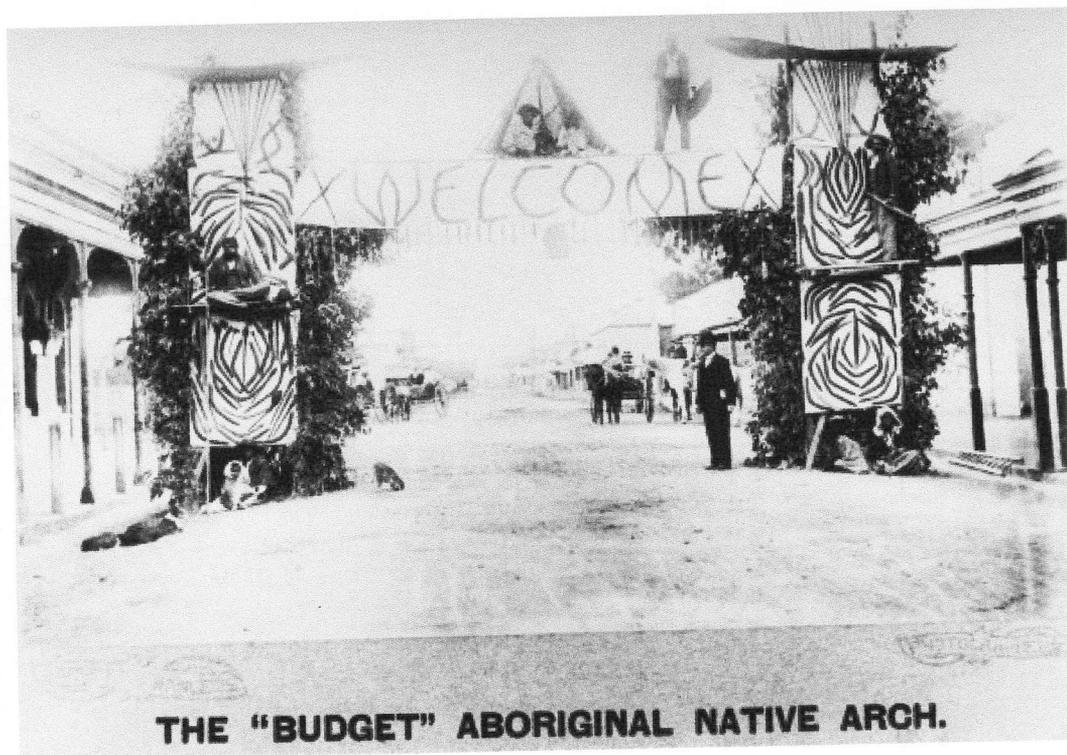




The Morrison Collection

The Morrison Collection was a collection of 124 Aboriginal cultural objects collected at the turn of the 20th century by Alexander Morrison in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales. This collection is of interest to the Wonnarua people whose families lived at the St. Clair mission where many of the objects were made.



THE "BUDGET" ABORIGINAL NATIVE ARCH.

The Budget Arch
Unknown © Australian Museum

This group of objects was collected by Alexander Morrison in the New South Wales Hunter Valley during in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was purchased by the Australian Museum between 1975 and 1982 from John Magers, a dealer and collector of Indigenous objects. Objects from Alexander Morrison's collection are also held by the National Museum of Australia.

Morrison, who was born and lived in Singleton, NSW, began collecting Aboriginal objects in his local area. He primarily collected wooden objects – boomerangs and clubs make up over 80% of the total collection. Many were sourced from the recently established St Clair Mission near Singleton. The population living at St Clair was made up of mostly people whose traditional land was in the Hunter Valley area. These people included those from the Wonnarua, the Awabakal, the Worimi and the Darkinjung.

The second half of the 19th century, when the majority of these objects were made, was a time of significant change for Indigenous cultures in the Hunter Valley. This change is reflected in some of the objects in the collection. For example, small objects such as undersized clubs and boomerangs that would have served no functional use may indicate that people at St Clair were making objects specifically for the tourist or collector market. The techniques used to make traditional objects also changed with the introduction of European tools such as knives and chisels.

The collection does not represent all the objects that would have been made and used by Indigenous people in the Hunter Valley. Objects such as baskets, fishing equipment, clothing and adornments are not found in the collection. Objects commonly used by men for hunting and fighting tended to be preferred by 19th century collectors. The large number of boomerangs in this collection is no doubt a reflection of the interests of Morrison himself who was reportedly an accomplished boomerang thrower.

Morrison is only known to have displayed his collection to the public once. For the visit of the State Governor Sir Harry Rawson on 27 April 1904, a ceremonial arch was erected in the main street of Singleton. The arch decoratively displayed artefacts from Morrison's collection and was the focal point for the processional route of the Governor. Some objects from the collection have been identified in a photograph of the arch.

While most of the objects in the Morrison collection are from the Hunter Valley, some are from outside this area, for example from Western New South Wales and Queensland. This may be because Morrison exchanged objects with other collectors. Or, he may have collected objects during his travels. Another possibility is that those objects from outside the Hunter Valley were not part of Morrison's original collection and could have come from John Magers' own personal collection.

References

Mulvaney, Richard. 1983. *Bachelor of Letters Thesis From Curio to Curation: The Morrison collection of Aboriginal wooden Artefacts*. Australian National University: Canberra. Australian Capital Territory.