EUROPEAN VISION AND AUSTRALIA'S HERITAGE

D. J. MULVANEY

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It is relevant to reflect that Pompeii was being uncovered around the period when Captain Cook and Governor Phillip brought Australia within the European ambience. The classical mould of eighteenth-century taste, of which Pompeii's ransacking was both a reflection and a stimulus, was a factor which influenced early European perception of the Aborigines. Our retiring President demonstrated its artistic consequences in his seminal study of *European Vision and the South Pacific*. Because my own intellectual formation already had been influenced from the 1940s by Bernard Smith's *Place, Taste and Tradition*, I welcome both the honour of being chaired by him and the opportunity of acknowledging my immense debt to his Australian vision.

As *European Vision and the South Pacific* demonstrated, for a brief interlude those Aborigines featured in European literature and art combined the norms of classicism with romantic notions of the simple or hard primitivism attributed to non-agricultural peoples (Plate 1). This fleeting idyll of savage nobility has a permanent memorial in *Manly* beach.

Even by 1823, when the first W. C. Wentworth wrote his passionate *Australasia*, he praised those

> Unshackled wanderers, enthusiasts free,
> Pure native sons of savage liberty.

But that was in the seclusion of Cambridge. Back in the harsh reality of Sydney, noble savagery succumbed. Indeed, Bernard Smith dubbed the artistic stereotype of the now degraded and despised fringe dwellers, 'the Comic Savage'. Clowns suffering misfortune may arouse sympathy or charity, a characteristic visible in some Sydney scenes around 1820.[1]

On expanding frontiers of settlement over the next century, however, attitudes hardened. An appropriate designation for colonial perception is 'the Hunted Savage'. The ancient legal precept of an eye for an eye became transformed into another value system: a human life for a steer, a tribe for a flock.[2] Carl Lumholtz, a touring naturalist, sketched the police 'dispersal' of Aborigines during an incident in the Cloncurry region of Queensland around 1880.[3] Was it an unduly imaginative reconstruction, because five unarmed

[1] I have published a series of illustrations depicting the changing fortunes of Aborigines in my essay, 'Gum leaves on The Golden Bough: Australia's Palaeolithic survivals discovered', in J. D. Evans and C. Renfrew (eds) *Antiquity and Man*, Thames and Hudson, London 1981. See also B. Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Oxford 1960, pls. 107, 139.

[2] See G. Dutton, *White on Black*, Macmillan, Melbourne 1974, Pls. 76-7.

[3] C. Lumholtz, *Among Cannibals*, Murray, London 1889, p. 375.

men have been shot, while a sixth offers the next target? Listen to Mounted Constable Willshire describing similar events west of Alice Springs during that same fatal decade.[4]

> 'At 3 o'clock we came upon a large mob of natives camped among the rocks. They scattered in all directions. It's no use mincing matters—the Martini-Henry carbines at the critical moment were talking English in the silent majesty of those eternal rocks'.

Plate 2 shows Willshire complete with his English-speaking carbine. He is known to have chained Aborigines before shooting them in the back, during a long reign of terror; yet he titled his book *Land of the Dawning*. Historians of the transportation era may be unaware that the chaining of gangs of Aboriginal prisoners either by leg-irons or neck-chains continued across tropical Australia beyond 1950—over a century after the cessation of convict transportation to eastern Australia.[5] Small wonder that firearms figured so prominently in Aboriginal rock paintings of the fatal contact era, for such was the Aboriginal perception of Europeans (Plates 3-4).

There was little serious interest in, or speculation about, the antiquity of Aboriginal society until Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory challenged the chronology of Genesis and required both time and people before Adam. It is ironic, however, that those late nineteenth-century scientists who espoused evolutionary biology and studied Aboriginal society in the certainty that it *was* ancient, held further preconceptions which underscored prevailing community prejudices. The pervasive influence of this intellectual perception has been underestimated. Henceforth, existing racial relations and social welfare policies were bolstered and given academic respectability by a philosophy best described as 'the Relic Savage'.

Founding anthropologists A. W. Howitt and Baldwin Spencer, for example, interpreted their informants as literally unchanged living representatives of primeval man. Despite their evident humanitarian solicitude and personal friendship with individuals, there was more than a master-servant relationship separating them. Spencer informed readers of his National Museum catalogue, that 'the Australian aborigines may be regarded as a relic of the early childhood of mankind left stranded . . .'.[6] He instructed parliamentarians who, in 1912, commissioned him to draw up a plan to administer Northern Territory Aborgines,[7] that these survivals had minds 'about the level of a child . . . no sense of responsibility . . . and initiative'.

