

Research and Collections



RESEARCH

Museum Victoria is responsible for maintaining a collection in excess of 16 million items. The collection is developed through research and acquisition, and accessed by scholars and communities. Information on Museum Victoria's collection and research focus, including details of current research programs and projects, is available on Museum Victoria's website.

During the year, Museum Victoria focussed on implementing key aspects of the Research Strategy, which was approved by the Museums Board in September 2001. Museum Victoria constantly aims to expand its research capacity by building on existing research partnerships with key universities and research institutions. Additionally, Museum Victoria aims to secure further research grants and increase involvement in graduate student education.

Research highlights:

- In 2002-2003, Museum Victoria researchers received funding support from a variety of sources including: the Australian Research Council; Australian Biological Resources Study; National Oceans Office; Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts; Australia Council for the Arts; Australian Heritage Commission; The Ian Potter Foundation; The University of Melbourne; Arts Victoria; Visions of Australia; and the National Geographic Society (details listed in Appendix).
- Museum Victoria researchers were involved in three successful applications to the Australian Research Council. Funding was awarded to projects that will examine the effects of evolutionary history on rarity and extinction risk in Australian vertebrates; evaluate contemporary museum practices and the cultural and civic roles of museums; and investigate anthropological and Aboriginal perspectives on the Donald Thomson Collection.
- Funding was also awarded to Museum Victoria from the Smart Water Fund. The funds will be used to develop an installation on water conservation in Melbourne homes. The installation will encourage Melbourne's residents to adopt sustainable water practices and provide information about ways to minimise water use. This initiative is closely aligned with the 2002 Thomas Ramsay Science and Humanities Fellowship project, *Innovating with Water*, which investigates the social, cultural, technological and ecological aspects of water use in Victoria.
- The DNA Research and Education Centre was established in 2003, with generous funding from The Ian Potter Foundation. The Centre undertakes research on the evolution and conservation of Australia's unique fauna, enhances the scope and value of existing natural history specimens by analysing their DNA, and delivers innovative programs in DNA-based science education for all ages.
- Five Museum Victoria staff participated in the Norfolk Ridge Australia and New Zealand (NORFANZ) marine research expedition to explore deep-sea habitats and biodiversity around Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands. The expedition received significant exposure in the media, and some of the specimens collected during the cruise have been displayed at Melbourne Museum.
- The 2002 Crosbie Morrison Memorial Lecture was presented by Dr Libby Robin, Research Fellow at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University. Dr Robin's lecture, entitled *Nature and Nation*, focussed on civics and nature study in Australia over the past 100 years.

Graduate and Postgraduate Student Supervision highlights:

- Six honours and 27 postgraduate students were supervised by Museum Victoria staff (details listed in Appendix).
- Museum Victoria has awarded two PhD Fellowships in collaboration with the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne, to facilitate research on the Museum's historical collections. The successful scholars are undertaking research on the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, and on rural women as drivers of change in Australian agriculture.

Publications highlights:

- Over 68 papers, reports, books and theses were produced, and 137 lectures and talks were presented (details listed in Appendix).
- *Memoirs of Museum Victoria* Volume 60(1) was produced, featuring the proceedings of a symposium on anomuran crustaceans, which was held during the 5th International Crustacean Conference in Melbourne in 2001.
- Staff members began work on a major publication that highlights treasures from the Museum Victoria collection. The publication will include a selection of more than 200 treasured objects, along with accounts from expert staff and special guest contributors, and is to be released as part of the Museum's 150th anniversary celebrations in 2004.

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY AND TECHNOLOGY

Through the Australian Society and Technology Department, Museum Victoria aims to improve our understanding of Australian and Victorian history and the relationships between technology and society.

