

Anthropological Slides at The Queensland Museum



Wild Australia performers, Brisbane, 1892, from the Roberts Family Collection.

Recently, lead CI Martyn Jolly visited the Queensland Museum, where he explored the Museum's lantern-slide collections with Karen Kindt, Assistant Collection Manager, Anthropology, and the Indigenous curator Michael Aird, Research Fellow, School of Social Science, University of Queensland. The Museum holds several major collections of slides related to science, religion, and anthropology. An example of the diversity of the Museum's collections are the slides produced by Charles Joseph Pound, a Queensland microbiologist who identified tick-born 'redwater fever' amongst Queensland's cattle and in the late 1890s and gave many lectures to Queensland farmers exhorting them to inoculate their herds.

Also of interest were slides produced by Bert Roberts of the long-established Ipswich family of coach builders and transport pioneers. He documented items of local interest including Aboriginal

communities. It is probable that he was at the Brisbane Show Grounds in 1892 to photograph Indigenous performers from the travelling show 'Meston's Wild Australia'. (For more information on these performers see: Wild Australia: Meston's Wild Australia Show 1892-1893, Michael Aird, Mandana Mapar and Paul Memmott, University of Queensland Anthropological Museum, 2015.)



Boxes of 'Primus Junior Lecture Series' chromolithographic slides with their readings

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Karen, Michael and Martyn also saw a large collection of slides that had been donated to the Museum in 1978 by The Reverend Clarence (Clarrie) Trudgian, Superintendent of the Brisbane City Mission from 1939 to 1980. Amongst the familiar scriptural images, which must have been used for Sunday School, were a large collection of intact boxes of lurid chromolithographic transfers from the 'Primus Junior Lecture Series', all complete with their printed readings. They give a vivid insight into colonial visual culture aimed at children in the early twentieth century. Besides the patriotic 'Our Colonies', other comic sets had enticing names like 'Gag-Jag the Rejected', 'A Country Courtship', and 'Sweep and Whitewasher'. (These sets are available for viewing on the [Lucerna magic lantern web resource](#))

The Museum also holds one of Clarrie Trudgian's original lectures, complete with its wooden travelling box and handwritten list of captions. 'War and Peace', a lecture of 74 slides, recounts Trudgian's experience during the First World War, where he served on the Western Front after training in North Africa and before returning home via South Africa.

Another intact lecture, where the slides remain in order and have been kept together with the lecture they illustrated, is also extremely significant. A O C Davies was a school teacher on Murray Island in the Torres Strait from 1924 to 1925, his ethnographic lecture of 92 slides is accompanied by its complete script and relates in personal detail his interactions with the local people.

Heber Longman, director of the Queensland Museum from 1918 to 1945, also left behind a collection of hundreds of anthropological slides, still ordered in their original boxes, but without the 'scientific' lectures they would have illustrated. As a botanist and zoologist Longman's collection appears intended to use anthropometric and photographic 'evidence' to 'rank' human 'races' in a global hierarchy. As such, it remains as compelling evidence of the power of the slide lecture in promulgating now discredited views of race.

