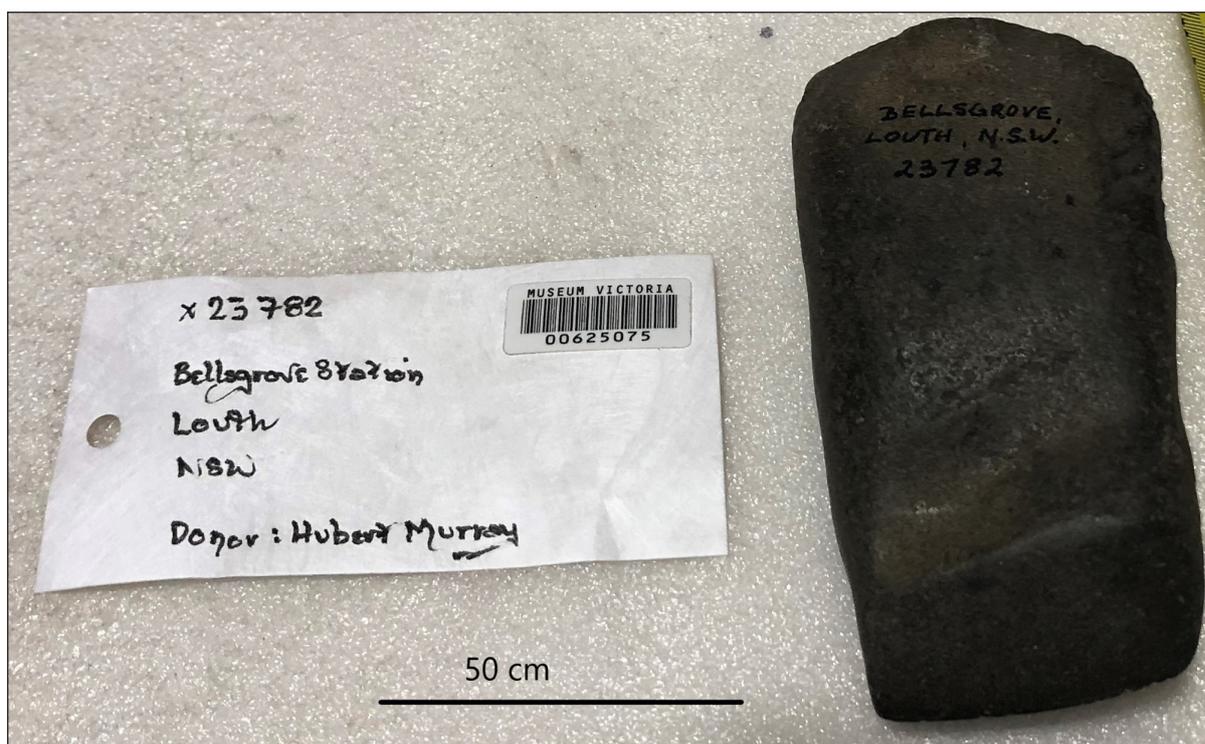


Figure 5: Large axehead donated by Hubert Murray to the Museum of Victoria. Photographer T. Murray 2019.

ing practices of my grandfather, a grazier who had a strong interest in Aboriginal Australia and who developed relationships with major figures such as Baldwin Spencer and prominent antiquarians such as Kenyon, Black and Balfour in the pursuit of his interest. What has been something of a surprise is the expansion of the scale and depth of that interest from mere collecting, which led to the collections he kept at the homestead at Dunlop (near Louth, New South Wales) and donated to others, to a much broader consideration of the history of Aboriginal Australia within the context of a global history of Aryanism. A great deal more work has to be done exploring this aspect of how the history of Aboriginal Australia was being discussed by antiquarians and others in the first half of the twentieth century, and its potential resonance with contemporary Australian politics (see e.g. Bird 2012; Foley 2013). The case of Hubert Murray has provided a very useful starting point into a large and surprising literature.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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