Highlights:

- Curatorial research for the *Getting In* exhibition, which opened at Immigration Museum in February 2003.
- Several Australian descendants of inventor William Symington attended the launch of a display at the Immigration Museum in April 2003. This event marked the 200th anniversary of the successful trials of his first steamboat, *Charlotte Dundas* near Glasgow, Scotland. Museum Victoria holds a rare original model and drawings by the inventor.
- Development of the *Tools of Trade* exhibition at Scienceworks, featured over 200 fascinating and beautiful Museum Victoria objects, representing 40 different trades.
- Collaboration with the Department of Infrastructure to develop an exhibition that highlighted the key elements of the new Melbourne 2030 strategic plan for Melbourne's development.
- Curators undertook a wide range of research projects, many of which will lead to publication and exhibition. They include: *Women in agriculture*, *Photography in the late 19th and early 20th centuries*, the *Royal Exhibition Building*, the *1854 Melbourne Exhibition*, the *Development of television in Australia*, *War and public memory*, the *Glory boxes of immigrant women*, *History of telegraphy*, the *Thomson steam car*, *Immigrant ships*, the *Lives of women in Melbourne's "Little Lon,"* and the *Great Melbourne Telescope*.
- Extensive research was undertaken on the history of tent boxing in Australia, with funding from a Development Grant from Visions Australia. Museum Victoria has the Harry Johns Boxing Truck and associated material in its collection. The research will form the basis for a national travelling exhibition.
- Australian Society and Technology curators undertook several reports for the Movable Cultural Heritage Unit of the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage, regarding permits for export of potentially significant heritage items. The Government relies considerably on the Museum's curatorial expertise on items of social and technological significance.

- The bi-annual Australian newsletter on children's folklore, *Play & Folklore*, is now published by Museum Victoria, both in hard copy and on the website.
- The Department acquired 11,093 items during the year. Significant acquisitions included the Cliff and Bunting steam traction engine, manufactured in North Melbourne c.1908. This engine is one of only two surviving Australian-built traction engines and is an important landmark in Australian technology. The purchase was assisted with grants from the Commonwealth Government's National Heritage Account and the Sunshine Foundation. Archival records relating to the history of CSIRAC, one of the first electronic computers in the world, were transferred from the University of Melbourne. Pioneer aerial photographer Jim Payens donated 4,200 aerial images taken from 1950s–1990s, as well as his own purpose-built camera. Other items include marionettes from the Forgeron Marionette Theatre, located at Luna Park from the 1920s–1950s, and a Phar Lap fan photo and letter from trainer Tommy Woodcock, sent in 1932 to a fan in Canada (this was the Museum's first donation via the internet).
- Daily tours of the collection store at Scienceworks continue to provide an insight into the Museum's collections, with over 3,500 people taking a tour during the year.

Advisory Committee

- Professor Kate Darian-Smith, Director, The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne.
- Professor Graeme Davison, School of Historical Studies, Monash University.
- Professor Peter Thorne, Computer Science & Software Engineering, University of Melbourne.
- Dr David Turnbull, School of Humanities, Deakin University.

INDIGENOUS CULTURES

Museum Victoria works with Indigenous peoples in Australia and the South Pacific to improve our understanding of Indigenous people and their cultures.

Highlights:

- Museum Victoria continued the touring schedule for the exhibition *Thookay Ngaweeyan, Young Voices of Victoria: Aboriginal Children's Art from the Collections of Museum Victoria* to regional galleries throughout Victoria and New South Wales, and to Tandanya, the National Aboriginal Cultural Institute in Adelaide.
- Development continued for exhibitions including *Our Place: Indigenous Australia Now* (working title), a joint exhibition with the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. The exhibition is considered a gift from Australia's two Olympic cities to Athens and will be presented in the lead-up to the Athens Olympics. Other exhibitions in development include *Inside Dreaming*, an exhibition of Aboriginal prison art, and *Colliding Worlds: Episodes of first contact between the Pintupi and Europeans: 1956-1984*.
- Work has begun on the Australian Research Council Linkage Grant project entitled *Anthropological and Aboriginal perspectives on the Donald Thomson Collection: material culture, collecting and identity*. Other research projects include the Graham Officer collection from the Solomon Islands and the Melbourne Aboriginal community.
- Manuscripts on *Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land* and *The Aboriginal Photographs of Baldwin Spencer* were finalised for publication. The new Fiji Online project was finalised and will be launched in the upcoming year.