[4] W. Willshire, *Land of the Dawning*, Adelaide 1896, pp. 40-3.

[5] C. D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, ANU Press, Canberra 1970, p. 199.

[6] Baldwin Spencer, *Guide to the Australian Ethnographical Collection in the National Museum of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne 1901, p. 12.

[7] W. B. Spencer, Preliminary Report on the Aboriginals of the Northern Territory, *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, 7, 1913, pp. 13-14.

Such Relic Savages, whose virtually unchanged mentality, social institutions and customs persisted into the present, were incapable of adapting to modern conditions. The immutable laws of Progress decreed the end of such archaic survivals. In his first anthropological work Spencer gloomily predicted that 'in contact with the white man the aborigine is doomed to disappear'.[8] As the fittest would inherit the land, therefore, segregation on reserves was advocated as the most humane policy. Consequently, scientific social theory condemned Aboriginal society to paternalism and apartheid until the ultimate racial solution of extinction. Such a philosophy provided little incentive for archaeological research, because the living relics constituted testimony to their past; it was pointless to dig for answers.

Even at the academic and scientific advisory level, therefore, it became common practice to treat Australia's flora, fauna and indigenes as some quaint Antipodean version of retarded evolution, in which the Aboriginal race along with the gum tree, the kangaroo and the platypus, formed part of quirkish nature in a timeless land. Australia's cultural heritage became nothing but a storehouse of fossil custom. It is an historic fact that the Aborigines were subsumed within the province of each State Natural History museum, where their ethnography was displayed in lifeless taxonomic order. Art galleries excluded Aboriginal art until recent years, a lead followed with only a single exception, by Ure Smith's *Art and Australia*. It all served to emphasize the non-humanity of being Aboriginal.

In Europe, the story has been different. National states have emphasized the cultural continuity of indigenous societies from prehistory through history, although often from an idealized or politicized stance. Consequently, prehistory features in school curricula, while even royalty studies prehistoric archaeology at an academic level. For example, the Prince of Wales and the Queen of Denmark were Cambridge undergraduates in prehistory. Indeed, the assumed relevance of Danish prehistory to the common man is symbolized by the massive endowments which museums and prehistorians receive from the Carlsberg brewery. How long must Australian schoolchildren wait before they are taught an objective version of Australian colonization, before the Commonwealth Public Service Board ceases its bar on public servants from studying 'irrelevant' prehistory, or before breweries or other major companies invest in museums, or sponsor research into our cultural roots? The standing of Aboriginal prehistory within our community may be one index of its degree of maturity.

At least today, the winds of change blow strongly from tribal lands through museums and art galleries, and awareness dawns in some official quarters that the Aboriginal past belongs to all Australians. The Australian Heritage Commission is founded on this philosophy, while the Museum of Australia

[8] W. B. Spencer (ed.), Report on the Work of the *Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia*, 1896, vol. 1, p. 111.

Bill recognizes this social reality by integrating Galleries of Aboriginal Australia and Australian History within the one institution. Major archaeological discoveries and intellectual reappraisals of accepted dogma, necessitate this positive approach to the significance and quality of life in pre-European Australia.

Before Vesuvius buried Pompeii, even before the pyramids, Aboriginal Australians contributed vitally to the cultural richness of mankind. However, such archaeological traces are not given the serious consideration which they merit, partly because they do not consist of architectural monuments, precious metals, or the paraphernalia of agricultural or urban settlements. To paraphrase Professor Higgins, our society is prone to question 'why can't hunter-gatherers be like us', and evaluate achievements by familiar criteria such as the tombs of Egypt, the temples of Greece and the streets of Pompeii. Literacy, of course, is a further yardstick. Again, the assumption is that the quality of intellectual capital depends upon its being written down. Tribal elders would disagree, and their world view which is transmitted orally and through actions linked to localities merits serious attention, particularly as it contrasts so markedly with our own.

While not asserting some latter-day version of noble savagery, it may be claimed that, despite the stereotype of the conservative Aboriginal society closed to ideas and unable to adapt, it was creative and remarkably receptive in those areas of life which it deemed relevant. It is worth reminding this Academy that Aboriginal society placed primacy on the role of the artist and songman, by ensuring that the central concern of all adult men and women was spiritual well being and the ordering of ceremonial life. Childhood educational experiences were motivated towards that group goal. Both in daily routine and in esoteric ritual activities, art, music, song and dance were integrated. The kin group became totally involved and responsible at such critical periods of personal life as puberty, marriage, old age and death, in a manner that signified the importance of each individual to the common good.

