

ADMINISTRATORS OF RANK 1836-1860

During its first eight years of existence, the infant institution had been known as the Sydney Museum or Colonial Museum. Acceptance by the Governor of Deas Thomson's suggestion that it be called the Australian Museum was appropriate at a time when New South Wales was the only Australian colony but, with the establishment of other colonies it led to some jealousy. When the proud citizens of Melbourne founded a similar institution in the 1850s, they established parity by naming it the National Museum.

Deas Thomson's proposal that the Museum's overall governance be put in the hands of a group of eminent citizens was also accepted and, on the authority of Governor Bourke, the following notice appeared in the *Government Gazette* of 15 June 1836:

*Colonial Secretary's Office,
Sydney 14th June, 1836.*

HIS Excellency the GOVERNOR directs it to be notified that the following Gentlemen have been appointed "A COMMITTEE OF SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM AND BOTANICAL GARDEN," viz.:—

THE HONORABLE ALEXANDER M^cLEAY, Esq.
SIR JOHN JAMISON, K.G.V.
PHILLIP PARKER KING, Esq.
WILLIAM MACARTHUR, Esq.
JOHN VAUGHAN THOMPSON, Esq.
CHARLES STURT, Esq.
EDWARD DEAS THOMSON, Esq.
GEORGE PORTER, Esq.
ROBERT ANDREW WAUCH, Esq., and
GEORGE M^cLEAY, Esq.

*By His Excellency's Command,
ALEXANDER M^cLEAY.*

Events had not, however, waited upon the printed authority, for the first meeting of the committee had been held on 7 June. Two sub-committees had been established, with Alexander Macleay and Thompson on both; King, Deas Thomson, George Macleay and Sturt on the committee responsible for the Museum and Jamison, MacArthur, Porter and Wauch on that responsible for the Botanical Garden. The *Sydney Gazette* on 15 June 1836 carried an advertisement:

CHAIRMEN, COMMITTEE OF SUPERINTENDENCE

<i>A. Macleay</i>	1836-1848
<i>W. S. Macleay</i>	1849-1853

CHAIRMEN, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

<i>W. S. Macleay</i>	1853-1855, 1859
<i>E. Deas Thomson</i>	1856-1858, 1860

CUSTODIANS

<i>G. Bennett</i>	Secretary and Curator	1835-1841
<i>W. B. Clarke</i>	Secretary and Curator	1841-1843
<i>W. S. Wall</i>	Collector and Preserver	1841-1844
	Curator	1844-1858
<i>R. Lynd</i>	Hon. Secretary	1845-1847
<i>G. E. Turner</i>	Hon. Secretary	1847-1853
<i>G. F. Angas</i>	Secretary	1853-1860

R. Strahan

Australian Museum

Notice is hereby given, that the Australian Museum having been removed to the house lately occupied by His Honour the Chief Justice, in Macquarie Place, is now open for Public Inspection on Tuesdays and Fridays between the hours of twelve and three.

By order of the Committee
George Bennett
Secretary

Australian Museum
June 8th, 1836

This building was the westernmost on a block bounded by the present Bent, Gresham and Bridge Streets (Macquarie Place then included the eastern end of Bridge Street). The Museum was on the ground floor and the upper floor housed the Public Subscription Library.

The committee was by no means an arbitrary selection of the gentlemen of the colonial establishment: most had made some contribution to science or exploration. Alexander Macleay's interests have already been mentioned. George Macleay (1809-91) was, like his father, a supporter rather than a practitioner of science although he experimented in economic horticulture and accompanied Sturt on his arduous expedition to the mouth of the Murray River.

At the time of his appointment, Charles Sturt (1795-1869) had not long returned from England to take up a grant of land. He is properly renowned for his explorations but also had a high reputation among scientists for the accuracy of his observations on the natural history of the areas that he explored. His bird paintings were much admired by John Gould.

Phillip Parker King (1795-1856), son of Governor King, was born on Norfolk Island and entered the navy at the age of sixteen. From 1817 to 1830 he was engaged primarily in exploration and hydrographic survey works which earned him fellowship of the Royal Society. In 1831 he retired with the rank of Post Captain and settled in Penrith, New South Wales, to manage his late father's extensive land holdings. He maintained a wide contact with European scientists, continued practical scientific research in a variety of fields, and encouraged research in many areas of Australasia.



On his expedition into central Australia, Charles Sturt discovered a rodent that built immense nests of sticks, since then known as the stick-nest rat. His original specimens were lodged in the Museum but cannot now be identified with certainty.

William MacArthur (1800-82), fourth son of John MacArthur of Camden, was born in Parramatta but educated in England. He was a founder of the Australian wine industry and active in experimental viticulture and horticulture. Hannibal MacArthur, his cousin, married King's sister.