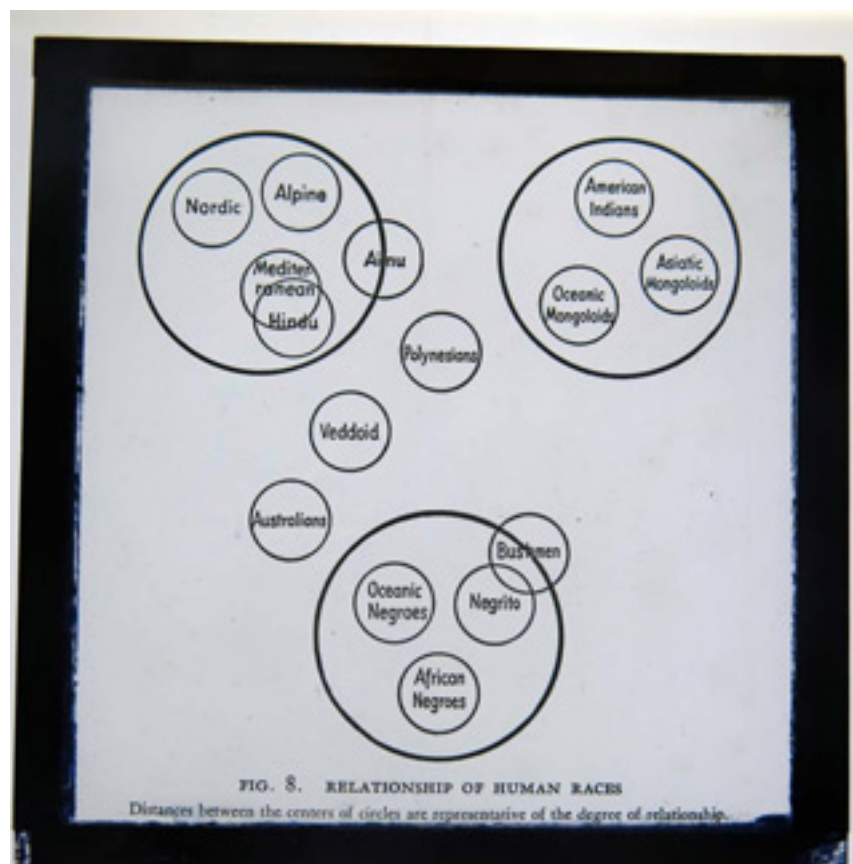


Diagram from a lecture on race. Heber Longman collection

Amongst the slides sourced from around the world, Longman's collection contains images originally taken by Walter Roth, an early anthropologist, ethnologist and 'Protector of Aborigines' in north Queensland between 1898 and 1906. The Museum holds two slides of images which were very controversial and the subject of much public discussion and parliamentary debate in 1904 and 1905. The slides are of two Aboriginal people paid by Roth to demonstrate a sexual position 'with a view', in Roth's words, 'to ascertaining the connection (if any) between the highest apes and the lowest types of man' This controversy eventually led to Roth's resignation in 1906, however because the images have been made into lantern slides, they must have once been displayed to other anthropologists in a lecture.

However, there is no evidence to suggest that Longman had used these slides in his lectures. (For more information, see Dr Helen Pringle, [The fabrication of Female Genital Mutilation: The UN, Walter Roth and Ethno-Pornography](#)).

Another large and significant collection of anthropological lecture slides is that assembled by Herbert John Wilkinson, foundation Professor of Anatomy at the University of Queensland in 1936. They were donated to the Museum in 1988 by Dr Walter Wood, then of UQ's School of Anatomy. Before coming to Queensland, Wilkinson had been lecturing in Anatomy in Adelaide. In 1931 he joined an extensive anthropological expedition to Cockatoo Creek in South Australia's north. (For more information see Philip Jones, *Images of the Interior: Seven Central Australian Photographers*, Wakefield Press, 2011) Wilkinson's slides beautifully and movingly document aboriginal life and ceremony, as well as the activities of the other anthropologists on the expedition, who he records busily filming and photographing their subjects. One of Wilkinson's slide boxes is labeled 'Inaugural Lecture'. This mysterious label prompted the question for us: are they his inaugural lecture as an Anatomy professor at the University of Queensland in 1936, or perhaps the lecture he gave as founding President of the Anthropological Society of Queensland in 1948?



Herbert John Wilkinson, Cockatoo Creek, 1931.



Michael Aird at the Queensland Museum

Martyn Jolly, Karen Kindt and Michael Aird were only able to spend such a fascinating morning amongst this material because of the earlier work of Michael Aird himself. Back in the mid 1990s, as an Indigenous researcher employed by the Museum, he had identified previously uncatalogued photographic images related to Indigenous Australians which was dispersed throughout the Museum's collections. He began to register them to the 'ethno-historical collection' and begin a new database. On each slide, alongside the original slide maker's slide number or label, assigned from within the taxonomy of the original collection or lecture, Michael had written a new number belonging to the Museum's 'EH' collection. This palimpsest of

taxonomies, attempting to locate the slippery magic lantern slide as it slips between different times, authors, owners, users, genres and, ultimately, meanings, is starkly and materially exemplified by the Queensland Museum's collection where, as in all collections, power and memory compete to make history. As they continue to catalogue and reproduce their collections of magic lantern slides, the Queensland Museum will continue to make more personal connections and reveal more about the historical apparatus of knowledge in Queensland's institutions.