Because Western society evaluates success using material criteria which are largely irrelevant to an Aboriginal assessment of cultural values or virtues, it has rated that society as impoverished. It is salutary to reflect, however, that until the growth of the social welfare state, all tribal Aborigines devoted more leisure time to the arts and ceremonial than all but a few Western artists and composers working under aristocratic patronage. Men and women also worked fewer hours than any peasant agrarian society and they ate a better balanced diet than the urban proletariat. They may have been inhibited by tradition and taboo, but their civil liberties exceeded those of nationals of many contemporary world powers.

If the quality of Aboriginal life was low on material assets, it was immeasurably rich in its reflective life and in its social relationships. As a consequence, it provided an enviable certitude for each constituent member. The visual reality of the creation-time landforms or mythical places provided

each clan with daily confirmation of its origins and of its place in nature and these traditional truths were further substantiated in ceremonial songs and dances. Each clansman possessed a timeless awareness of his local and group identity, which was keener than that which tied a patriot to his European nation state a century ago.

It is time to sketch relevant features of Australian prehistory, because prehistorians have demonstrated that its cultural complexity is deeply rooted in a past whose continuity and innovative adaptation exceeds that of most nations. This theme of spiritual values and artistic achievement seems doubly relevant to an Academy lecture delivered in a great art gallery.[9]

People settled in Australia over 40,000 years ago, and there are hints at Keilor and elsewhere that it may have been considerably earlier. However, the first substantial, varied and uncontroversial finds date within the last 30,000 years. In Old World terms, this equates with the Upper Palaeolithic, that dynamic phase of artistic and technological efflorescence associated with *Homo sapiens*. The Australian evidence exhibits all the hallmarks of the same creative humanity. It must be inferred that, for whatever reasons, emotional and interpersonal relationships existed, involving complex ritual behaviour, concern for the deceased and an aesthetic sense. They developed into the complex artistic and symbolic systems which flourished in rich diversity when uncomprehending Europeans arrived.

On the immense eroding skeleton of the Lake Mungo lunette, precious clues have been uncovered illumining the dignity and quality of life in ice age Australia. There is the evidence for complex human cremation practices some 26,000 years ago, by many millennia the earliest cremation burials known in the world. A few hundred metres away, but 4,000 years older, a grave contained the extended skeleton of a man who had been buried with his corpse thickly dusted with powdered ochre. Excavations show that red pigment was transported to Mungo even before 32,000 years ago, at much the same time as bodies were being interred on the Riviera daubed in ochre. Russell Drysdale painted this site in the summer of 1945. He portrayed a stark landscape seared by heat and inhospitable. His 'Walls of China' serves as a symbol of European perception of the outback, therefore, and a reminder that the same landscape appeared benign to Aborigines.

Almost every excavation in deposits older than 10,000 years uncovers quantities of ochre. Grindstone slabs impregnated with crushed ochre establish that it was used at Arnhem Land sites 19,000 years ago; fragments with striations or smooth facets indicate that 'crayons' also were used. Modern Aborigines employ ochre lavishly to give lustre and protection to wooden implements, for ceremonial body decoration and for painted designs on

[9] I have elaborated upon this theme in my Edgeworth David lecture, 'Blood from stones and bones', *Search*, 10 (1979), pp. 214-18. See also, the exhibition catalogue prepared by the Australian Gallery Directors Council, *Aboriginal Australia*, 1981, to which I contributed. Illustrations relevant to this lecture are reproduced there.

objects and rock surfaces. In recent times, it served as a basic commodity in gift exchange systems throughout Australia. Great quantities were consumed at ceremonies, particularly supplies from certain quarries which tradition endowed with mythological significance. Wilgie Mia quarry near Meekatharra produced many thousands of tonnes of ochre, which was mined using only stone mauls and wooden wedges.

Further insight into non-material aspects of the past is provided by century-old evidence from the Lake Eyre region. Up to seventy Dieri tribesmen journeyed 500 kms annually to attend ceremonies, and each returned home from Flinders Range quarries carrying heavy loads of ochre. Men from the same region also headed periodically across the Simpson Desert to sandhills where they exchanged ochre for the leaves of the narcotic pituri plant. The fact that these two commodities were separated by almost 1000 kms, yet they featured within a single exchange network, are proof that there was considerable opportunity for concepts, as well as goods, to be transmitted rapidly across distances at related ceremonial gatherings.[10]

Archaeology has established a continuous concern with pigments spanning over 30,000 years, but because rock paintings normally suffer rapid physical or chemical destruction, few paintings are known to be of great age. In Arnhem Land, however, numerous paintings have been identified portraying two animals believed extinct for up to 3000 years (Plate 5). They are anatomically detailed drawings of the Tasmanian tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) and the Tasmanian Devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*). Possibly these species survived later in this remote region, but scientific analysis of one thylacine gallery provides an alternative explanation. A protective silica film accumulated naturally over the surface, therefore possibly preserving the drawings over millennia. This is a field awaiting major research.