Sir John Jamison had the honour, unusual among Englishmen, of being a Knight of the Order of Gustavus Vasa, an award, for his success, while serving as a surgeon under Nelson in the Baltic, in treating an outbreak of scurvy in the Swedish Navy. He subsequently received a British knighthood and retired to manage the large properties left him by his father, also a naval surgeon, who had come to Australia with the first fleet in HMS *Sirius*. His scientific interests were mainly horticultural and he was much more interested in the Botanical Gardens than in the Museum. He carried out early explorations on the Warragamba and Cox's Rivers and his house, 'Regentville', near the present site of Penrith, was visited by many eminent scientists.

John Vaughan Thompson FLS (1779-1847), an army surgeon, was, by appointment, Inspector-General of Military Hospitals in New South Wales. By inclination, he was an invertebrate zoologist of some standing, being one of the first investigators to demonstrate that barnacles are crustaceans; that they, and many other crustaceans, have planktonic larvae; and that the animals then known as 'zoophytes' comprise several distinct groups, to one of which he gave the name Polyzoa. At a symposium of the Linnean Society of London held in 1910 to discuss his contributions to zoology, it was remarked that he was 'a man of renown who dimmed the lustre of his researches by his confused manner of expounding them'.¹

George Porter was a businessman with importing interests in Sydney and Melbourne. I can find no information on Wauch but a Robert Waugh was associated with Porter's Melbourne activities in 1842.

It could hardly be expected that the committee of eminent gentlemen would supervise every detail of the Museum or, indeed, that they could satisfactorily work through Deas Thomson's messenger, Galvin. It was necessary to appoint a secretary.

Reference to Dr George Bennett (1804-93) has already been made. He was a distinguished naturalist who began his extensive travels at the age of fifteen when he sailed from Plymouth to Ceylon and, after a year in that country, returned via a six-month visit in Mauritius to take up medical studies. After passing the MRCS examination in 1828 he again embarked on a long series of voyages during which he wrote numerous papers on subjects ranging from the conifers of New Zealand to Polynesian dialects.

Bennett visited Sydney in 1829 and 1832, returning to settle in 1835 with the ambition of resolving questions that puzzled the zoologists of Europe: how is the kangaroo born?; do the platypus and echidna bear live young or lay eggs?; if eggs are produced, are they hatched externally or within the mother? After dissecting many kangaroos he produced the evidence to solve the first of these problems but, despite years of study, never managed to resolve the question of monotreme reproduction.

He began to build up a medical practice in Sydney but, when the prospect of reorganisation of the Museum and the need for a curator was mooted, he lobbied assiduously in Sydney for the position and, since the appointment lay in the hands of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, also sought assistance from friends in London. The proposed salary of 200 per annum (the entire budget for 1836) being insufficient for his needs, he attempted also to obtain charge of the Botanical Gardens. It seems to have been suggested that he could have this post if the incumbent, Richard Cun-

ningham (who had been lost on Mitchell's expedition), should prove to have died but, although this was later shown to be the case, the vacancy created by Richard's death was filled by his illustrious brother Allan in October 1835.

Bennett's correspondence includes passing mention of his intention to repay any kindness from Owen of the Royal College of Surgeons and the British Museum with specimens collected for the Australian Museum. Most of his scientific activities were of a minor nature and he saw himself and the Museum in a colonial setting, owing deference and service to the authorities at 'home'. We shall see later that the first signs of revolt against this attitude by a head of the Museum involved quite an uproar.

Once installed in the Museum, Bennett kept his assistant Roach busy with collecting and himself with collating a catalogue of the specimens in the collection, some of which had not yet been scientifically described. To Owen, on 10 March 1836, he wrote:

The Museum Report will be published in about a month when I will avail myself of the first opportunity to send you some copies. Let all the specimens sent home be described as soon as possible and account transmitted to me without delay, as the field is wide and extensive and I am therefore eager to have new or described species decided on as soon as possible that they may be properly noted in the Catal. of the Australian Museum.²

A French traveller, du Petit Thouars, who visited Sydney in 1838 in the ship *Venus*, was favourably impressed by the Museum under Bennett's administration.

As there was not much time to lose, I went to have a look round Sydney to see if there was anything interesting. I looked into the library . . . I then went through the museum connected with it. This was on the ground floor. There I saw the numerous, peculiar animals of New Holland; the opossum; the Orny-thorynchus with its golden-green fur and changing shades of which they make magnificent fur trimmings; the kangaroo . . . the recently discovered kangaroo-mouse. This animal is exactly the same size and colour as the animal after which it is named, but its shape and form is the same as that of the big kangaroo which is now called the kangaroo sheep to distinguish it. . . In an anteroom, off the Museum, I was shown a collection of plaster casts, taken from the faces of the biggest criminals in the colony, after they had been executed. These faces were all contracted and had a strained appearance . . .³

