The Appeal of Urgency: Extinction Discourses, Myths and the Private Collectors of Australian Aboriginal Human Remains

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Abstract

Extinction presents as a narrative thread in the collecting of Australian Aboriginal human remains in Britain and Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Examples of this narrative are in the correspondence, research and the cataloguing methodologies of private individuals and their interaction with collecting institutions. This article focuses on three case studies that present three different private collecting profiles and intellectual environment interactions: Joseph Barnard Davis (1801–1881), Frederic William Lucas (1842–1932), and William Colin MacKenzie (1877–1938). All three have collections held by major collecting institutions in either Australia or England. These separate and diverse individuals are an important conduit to understanding why the application of the extinction narrative was a factor in transforming Australian Aboriginal human remains into prized specimens, sought by private individuals and public collecting institutions.

Key words: collecting, human remains, Aboriginal, extinction, museums

Introduction

From the early years of the British colonization of Australia, the human remains of Australian Aboriginal Ancestors were removed from their resting places and sent to institutions and collections worldwide. By the late 1820s a significant thread in the settler colonial discourse surrounding these Aboriginal human remains was the supposed 'extinction' of the 'Aboriginal race' and the associated fatalistic prognosis of 'the natural capacity of Aboriginal Australians to be progressively brought to embrace civilization' (Turnbull 2007: 28).

This article will explore this narrative of extinction by examining three collector case studies, all of whom represent different collecting projects grounded in the supposed reality of Indigenous extinction. Joseph Barnard Davis (1801–1881), Frederic William Lucas (1842–1932), and William Colin MacKenzie (1877–1938) operated in a span of almost 100 years (1840s to 1938), covering a dynamic era in the growth of anthropology, comparative anatomy; phrenology; and an interest in examining racial types (Fforde *et al*. 2020: 2). Davis provides insight on the perceived extinction of Aboriginal Australians as a collecting motivation. Lucas demonstrates how a museum associates the value of a specimen with the narrative of extinction in the context of a larger natural history collection. The third case study, MacKenzie, explores extinction in the context of building a national collection that advances medical training and anthropological research. In all, evidence of a belief in racial extinction is present in collecting documentation, published research and/or the correspondence of each collector. Collectively they are representative of how extinctionism was a key motivation that drove the trade of Australian Indigenous human remains over a period when the trade was prolific and the threat of extinction was included in the acquisition narrative as a given reality.

The Extinction 'Myth'

The salience and consequences of perceptions of Indigenous extinction has been explored by numerous academics (see McGregor 1997; Brantlinger 2003; Turnbull 2007; Anderson and Perrin 2008; Hemming and Rigney 2008; Knapman 2009; Turnbull 2017). The notion that a

particular human race had 'died out' because of European colonization was not a new concept in the nineteenth century. Patrick Brantlinger writes in his analysis of the extinction narrative that '…from the late 1700s on, an enormous literature has been devoted to the "doom" of "primitive races" caused by "fatal impact" with white, Western civilization' (Brantlinger 2003: 1). This narrative continues to have a modern consequence for many Indigenous peoples. As Hemming and Rigney have written in relation to the Ngarrindjeri Nation of the Lower River Murray, Lakes and Coorong of South Australia, 'These powerful myths of south-eastern Indigenous extinction continue to frame relations between the Ngarrindjeri nation and the State' (Hemming and Rigney 2008: 762); the impact being a continued effect on their claims to land and water rights, and to recognizing Ngarrindjeri authority and agency of their living nation.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century observers were witnessing a drastic decline in Indigenous populations as a direct result of colonization. The fear of extinction was not a myth for many of these people – it was a real phenomenon with causes ranging from the impact of frontier violence to susceptibility to diseases that caused relatively few deaths in contemporary European populations.

Extinction myths are closely attached to the idea of race, authenticity and 'purity' of 'blood'. There is no single discourse of extinction and understanding the biologically focused environment helps explain why some groups were considered 'extinct' if no members existed that conformed to this biological criterion – whether or not those members themselves identified as such. For one key collecting group, the craniologists who focussed on determining racial diversity, only the remains of 'pure bloods' were acceptable. Accusations of inauthenticity have hounded Indigenous people for decades, an injury compounded by the role of colonization in decimating populations and the concurrent loss of languages and cultures.