While it is difficult to date rock paintings, ancient rock markings have survived, produced by processes involving pecking, abrading or engraving. Koonalda cave is the most significant place. Set in total darkness deep beneath the Nullarbor Plain, the cave's limestone walls exhibit extensive areas of abraded grooves and finger tracings. Fortunately, for dating them, a rock fall buried some markings; subsequent visitors dropped brush torches as they clambered over the rubble. Provided that the correlation is valid, charcoal from these torches is over 20,000 years old, thereby providing a possible minimal age for those markings buried by the collapse. This subterranean gallery is as dark and difficult of access as many European Palaeolithic caves, while its art is older than most famous Palaeolithic galleries.

Excavations have produced further results. On Cape York, the Early Man Shelter contained a frieze of pecked designs buried beneath two metres of occupation deposit. It was already deeply weathered before it was covered

[10] For the extent of these ceremonial exchange networks, with maps, see my essay, 'The chain of connection' in N. Peterson (ed.), *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia*, A.I.A.S. Canberra, 1976.

13,000 years ago. Southwest of Katherine, Ingaladdi produced deeply incised linear grooves and bird tracks on rock fragments buried over 5,000 years ago. The designs had been placed on the shelter wall prior to the disintegration of its surface. Only eighty kilometres away at Delamere, identical grooves had been rubbed during a ceremony held there fifty years ago.

From Koonalda 20,000 years ago to modern Delamere, a remarkable continuity of technique and motif is exhibited. To judge from the extent of their physical and chemical weathering, there are numerous ancient sites with comparable motifs across much of Australia, from the Pilbara to West Queensland and South Australia. Many of them are rock pavements exposed in the open and now disintegrated, but covered with traces of abraded and pecked designs, including variants of grooves, circles and bird and animal tracks. Their absolute dating and conservation are pressing tasks. These design elements recur in Tasmania, where the magnificent Mt Cameron West engravings offer tantalizing hints that its artistic inspiration formed part of the invisible cultural inheritance of the Pleistocene colonists. However, this long persistence of motifs and their wide geographic distribution need not imply that transformation did not occur through time in the symbolism of the design elements.

In contrast to the pan-continental distribution of an ancient engraving tradition, recent rock painting was characterized by great regional diversity. Even within regions there were dynamic changes in form and technique, so that some galleries are palimpsests of the artistic traditions of that region. So many areas of Australia are unstudied in detail, that it is premature to synthesize its prehistoric art provinces. This same diversity of regional artistic and technological expression is reflected in material goods and decorative arts. Unfortunately, Europeans envisage a stereotyped Aboriginal who is equipped with the mandatory boomerang but little else.

Kimberley is known chiefly for its enormous mouthless Wandjina spirit figures, yet this emphasis is misleading, because these paintings replaced a lively earlier tradition of small action vignettes which combine artistry with detail. They are termed Bradshaw figures. Numerous artistic traditions are superimposed, also, on the rock faces of western Arnhem Land. The latest style is the better known one, because of its unique 'x-ray' portrayal of internal organs and skeletal elements, both in rock art and bark paintings. However, the tiny Mimi figures which they overlie are reminiscent of Bradshaw paintings and possibly form the most striking corpus in Aboriginal art. Economical and impressionistic in conception, they still portray vigorously and in detail the rich prehistoric material culture and related activity scenes. Another figurative style preceded the Mimi, with an emphasis upon larger naturalistic drawings, and the thylacine motifs may belong to it.[11]

[11] The art of Arnhem Land is vividly portrayed by Robert Edwards, *Australian Aboriginal Art*, A.I.A.S. Canberra, 1979.