- Major acquisitions during the year included bark cloth from Fiji purchased during a research trip in 2002; a donation of 257 children's drawings and photographs from Lake Tyers, Gippsland, in the 1960s; 79 items from Samoa; and donations of material from Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Alaska.
- There continues to be a very high demand for external access to the collections and for copies of photographs. Approximately 3,500 images from the *Thomson Pintupi Project*, plus 1,800 images from the *Ara Irititja Project* have been scanned and catalogued to facilitate access by the relevant Aboriginal communities.
- A large number of loans were processed including 53 Waramungu objects to the new Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre in Tennant Creek, and five objects to the Queensland Art Gallery for their exhibition *Story Place: Indigenous Art of Cape York and the Rainforest*.

Repatriation:

The Museums Board of Victoria approved two new policies on repatriation in June 2003:

- Repatriation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Property.
- Repatriation of Indigenous Cultural Property from the Pacific Island and the Rest of the World.

With funding assistance from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), Museum Victoria repatriated Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and Grave Goods to representatives of the Taungurong, Yorta Yorta, Wurundjeri and Latje Latje communities, as well as to Ernabella, South Australia. Approval was given for the return of Remains to the Wathaurung and North West Nations Clans as well as Ancestral Remains and secret-sacred objects to communities in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia, and a significant collection of secret-sacred objects to communities throughout Central Australia.



An important collection of Ancestral Remains (the Berry Collection) was transferred from the University of Melbourne. Funding from the University has enabled work to begin to establish provenance information to enable repatriation to the appropriate communities.

Advisory Committees

Museum Victoria continued to receive advice from the following Committees:

- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee (ACHAC).
- Pacific Islands Advisory Group.
- Donald Thomson Collection Administration Committee (in association with the University of Melbourne).

SCIENCES

Museum Victoria aims to promote an understanding of the natural sciences, the human mind and body, and science communication.

Highlights:

- The DNA Research and Education Centre project, funded by The Ian Potter Foundation, commenced operations in 2003. The centre includes a state-of-the-art DNA sequencing facility and an ancient DNA laboratory. A mobile DNA lab is also being developed for public program use.
- Curatorial staff provided content and direction for the development of the Scienceworks exhibitions *House Secrets* and *Science of Toys*, the Melbourne Museum exhibition *Bugs Alive!*, and the Planetarium show *Cosmic Couriers*.
- Museum Victoria provided specimens and content for the touring exhibitions, *A Gap in Nature*, *Mars and Beyond*, *The Waterhole*, and *Stuffed and Mounted*, as well as the Australia Post exhibition *Away with the Birds*.

- Museum Victoria established a partnership with the Commonwealth Department of Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health. Museum Victoria was supplied with a high resolution digital microscope and camera in exchange for providing detailed information and images of pest invertebrate species.

- Staff played a significant role in the implementation and launch of the OZCAM (Online Zoological Collections in Australian Museums) project. This project is a distributed network that links the zoological databases across all the Australian museums with natural history collections. The first databases to be linked were the mammal, reptile, amphibian and fish collections. In addition, funding was received from the Global Biodiversity Information Facility to database and image-capture all the type specimens of vertebrate and molluscs held in Australian collections.

- A successful ongoing monthly seminar series, the Melbourne Systematics Forum, began involving participants from Museum Victoria, universities, Royal Botanic Gardens and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

- Five Museum staff joined an international team of 30 on the NORFANZ research expedition to document the biodiversity of seamounts (extinct submarine volcanoes) in the Tasman Sea over a four-week period. Thousands of specimens of fish and invertebrates were collected and photographed, including many new to science. Significant numbers of these have been incorporated into the Museum's collection.

- An important collection of minerals and fossils valued at over \$200,000 was donated by Mr Tom Kapitany under the Cultural Gifts Program. Other significant donations included the Glynn Maynard collection of Australian bees, a specimen of the extinct Paradise Parrot, and the second instalment of the Marrow Collection of marine molluscs comprising 1000 lots of cowrie shells from the Australasian region.

- Significant acquisitions included fishes from Hawaii, birds from South Africa and the Northern Territory, 1200 bird DNA samples from Queensland, a rare False Cat-Shark from the southwest Indian Ocean and freshwater fishes from southern Australia.