The history of Tasmanian Aboriginal persons is one dynamic illustration of this decimation and perceived 'racial' extinction. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2016 census data, 4.6 per cent of Tasmania's population identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This equates to approximately 23,414 people.1 However, many people believed up until very recently (and may still today) that Tasmanian Aboriginal persons became extinct with the death of the last 'full blooded' person, Truganini (circa 1810/12–1876).

Between 1904 and 1947, Truganini's skeleton stood in a glass cabinet in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart. The display transformed her from a person into a relic of a lost race and she was interpreted as a 'scientific curiosity' (Piggott 2013: 81). It was not until 1976, the centenary of her death, that she was afforded the dignity of being laid to rest by a traditional cremation, a dignity that alludes many people who continue to be housed in collections worldwide as a consequence of the human remain-collecting mania of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Joseph Barnard Davis, the Archivist of Racial Extinction

Joseph Barnard Davis flourished in a network of human skull collectors that operated across the British Empire, Europe and North America. Born in York, England, Davis was a medical practitioner, craniologist, published researcher and highly effective international networker. Through his dedicated collecting ability, he built one of the largest private collections of 'race' crania in the mid-nineteenth century that rivalled many institutional collections (Turnbull 2017; Roque 2018; Parker 2020). In 1880, the Royal College of Surgeons of England purchased Davis's predominantly human skull collection. A segment of his collection was transferred in the post-war years to the Natural History Museum, London.

Davis was a polygenist, believing human 'races' evolved from different ancestors, and he claimed that he doubted '…the unity of man's origins' (Davis 1867: v). Polygenistic theory was popular in the first half of the nineteenth century (Stocking 1968 [1982]: 42-68; Fforde 2004: 17) and was based on a belief in multiple origins and a belief in the fixity of racial characteristics. In the context of the extinction narrative this meant many Indigenous peoples, including those from mainland Australia and Tasmania, were doomed to extinction because of a perceived biological impossibility for improvement.

Davis's first major publication was *Crania Britannica: Delineations and Descriptions of the Skulls of the Aboriginal and Early Inhabitants of the British Islands*, co-authored in 1865 with psychiatrist, ethnologist and polygenist, John Thurnam (1810–1873) (Davis and Thurnam 1865). Written in the style of American craniologist and polygenist Samuel Morton's 1839 *Crania Americana* (Morton 1839), work on this catalogue led Davis to believe in '…the importance of collecting skulls of all human races, and especially those of aboriginal peoples, for examination and comparison' (Davis 1867: vi). Davis's second major publication, *Thesaurus Craniorum: Catalogue of the Skulls of the Various Races of Man, in the Collection of Joseph Barnard Davis* (Davis 1867) further reveals Morton's influence, which was acknowledged in the volume's Preface (Davis 1867: x). Davis expanded upon Morton's catalogue system, which had followed German comparative anatomist Johann Frederick Blumenbach's (1752–1840) style of separating humans into the groupings of Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay (Blumenbach 1795). Davis was not supportive of his contemporary, the monogenist Charles Darwin (1809–1882), describing the growing interest in his evolutionary theories as the 'modern transmutation hypothesis' (Davis 1867: v).

Thesaurus Craniorum contains 1,389 human remains (predominantly skulls), including 24 Aboriginal skulls from mainland Australia and 12 from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Of these 1,389, four are referred to as those of extinct races, with three coming from Australia.[2] One is a modified skull from an *Adelaide Tribe*, likely a Ngarrindjeri Ancestor: 'These cranial drinking-vessels are now rare objects, as the tribe which prepared and used them is extinct, or nearly so' (Davis 1867: 260). Two are the remains of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. The first, Davis describes as '…one of the finest examples in any collection of a cranium of a people so nearly extinct…' (Davis 1867: 268). The second, Davis describes as a '…fine specimen... presented by Geo. A. ROBINSON, Esq. the most enterprising and devoted friend to this just extinct race' (Davis 1867: 271). The fourth reference to extinct human races relates to six Carib skulls from the Caribbean.