This complex region, in common with almost every art province in Australia, contains a proportion of stencil paintings. This tradition climaxed in southern Queensland, where extensive galleries exhibit over ninety percent stencil motifs, chiefly hands and weapons, but even an entire human body is stencilled at one site. The art of western N.S.W. includes stencils, but its densely pecked and superimposed galleries emphasize simple activity scenes and human figures in silhouette. They never could be confused with any northern artistic complex. Central Australia, also, presents an emphatically distinct pictorial style. It emphasizes geometry—circles, concentric rings, linear designs—often as components of human or animal figures. The art of Cape York contains complex evidence for stylistic superpositions, and combines an emphasis on naturalistic paintings of fauna with distinctive, slender humans. These so-called Quinkan figures are a timely reminder that much Aboriginal art remains to be described; its conservation and preservation offer one of the great challenges of the Australian cultural heritage.

Personal adornment reflects individuality and self-awareness, and there are hints that the cult of personality has a long ancestry in Australia. Apart from the possible cosmetic applications of ochre, recent discoveries illumine the prehistoric decorative art. Cut segments of kangaroo fibulae were worn as beads over 12,000 years ago at Devil's Lair, south of Perth. At least that is the interpretation of their wear pattern, presumably the result of friction from a sinew on which each bone was threaded. Around this period, a body was buried at Kow Swamp, its head ornamented by a row of kangaroo incisors, while traces of resin indicated that they had been stuck together in a band.

Excavations at Graman, N.S.W., uncovered two stone pendants, buried over 5,000 years. They are perforated for suspension by a pecking technique. In the same region, the Seelands shelter contained a rectangular shell piece with a hole cut in it for threading. This specimen was a few centuries old, and it raises the possibility that the ceremonial exchange of shell ornaments during the nineteenth century was an ancient custom. Pearl shell from the Kimberley coast and baler shell from Cape York waters diffused for ritual purposes over distances exceeding 1500 kms. The further they travelled, the more esoteric and non-decorative their functions. Baler shell pendants have been identified amongst stencilled designs on the walls of painted galleries far inland in southern Queensland. Their rarity and ritual value may be reflected in the apparent repeated use of the same specimen on a cave wall.

Roonka burial ground, on the Murray river, contained further variants of ornament. Grave goods older than 4,000 years included two tiger cat (*Dasyurus*) mandibles, with holes drilled through the ascending ramus, and a fossil Miocene oyster shell with two perforations for suspension. Another burial wore a double strand of notched marsupial incisors encircling its forehead.

The most dramatic ornament excavated so far accompanied Nitchie Man to

his grave in western N.S.W. over 6,000 years ago.[12] He wore a necklace of 178 Tasmanian Devil teeth, constructed from a minimum of forty-seven animals, each tooth pierced by a hole which was ground and gouged. There is no parallel for these pierced teeth, while the predatory implications of the necklace offer a possible clue to the cause of the mainland extinction of this prey. The Nitchie cranium lacked its two upper incisor teeth, which had been removed during life. Some Roonka burials had undergone similar treatment, so this may point to the early practice of tooth avulsion, an initiation ritual distributed widely in 1788. Nineteenth-century Aborigines also continued the tradition of using teeth, mandibles and shells as ornaments, paralleling closely the archaeological specimens mentioned above. Tasmanian shell necklaces are the most distinctive surviving artefacts of Tasmanian decorative art.

Such material hints of ceremonial continuity, together with persistent burial practices and artistic traditions, may reflect the great antiquity of Aboriginal belief systems. The extraordinary multiplicity of languages from a common ancestral tongue—over 220 of them—is also testimony to many millennia since tribal groupings became established. While complex reciprocal gift exchange systems and associated rituals formed a pattern across the continent, the 'walkabout' involved in attending them was set within clearly defined territorial and kinship bounds. In this sense, the shiftless Aboriginal 'walkabout' of popular belief is fiction. Links with ancestral territories were too close for people to move outside them. No Melbourne tribe ever visited the Gold Coast, or wintered in Mildura.

All very well, critics respond, but if Aboriginal society was so creative, why did it not develop agriculture and so progress to 'better' things? This is a non-question motivated by Europocentric preconceptions of the good life. There is insufficient time to examine this problem, but it is necessary to explain that recent research indicates that considerable regional intensification of economic exploitation patterns occurred within Australia.

Improved technology linked with local environmental manipulation greatly increased the economic yield. Disregard current concepts of what typifies sound farming management, but accept the reality that Aborigines utilized alternative planning and production principles. These tools included controlled burning, finely tuned seasonal movements to maximize locally abundant food supplies, drainage, leaching of poisonous constituents from nutritious but dangerous foods, wild fowl drives, fish traps, food storage—all on a scale never appreciated previously.

