

# The Travels of the Macleay (Chau Chak Wing Museum) Slides: migration, war and exploration

**Elisa deCourcy spoke with curator, Jan Brazier about the breadth and intricacies of the Macleay Collection of lantern slides at Sydney University.**

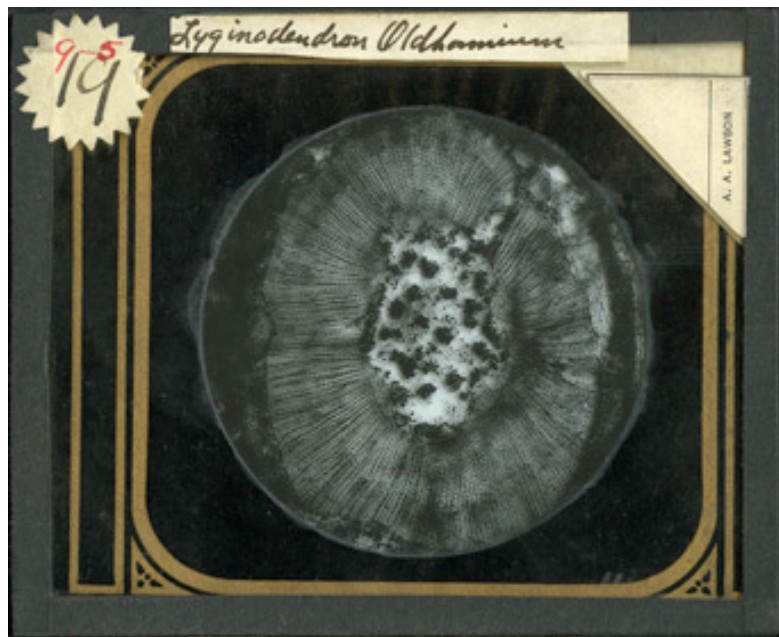
The Macleay Museum opened in 1890 as a repository for the natural history collection of the family whose name it carries. The collecting zeal began with Alexander Macleay (1767-1848) whose array of insect specimens was unmatched in England. He moved to Australia in 1826 to take up the post of Colonial Secretary to New South Wales, where his son and great nephew went onto expand the family's collection to include all areas of zoology along with ethnographic artefacts. Today the Macleay holdings are even more extensive and varied. They represent a cross-section of the sciences but also encompass the Historic Photograph Collection, a part of which is over 10 000 lantern slides. On the eve of its 130th year the Macleay is about to go through a new phase of reinvention as its exhibition space and holdings are absorbed into and extended in the new [Chau Chak Wing Museum](#).



Jan Brazier with the Macleay slides. Photo credit Elisa deCourcy

Jan and Elisa discussed the scope and variety of the lantern slides. A large part of the collection is drawn from materials used for teaching in the various university departments. Many of the slides were fabricated by departmental technical officers. Mainly, the slides come from the sciences but there are a few sets from the arts. The French department, for example, used a 1907 high-quality commercial photographic series showing notable Parisian landmarks for teaching throughout the early twentieth century. Aside from teaching materials, there are some sets that came in from personal collections by way of private donations. And, there is the large collection from the Department of Anthropology that would have been used both for teaching and public lectures. The process of cataloguing, researching and digitalising the lantern slide collection is extensive and on-going. Moreover, the Macleay collection is diverse ranging from beautiful photographic slides, such as some delicately hand-painted miniature slides from the Sino-Japanese war, to information slides, exhibiting copies of diagrams from textbook.

A partial set of botanical slides photographed and painted by the foundational professor of botany is perhaps one of the more beautiful and eye-catching series in the collection. Professor Abercrombie Anstruther Lawson was a fellow of the Linnean Society, London and taught at the University of Sydney between 1913 until his death in 1927. His research interest lay in Australian flora, particularly seed-producing plants, and investigations into ideas of Mendelian descent. Lawson's slides depict intricate hand-coloured visions of flora from fossil plants to photomicrograph views of dissected seed pods. His scientific prowess is displayed in the subject matter but his artistic skill is evident in the quality of his hand-colouring. Jan highlighted Lawson's pride in the slides gesturing to how he affixed many with a tiny, custom-made corner-frame stickers bearing his own name and initials 'A. A. Lawson'.



A.A. Lawson, lantern slide c. 1915, image supplied.

Yet, not all of the Macleay teaching series are sets carefully photographed and hand-painted by founding professors. Geology accounts for the largest lantern slide collection of any department and predominantly comprises of photographic slides of mixed origin, quality and maker. Indeed, this medley of original, amateur, and commercially-produced slides is what makes some of these teaching sets so interesting. For example, Antarctic explorer, war adviser and academic, Sir Tannatt William Edgeworth David used a hybrid set of slides in his geology lectures showing scenes from his time as a geologist working on the Western front. Jan has recently attributed some of his slides to the photographs of Australian war photographer, Frank Hurley. Her research has found that both Edgeworth David and Lawson's slides had lives beyond the classroom, being used as the accompaniments to public and society lectures. 'Daily Observer' (Tamworth) wrote a piece on one of Edgeworth David's public lectures on 19 Sep 1919 '[War Wonders Professor David's lecture](#)' describing the audience 'being enthralled from beginning to end' on account of his beautifully illustrative lantern slides.

***The Chau Chak Wing Museum is due to open in late 2018. It will display portions of the Macleay lantern slide collection and provide opportunities for scholars to undertake further research into the university's extensive lantern slide collection.***