Of the 337 human remains described in Davis's 1875 *Supplement to Thesaurus Crainiorum: Catalogue of the Skulls of The Various Races of Man*, there are two uses of the word 'extinct'. The first is recorded in the description of three skulls, two jaw bones and a skeleton of Moriori people from the Chatham Islands: 'These relics of an almost, if not entirely, extinct race are especially interesting, as they present some differences from the crania of the Maoris' (Davis 1875: 77). In the 2013 New Zealand census, 738 people identified as Moriori, less than one per cent of the total population of Māori descent.[3]

In the *Supplement* there are 15 references to Tasmanian Aboriginal human remains: five skulls, three skull casts, two jawbones, a maxilla, two tibias, a radius, and a bag containing the remains of femora and ulnae. Two of the skull casts are named individuals: 'Augustus', a circa 50 year old male, and 'Caroline', a circa 70 year old woman. Davis describes the casts of these persons as '…skulls of two Tasmanians, celebrated in the classical age of the declension of the race…' (Davis 1875: 65). Davis uses 'declension' to describe the declining population and he is referring to the forced removal of Tasmanian Aboriginals to Bruny Island, then later Flinders Island, under the stewardship of the before mentioned Protector of Aboriginals, George Robinson (1791–1866). During Davis's lifetime, the population of Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples rapidly declined and was estimated to be between 4,000–15,000 people (Madley 2008: 78) before British colonization in 1803. This population was reduced to 400 'full-descent' Tasmanian Aboriginal people by 1835, and by the 1850s an estimated 47 full-descent persons still survived (Madley 2008: 78). These are the only named Tasmanian Aboriginal persons in Davis's catalogues, which demonstrates a major imbalance in information about the collector and the collected. With very limited recorded provenance there is no certainty as to who these people were but potentially Augustus was Augustus Clark, also known as Thermanope (d.1860). Davis owned an 1845 portrait of Thermanope by the Tasmanian-based English artist John Skinner Prout (1805–1876), now in the British Museum's collection (reference: Oc2006,Drg.5).

Davis's 1874 article *On the Osteology and Peculiarities of the Tasmanians, A Race of Man Recently Become Extinct* indicates a particular interest in the skulls of Tasmanian Aboriginal people:

There is an unusual interest in contemplating the native inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land, for, within the last century, they have passed through all the phases of human history. Up to one hundred years ago, they occupied the Island alone, had unimpeded away in it, and had done so for ages we cannot count… It has now become a feeling of importance to gather up the stray records of this curious uncivilised people, and to preserve them permanently among the archives of the history of man (Davis 1874: 3).

These 'stray records' are human remains, transformed into specimens and held in institutions for the benefit of future scientists to advance the study of human racial types. As a Davis contemporary, George Bennett (1804–1893), from the Australian Museum in Sydney 'argued much of value would be lost to science unless efforts were quickly made "to collect the skulls of the different tribes [of Australia]…"' (Bennett 1834: vol. 1, 69 as cited in Turnbull 2020: 928). This interest was not unique to Australian museums and Davis observed other museums that placed a scientific value on the human remains of Tasmanian Aboriginal persons:

> There are nine Tasmanian crania in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Two of these belong to the old Hunterian collection, and are probably the first skulls that came into the hands of one who appreciated their value (Davis 1874: 4).

Davis was in competition with these institutions and, in the same article, he commented on the rapid increase in the appeal of these human remains to the medical, anthropological and museological sector:

> Until within the last three years [approximately 1870–1874] there was not a skeleton of a Tasmanian to be met with in any European museum. During that period the entire bones of four individuals have reached England…; and there are now two skeletons of this extinct race in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England…; another of a man in the collection of the London Anthropological Institute; and the fourth and last, of a man also, in my own collection (Davis 1874: 5).