There is abundant evidence from every major environmental region that groups of some hundreds, possibly 1000 people in some areas, assembled regularly for extended and bountiful ceremonial events. Over much of arid Australia such food resources and population densities never have been

[12] N. W. G. Macintosh, Analysis of an Aboriginal skeleton and a pierced tooth necklace from Lake Nitchie, *Anthropologie*, IX, 1971, pp. 49-62.

equalled since contact; certainly European pioneers seldom matched Aborigines for leisure or nutrition, while despite hardship and effort their creative comforts were few. Yet a single generation of overstocking created ecological havoc on a scale unmatched even by the changes accompanying the end of the ice age. It is reasonable to ask, therefore, why the essentially different lifeway of the Aborigines should have provided incentive to 'invent' farming or pastoralism in its western form.

Prehistorians and ecologists have demonstrated within the past decade the extent to which wild grasses were harvested in the semi-arid zone, using sandstone slabs to mill the staple flour. As the use of grindstones probably exceeds 15,000 years, they constitute some of the earliest evidence in the world for such a technology. Likewise, intensification of cycad and macrozamia nut and wild tomato fruit (*solanum*) production followed premeditated burning. Similarly, 'firestick farming' encouraged regrowth and so congregated grazing marsupials on selectively fired areas. In inland rivers and lakes, fish were manipulated through complex traps which represented major engineering achievements, while enormous nets maximized wildfowl exploitation. In the Western District, channels were dug between and within swamps which controlled the movement of eels and facilitated trapping them. In tropical waters, Indonesian and Papuan watercraft were adapted to the requirements of dugong and turtle harvesting.[13]

Quite obviously, the hundreds of regionally adapted tribal societies did not constitute a unitary continental 'culture', despite the fact that some governments assume such a monolithic structure even today, when formulating policies or asserting the errors of Aboriginal ways. Neither were they the parasitic, brutalized and free-ranging nomads which the European landtakers found a convenient stereotype in order to justify their actions in the cause of progress.

If there is every reason to record, preserve and promote the achievements of prehistoric Australia, there is an equal obligation to ensure that the non-Aboriginal material heritage is respected and preserved. In my opinion it is unfortunate that some governments divide the legislation and administration of Aboriginal and European relics between different Ministries. Our European vision of 'us' and 'them' persists in this legal device. It accentuates the notion that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal places are different entities, whereas they constitute the totality of human endeavour in this continent and the inter-relationship between man and the environment.

More serious is the fact, however, that while legislation exists to protect

[13] Rhys Jones, 'The Neolithic, Palaeolithic and the Antipodes', in R. P. Suggate, M. M. Creswell (eds), *Quaternary Studies*, The Royal Society of New Zealand, Wellington 1975, pp. 21-34; Harry Lourandos, 'Change or stability?: hydraulics, hunter-gatherers and population in temperate Australia', *World Archaeology*, 11, 1980, pp. 245-64.

Aboriginal places in every state, at least notionally, in some states non-Aboriginal places are unprotected by any heritage-type legislation. Possibly it is because many influential people wrongly assume that you cannot have an archaeology or a respectable history of a recent society. Fewer than two centuries seems an unduly brief notch on the stick of world history. The element of cultural cringe and inferiority which has inhibited positive action to preserve our past was highlighted by the Hope Committee's *Report on the National Estate.*[14]