- Staff undertook fieldwork in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland, central Australia, Ashmore Reef, Alaska and Uzbekistan collecting vertebrate, invertebrate, fossil and mineral specimens.

Advisory Committee

- Professor Janet McCalman, Department of History & Philosophy of Science, and, Centre for the Study of Health & Society, University of Melbourne.
- Professor John McKenzie, Faculty of Sciences, University of Melbourne.
- Professor Fred Mendelsohn, Howard Florey Institute, University of Melbourne.
- Dr Gareth Nelson, School of Botany, University of Melbourne.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

Highlights:

- Reconfiguration of the main storage area at Moreland Annexe was completed in early 2003. This has ensured that available space is used efficiently for storing large collection objects and has provided some limited short-term capacity if urgently required for additional material.
- A new Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Arts Victoria to manage a public loan program for the 2001 Federation Handbells for a further two years.



LEFT TO RIGHT

Research and Collections staff
 Dr. Richard Gillespie
 Dr. Gary Poore
 Dr. Jane Melville
 Dermot Henry
 Dr. Tim O'Hara
 Diane Bray

- Collections staff continued to manage over 500 objects on loan to Museum Victoria by individuals and external organisations for use in exhibitions. Staff also managed the collection elements for all temporary and in-house exhibitions across the Museum's three campuses including: *Mars and Beyond* at Melbourne Museum, *Holes. Surrounded By Thread* and *Getting In* at Immigration Museum, and *Rare Trades* and *House Secrets* at Scienceworks.

Collection Information Systems:

- Significant progress was made with the implementation of EMu (Electronic Museum) collection management database. Ten databases from a total of 41 databases from Sciences, Indigenous Cultures and Australian Society and Technology areas were transferred between October 2002 and July 2003. Subject areas represented in these transfers included ichthyology, mammalogy, herpetology, ethnography and Australian social history and technology. As a result, EMu has now been implemented into selected areas of each of the three Museum collecting disciplines. This represents the first stage in the realisation of EMu as a single data management system for all Museum Victoria collections.

- The implementation of Museum Victoria's Collection Inventory System (CIS) also continued, with preliminary work commencing on the Australian Society and Technology collection material held in storage at Scienceworks. CIS was designed by the Museum to allow for the compatible integration of a location inventory control system in conjunction with the implementation of EMu. Some 30,000 objects recorded on EMu are now controlled by CIS according to an internally developed Locations Identification System. This system can identify and position items in one of a range of specific locations across three campuses. The system uses electronic data capture, barcode identification and radio frequency technology to enable real time updates to information and access location collection data through portable hand held computers.

CONSERVATION

Highlights:

- A major investigation and stabilisation treatment was implemented on the Bush Mechanics Car, a new acquisition for the Indigenous Cultures Department. Decorative paint finishes were consolidated, engine immobilisation measures implemented and detailed documentation recorded about the condition of the vehicle, in anticipation of its future use as an exhibition item.
- Artworks from the *Spirit Country* collection were prepared for travel and exhibition as part of the Shanghai Arts Festival in China. Two conservators accompanied Melbourne Museum representatives to oversee the successful installation and demount of the collection at the Shanghai Library.

- A three-year project rehousing and consolidating 600 bark paintings from the Indigenous Cultures collection was completed.
- The Integrated Pest Management Program was extended to include Scienceworks. This program now operates across all campuses including Moreland Annexe and the Royal Exhibition Building.

PRODUCTION

Highlights:

- Significant projects included production of the multi-award-winning permanent exhibition *Getting In* at Immigration Museum.
- Production of the new permanent exhibition *House Secrets* at Scienceworks.
- Production of Melbourne Planetarium Show *Cosmic Couriers* was completed in association with the Sciences Department.
- Co-ordination of the highly successful *Out of the Vaults* program to celebrate International Museums Day in May 2003.
- Preparation and installation of the Scar Tree model for the foyer of the Koorie Heritage Trust's new headquarters.
- Preparation of a Strap-toothed Whale and Christmas Island bird specimens.
- A new large-format permanent ink printer commenced operations, enabling the cost-effective output of high quality exhibition graphics.