This assemblage is Davis's legacy. The assemblage of a large cranial collection that rivalled many public and private collecting institutions. This legacy also dehumanized many of the human remains in his collection, and in the case of Tasmanian Aboriginal persons, it assigned their value as representative of a type rather than as a person with an identity (beyond their generic association with a vulnerable culture). Davis clearly saw himself as advancing the study of human racial types, pioneered by comparative anatomist Robert Knox (1791–1862) (see Knox 1850) and the previously mentioned Blumenbach and Morton. Davis attempted this by urgently gathering the empirical material to confidentially work on determining the extent and causation of human variation and the divide between racial types on the evolutionary ladder. History has not remembered Davis in the same terms as these influential medical individuals but rather as a prolific collector of human skulls.

Frederic William Lucas, Collector and Donator of the Rare and Extinct

Frederic William Lucas was a solicitor, natural history collector, published author, and Fellow of the London Zoological Society and the Linnaean Society of London. A polymath, Lucas actively served the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery and the Booth Museum in Brighton, England, holding various positions including membership of the Booth Museum Sub-Committee (from 1914) and the Library, Museums and Fine Arts Committee (from 1917). Lucas also created his own private museum that contained approximately 1,765 items including coins, ethnographic material, taxidermy specimens and the skulls of a variety of domestic and wild animals including sheep, goats, deer, gorillas, giraffes, chimpanzees, lions and tigers. In the context of a predominantly natural history collection, Lucas also collected the skeletal remains (including modified ethnographic material) of human beings from around the world. Unlike Davis, there is no known surviving correspondence between Lucas and his suppliers, and the majority of provenance details are sporadic notes in the receiving Museum Register. The limits of working with historic private donations means information is either lost or not recorded.

On 16 November 1925, Lucas made his largest donation of predominantly osteological and ethnographical material to the Brighton Museum. The collection was part of his private museum located in his residence, Northgate House in nearby Rottingdean, East Sussex (the house is no longer standing). Documentation surrounding Lucas's donation demonstrates that the size and diversity of natural history specimens and the remains of peoples or animal species believed to be 'extinct' granted a collection greater appeal and value. Henry Roberts (1870–1951), the first Director of the Royal Pavilion Estate, wrote to the Museum Council on 25 November 1925 about the offer, stating that Lucas was intending to donate:

> one human skeleton; 103 skeletons of other Mammals; 34 Avian Skeletons; 8 Amphibian skeletons; and 7 Reptilian skeletons; 18 human skulls; 654 skulls of other Mammals; 83 Avian Skulls; 2 Amphibian Skulls; and 2 Reptilian skulls. 36 Horns and Heads; 28 skeletons of British Mammals in Cases and 45 feet bones of extinct and living Mammals (Roberts 1925).

The Australian Aboriginal human remains in Lucas's possession were a skull and a left and right femur from a single person, identified by Lucas as an 'Australian Aboriginal'; and a skull from South Australia. The South Australian skull was described by the Brighton Museum as a 'water carrier' (the same type of Ngarrindjeri Ancestor discussed in the Davis case study).[4] It is not recorded if Lucas was aware of the cultural practices of the Ngarrindjeri while the ancestor was in his possession. However, its inclusion by Lucas under the category of 'Ethnography' and not 'Osteology' implies he regarded the human skull as cultural material.

Museums were important and public places for the study and display of extinct specimens, both human and non-human. As observers were witnessing massive population decline through disease, violent dispossession and social anomie, the action of collecting and later transference to museums meant their story would not be lost. In terms of Australian Aboriginal human remains, the right for a Community to lay an Ancestor to rest is usurped by the museum's role as a custodian of knowledge and a 'rightful' place for rare specimens.