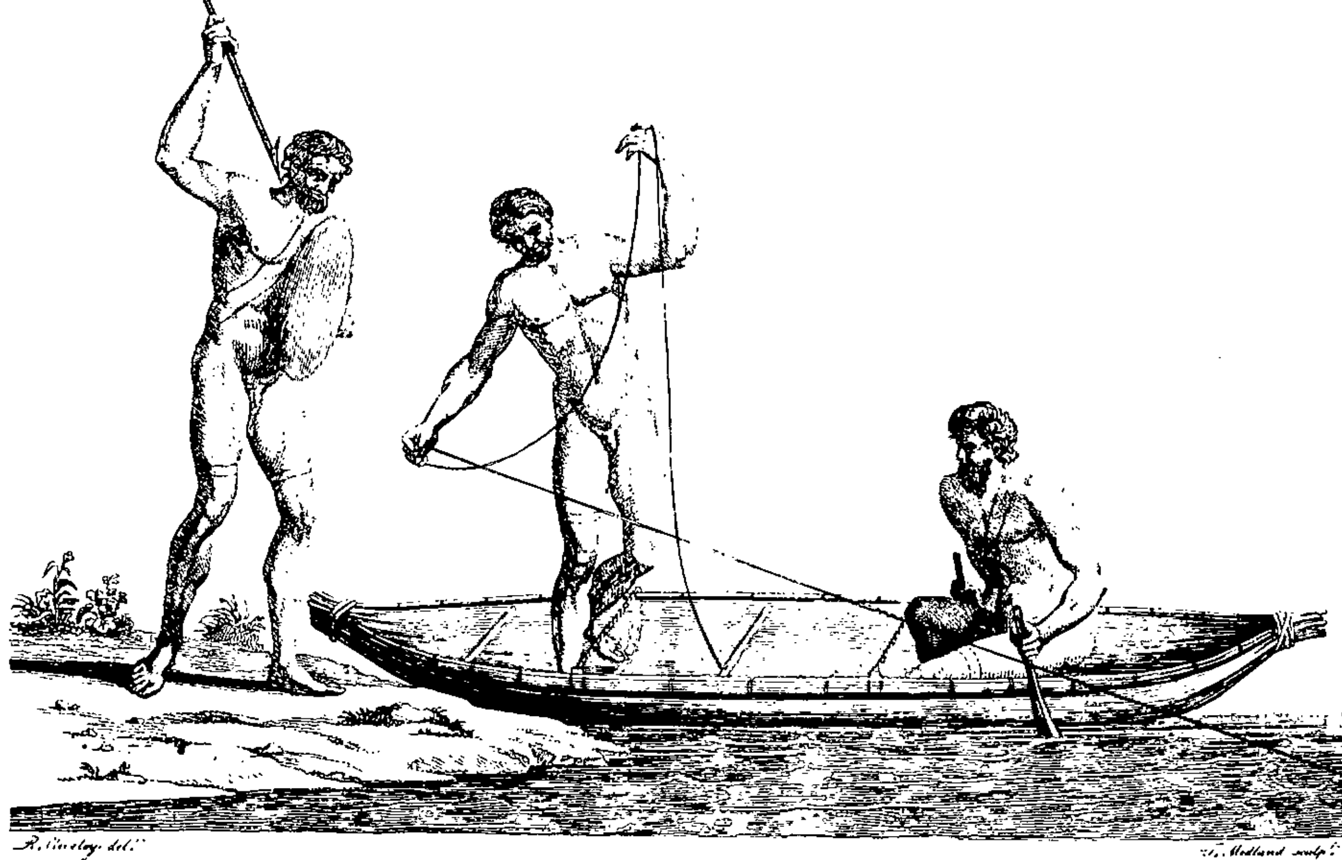
It seems symptomatic of past unconcern amongst academic historians for the material evidence of the past, that they have done little for conserving those very structures which housed the authors of their documents. Whelan the Wrecker and those other prime movers of city development had changed the face of historic urban streetscapes by the time the Hope Committee assembled in 1973. Although National Trusts and some Historical Societies gave evidence to that Inquiry, amongst the ten pages of witnesses, I cannot find listed the name of any academic historian or university department.

Time prevents an examination of the alarming condition of Australia's non-Aboriginal cultural relics. Within the past decade places of significance to the history of mankind, and not only those important nationally, have been either destroyed or 'restored' out of existence, by public and private actions. Much of the work in The Rocks area in Sydney, and Kingston, on Norfolk Island, must be so described. Some National Trusts, the Australian Institute of Engineers, and Heritage bodies in those states which have them, are working with the Australian Heritage Commission to ensure that our material past does have a future. Australia is a signatory to both the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. These are moral and practical guidelines which need to be implemented firmly throughout the Commonwealth. Too many prominent citizens today parallel the attitude of those Darwinian biologists of a century ago, who assumed that progress necessarily involved the extinction of the Aboriginal race; recently a Premier demolished declared Heritage places in the interests of a 'progress' which makes ancient buildings retrograde; and he has many supporters in areas of public as well as private enterprise, as a stroll along the length of Collins Street demonstrates.

It is best to close with a reflection from Jock Marshall's pioneering conservation classic, *The Great Extermination,* because he reflected an Australian vision of our future which utilised the resources of our past: 'Our national heritage, be it the Platypus, an old pub or a colonial document, is ours for the skinning, the bulldozing, the burning—or the keeping.'[15]

[14] *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate*, A.G.P.S. Canberra, 1974, p. 136.

[15] A. J. Marshall, *The Great Extermination*, Panther, London 1968, p. 16.



NATIVES OF BOTANY BAY.

PLATE I Natives of Botany Bay, engraving by T. Medland after R. Cleveley, published in 1789.