Figure 1: *Map of Australia indicating the area of the Ngarrindjeri Nation of the Lower River Murray, Lakes and Coorong of South Australia.*

The reason for Lucas' specimen acquisition is speculated through an examination of Lucas's wider zoological collection, and through analysis of his correspondence with the Brighton Museum. Lucas accompanied his 1925 donation with an undated, hand-typed catalogue, now in the Booth Museum archive, titled *Catalogue of the Specimens Illustrating the Osteology and Dentition of Vertebrated Animals, Recent and Extinct in the Private Collection of Fred. W. Lucas* (Lucas n.d.). This title is repeated, and the contents is added to, in the County Borough of Brighton Museum Register R2421 to R3279 D. In the catalogue, the use of the term 'extinct' is only applied to non-human skeletal remains, a dodo and moa, both prized collecting specimens for the natural history collector.[5]

The word 'extinct' in the title may thus be less about quantity and more about drawing attention to the collection containing rare and valuable specimens. Yet the inclusion of extinct and rare species heightened the importance of the collection and as evidenced in the previously referenced 1925 letter from Roberts to the Museum Board, supported a belief in the extinction of some indigenous peoples: 'The human skulls are exceedingly valuable and some of the races they came from no longer exist'. Which 'races' Roberts is specifically referring to is not revealed but it is highly likely it included the Aboriginal human remains. The other human skulls came from New Zealand, Nigeria, Northwest United States of America, Bolivia, Borneo, Peru, France, England, and one described as a 'European'. There is no written evidence to suggest Lucas was interested in racial science, but this assemblage combined with his primate collection and the skull cast of Piltdown Man, 'discovered' near Piltdown in Sussex, England, in 1912, suggests an interest in rare specimens and human diversity and evolution. Piltdown Man was lauded as the 'missing link' between humans and apes and was later found to be a hoax.

In his local museum environment, Lucas was an authority on his collection and on natural history specimens, although he was not well known nationally and internationally. Natural history collecting offered this private individual great scope to build a diverse collection with multiple social and scientific narratives. Lucas's interest in owning human and non-human remains associated with extinction was one narrative that was also seen as appealing for a public museum. The extinction badge added to the perceived rarity and value of the specimens and is more a reflection of a personal interest, a collecting trophy, than research into a particular field of enquiry.

William Colin MacKenzie, Anatomist of Australian Extinction

William Colin MacKenzie was an orthopaedist, comparative anatomist, collector and the first Director of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, Canberra, Australia. In 1923, MacKenzie donated his collection of approximately 2,000 items to the Australian Government, and in 1924, the National Museum of Australian Zoology was formed with the passing of the *Zoological Museum Agreement Act 1924* which allowed for '…passing ownership of…MacKenzie's anatomical collection to the Commonwealth, locating this gesture within the tradition of statutory transfer of major private collections to public museums, especially in the United Kingdom' (McShane 2007: 202).

The National Museum of Australian Zoology became the Australian Institute of Anatomy on the passing of the *Australian Institute of Anatomy Agreement Act 1931*, which saw MacKenzie not only become its inaugural director but also be given the title of Professor of Comparative Anatomy. The Australian Institute of Anatomy closed in 1985 and through Clause 8 (3) of the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* its collection was transferred to a new cultural institution, the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, where it is still held today.

The personal objectives that drove MacKenzie to collect adapted as he moved from a private part-time researcher to a professional and accountable collector in his later career. Throughout, MacKenzie's collecting focus was dominated by an interest in native Australian fauna, which extended to exploring what could be learnt about human evolutionary history from studying marsupial morphology that might advance medical treatments, and notably the treatment of infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis) (see MacKenzie 1918–19; MacKenzie 1923; Robin 2006; Wehner 2017).

Figure 2: MacKenzie display, permanent exhibition, National Museum of Australia, Canberra as of 30 November 2016. Photographer: Johanna Parker.

MacKenzie's research relied on preserving these animals as specimens for research before they became extinct. As Libby Robin explains in her definitive study of the animal specimens collected by MacKenzie:

> Because these animals were "primitive" and were seen as displaying arrested or "medieval" development, they were expected to fade away, to be displaced by the fitter and more "modern" species introduced by European Australians. Extinction was "inevitable" under this world view (Robin 2006: 118).

This objective is evident in a 1925 speech read by MacKenzie to the Royal Society of Tasmania:

> I wish to draw attention to what is now the most urgent plea for the preservation of our fauna, viz., its [sic] important for a correct understanding of the human body in health and disease.
>
> The animals of Australia and Tasmania are teeming with points of scientific interest. Through them human complexities are revealed in their simpler form (MacKenzie 1925: 203).