[illegible] Chained Aboriginal prisoners presumed to be in the custody of W. Willshire, Alice Springs district, during the 1880s

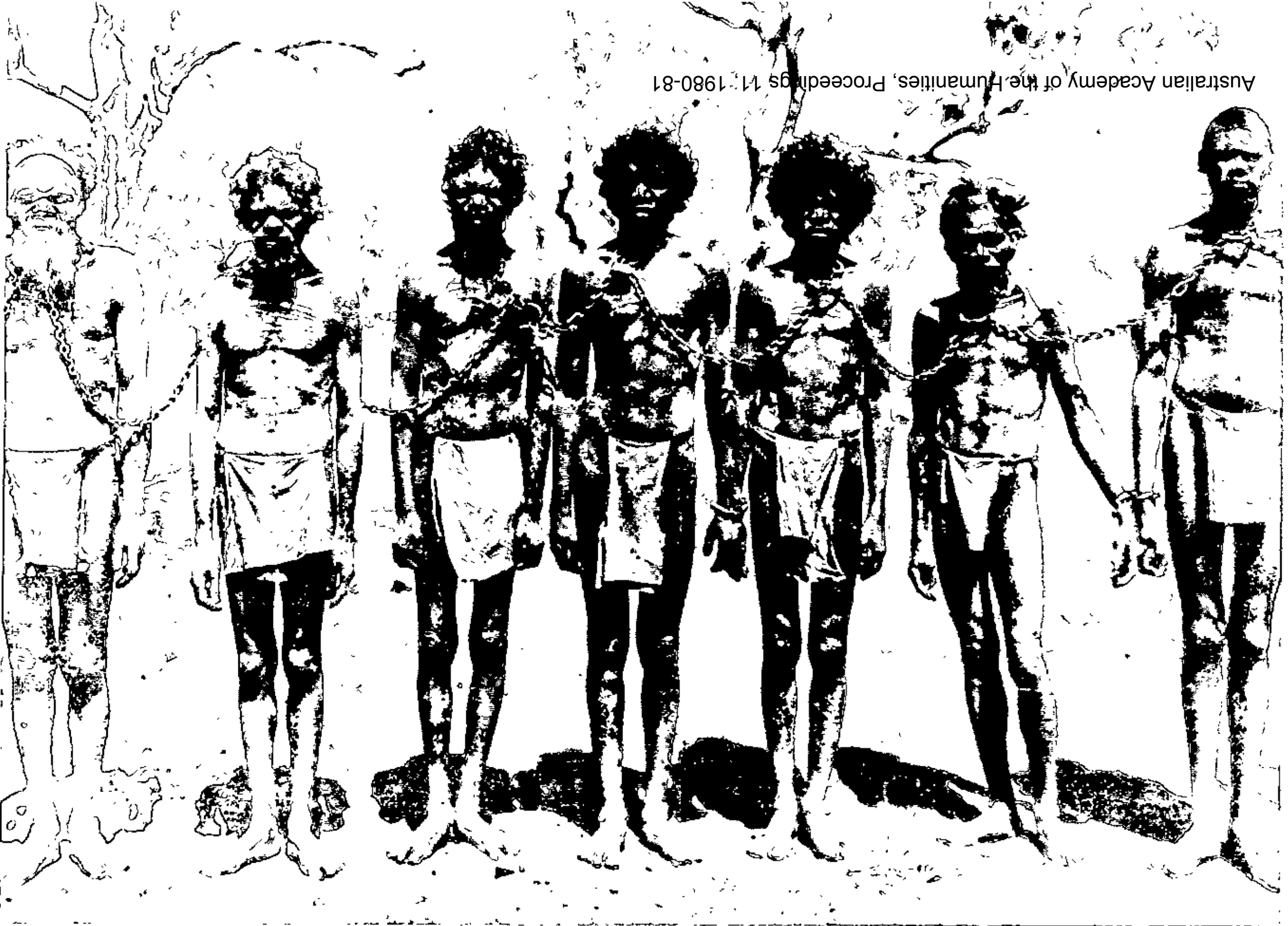


PLATE 3 'Prisoners on way down 9 miles from Wyndham'. Photograph taken by H. Klaatsch, August 1906. At this period there were over eighty Aboriginal prisoners in the Wyndham gaol. (A.I.A.S.)

PLATE 1. Rifles and revolvers painted in a rock shelter south-west of Katherine, N.T. (Robert Edwards)

PLATE 5 Painting of a thylacine (Tasmanian tiger) on the face of an Arnhem Land rock shelter. This is one of a group of thylacines depicted at this shelter. (G. Chaloupka)

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PLATE 6 Fossil minds — a storehouse of fossil culture: Baldwin Spencer and informants, Alice Springs, 1896.