Prior to the establishment of the Australian Institute of Anatomy as a government collecting institution, MacKenzie worked from his own premises in St Kilda, Melbourne. Later, in 1920 his research domain was expanded to include 78 acres at Badger Creek in Healesville, 53 kilometres north of Melbourne. Known as the Sir Colin MacKenzie Sanctuary from 1934 (now known as the Healesville Sanctuary), the zoo specialized in indigenous Australian fauna and gave MacKenzie '...the capacity to breed and collect native animals for use as anatomical specimens' (Hansen 2005: 9). As Kirsten Wehner asserts in her analysis of the activity of MacKenzie in the context of wider ecological collecting:

> In many ways, the collection embodies and finds its rationale in human assumptions about our right to exploit the non-human world for our ends, and the preparation and display of the animals' bodies as specimens can be seen as reproducing the unequal power relations that legitimated the killing of these creatures in the first place (Wehner 2017: 91).

Wehner's identification of unequal power relations in the collection's marsupial contents can also be applied to the Aboriginal remains that it held. MacKenzie's collecting benefited from his agent's desecration of burial sites. There was no acknowledgment by either party that their pillaging actions in the 'name of science' were disrespectful to another culture. MacKenzie's anatomical and anthropological interest also includes examples of this power dominance. In one 1924 publication, *Intellectual Development and the Erect Posture,* MacKenzie claimed the inferior physiology of Aboriginal persons had led to their dominance by a 'superior race' (the British):

> The superior race has preyed on the inferior, causing its elimination, as has happened in recent times – the original Tasmanian nation being ruthlessly and completely destroyed by modern man within a period of about 50 years. Unlike the Tasmanian, the ape escaped the venomous destruction of his superior successors, by fleeing to the forests and poison-infested fastnesses of the Gabon and Borneo. The aborigines of Southern Australia, of whom there is only a remnant left, were, like the natives of Tasmania, short people, and usually described as lazy and stupid (MacKenzie 1924: 36).

MacKenzie's belief that extinction had already occurred for many Indigenous 'tribes' demonstrated to him that it was inevitable that other Indigenous Communities would meet a similar fate. For example, he remarked in relation to the Aboriginal people of South Gippsland, Victoria:

> It is indeed a lamentable fact that the appearance and daily life of these primitive inhabitants of South Gippsland should be already a matter for postulation, and that they should in less than a century have completely disappeared, leaving only bones and implements as evidence of their existence (MacKenzie 1932).

MacKenzie's observation, although wrapped in tones of melancholy, demonstrates his direct role in the application of extinction as a part of the collecting justification. MacKenzie did not, however, advance a rhetoric of extinction so much as seek to provide empirical evidence for what was an ingrained belief by the time he began collecting – that Australia's Indigenous peoples were lower on the evolutionary scale than their European colonizers and as a result were vulnerable to extinction.

Following MacKenzie's death in 1939, the Institute continued to present the public with what were by then regarded as erroneous and socially pernicious ideas and arguments about the place of Australia's first peoples in human evolutionary history. Even 30 years later, in 1972, a visitor to the Institute encountered one such example of a racially derogatory display. The visitor was compelled to write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, *The Canberra Times*, about the experience:

> Sir, - As an overseas visitor I have observed from newspaper stories and so forth that problems arising from racism are becoming more noticeable in your society. It was therefore all the more shocking to see such racism encouraged by a set of pseudo-scientific exhibits in the Institute of Anatomy in your beautiful capital of Canberra…in one case there are four skulls arranged in the following order: male gorilla, female gorilla, Australian Aborigine, modern European Englishman. Not content with this implication a note at the bottom reads, "It is not suggested that Modern European is a direct descendent of the gorilla and Australian Aborigine but these skulls are used to emphasise the lines along which the refinements of the modern skull evolved" (Morgan 1972: 2).

This type of display mirrored an era in museological practices that is no longer reflected in modern ethics. It is a type of display that traces its roots back to the emergence of natural and social history museums and is clearly expressed in the advice of English naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913):

> The chief well-marked races of man should be illustrated either by life-size models, casts, coloured figures, or by photographs. A corresponding series of their crania should be shown; and such portions of the skeleton as should exhibit the differences that exist between certain races, as well as those between the lower races and those animals which most nearly approach them (Wallace 1869 [2008]: 205).

Although the Aboriginal human remains acquired by MacKenzie may have been collected and displayed in this 'spirit', they are no longer used to tell such narratives. The National Museum of Australia does not place any human remains on public display, and they are not considered accessioned objects.[6]

Conclusion

The collecting activity of Davis, Lucas and MacKenzie has left many modern legacies for the host museums. The animal remains and ethnographic material are still 'useful' specimens for display and research; however, the human remains are no longer treated with the same 'curiosity' and cultural insensitivity. All three collections have been and continue to be part of repatriation claims by Australian Indigenous communities wanting to return their ancestors to Country. However, the sporadic provenancing, limited documentation and the focused medical and zoological interpretation has meant some ancestors may never have enough information to be able to be returned to their traditional Country.

This is not unique to Australia and the action of collecting human remains has dehumanized people across the world for centuries. Identifying the language of extinction in the collection documentation and research of the case studies has demonstrated how this theme was a part of the driver to collect people, including Aboriginal human remains, in both the private and public environments; and as part of medical, zoological and race cranial collections.

These separate and diverse individuals are an important conduit to understanding why the application of the extinction narrative, and their understanding of identity as a biological construct, was a factor in transforming Australian Aboriginal human remains into prized specimens, urgently sought by private individuals and public collecting institutions. Davis, Lucas and MacKenzie were not exceptional collectors but the size of their collections, the years spent collecting and the appeal of their acquisitions to museums, makes them important from a museological perspective and worthy of more scholarly attention. Their actions demonstrate a belief that museums, or major collecting institutions, were the 'correct' place to preserve these 'specimens' and tell the narrative of their past existence. As Paul Turnbull notes in his examination of the environments that drove the acquisition of Aboriginal human remains during this period: '…they were in a race against time to ensure that science would be able to determine what was racially typical about the bones of Australians before their biological peculiarities disappeared…' (Turnbull 2017: 211).

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Notes

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, '2016 Census Quick Stats, Tasmania', last updated 30 October 2016. https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/mediareleasesbyCatalogue/7F1A862B6F8B6BA0CA258148000A41AC, accessed 12 February 2021.

[2] 1.796 to 6.1166 (six skulls) Carib, Races of Antilles, page 236; 5.340 Australian of Adelaide Tribe, Races of Australia, page 260; 6.928 Tasmanian, Races of Van Diemen's Land, page 268; 12.1297 Tasmanian Races of Van Diemen's Land, page 271.

[3] Moriori are the indigenous Polynesian people of the Chatham Islands. See 2013 New Zealand Census, 'Iwi individual profile: Moriori', 2013. https://www.stats.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/2013-Census-iwi-individual-profiles/91-iwi-profiles-Moriori.pdf, accessed 10 January 2021.

[4] During the 1960s, Australian Italian curator Aldo Massola considered the history of European interaction with these modified human remains and noted '…historical descriptions by European artists, missionaries and antiquarians reflect the observer's incorrect perception that such remains were mere utensils' (referenced in Fforde *et al*. n.d.: 1).

[5] 'Didus ineptus DODO (extinct). Mauritius' and 'Dinornis maximus MOA (extinct) New Zealand'. Both accessioned as separate parts.

[6] National Museum of Australia, 'Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Human Remains Management and Repatriation Policy', V2.4 released on 1 August 2019. https://www.nma.gov.au/about/corporate/plans-policies/policies/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-human-remains, accessed 21 December 2021.

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Biography

Johanna Parker is a PhD Candidate at the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the Australian National University, Canberra. Her thesis examines the motivations and methodologies of private collectors of Australian Indigenous human remains. Johanna holds a Master of Arts in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester and a Master of Arts in Public History from the University of Technology Sydney. Johanna has held the position of curator at the National Museum of Australia, the National Archives of Australia and at the Museum of Australian Democracy. Since 2009, Johanna has worked in government policy including the repatriation of Indigenous human remains and cultural property.