Several years later another visitor noted that the heads were of phrenological significance, demonstrating 'a disproportionate development of the posterior region of the skull and a narrowness of forehead which a disciple of Spurzheim would regard, perhaps with some complacency, as tending to confirm his doctrines'.⁴

In 1840, the Museum and Library were relocated on the western side of the southern end of Macquarie Street in a house known as 'Surveyor-General Mitchell's old house' or 'St James' Parsonage'. The Museum was crammed into a single room and has been described by a Spanish visitor, Michelena y Rojas, from a (supposed) visit in 1841:

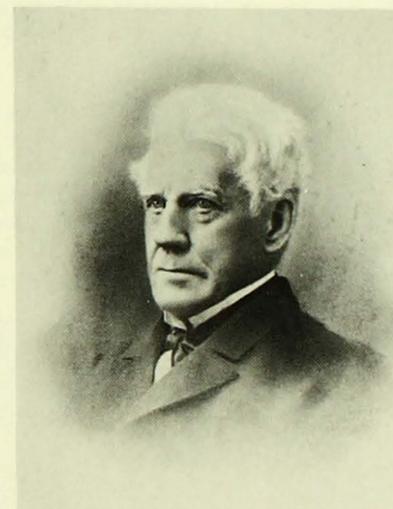
There is a museum of *Natural History*, which although of some interest, mostly in the zoological section, nevertheless does not correspond with the richness that the traveller can expect to find in a land so favoured by objects of unique natural interest. This is because the rarest objects that are encountered and the beautiful collections that are made up, are immediately exported to Europe, either by travelling naturalists or on behalf of the government of the colony, going to decorate the museums of the capital of the empire; the two best local collections are those of birds and of marine and freshwater shells, the

rare merit of which is beyond all personal comment.⁵

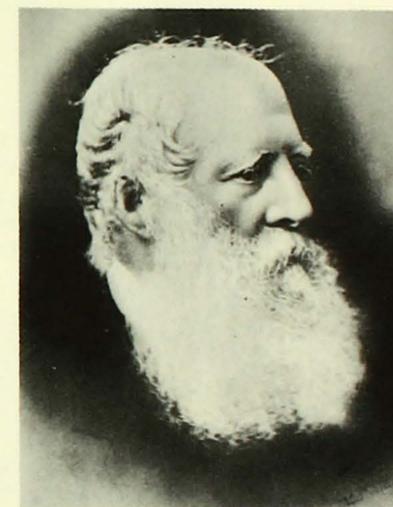
Before proceeding to more mundane matters, one further quotation from this period must be included. The *Sydney Gazette* of 22 October 1836, after drawing attention to the neatness of the Museum, mentions a special temporary exhibit.

The figure which was brought up from Murray Island by the Government schooner *Isabella*, and which was hung round with the skulls of the murdered crew and passengers of the *Charles Eaton*, will be deposited there in a few days for general inspection. Among the skulls brought up by Captain Lewis, of the *Isabella* one of them contains a back tooth, found to be stoped [sic] with fine gold. This proves at once that it must have belonged to one of the crew, or more likely one of the passengers, of this ill fated vessel. The skulls have been buried by order of the Governor.

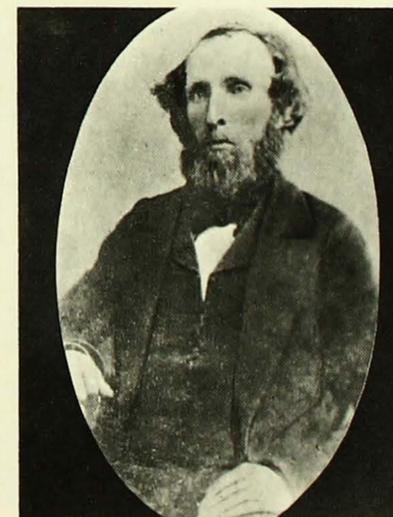
The absence of the skulls must have disappointed those citizens of Sydney who sought edifying entertainment in the Museum. Still, the number of death-masks could be relied upon to increase for, to eke out his income, Bennett also held a government position involving the supervision of hangings and dissection of the victims. In a remarkably parallel capacity, he was also an Inspector of Abattoirs.



Right: Dr George Bennett, secretary and curator of the Museum, 1835-41.



The Rev William Branwhite Clarke, secretary and curator of the Museum, 1841-3.



Right: William Sheridan Wall. Taken onto the staff in 1840 as collector and preserver, he later became the third curator of the Museum.



Far right: George French Angas, secretary of the Museum, 1853-60.

In his search for sufficient income, Bennett became a very overworked man but he was nevertheless able to write a catalogue of the collection and have it in print by 1837.⁶ Thirty-six Australian mammal species were represented including 'A new and undescribed marsupial animal of singular form, brought from the Interior of Australia by Major Mitchell, the Surveyor-General, in his last exploring expedition' [1836]—probably the Pig-footed Bandicoot. Five exotic mammals were displayed, and two mammal skeletons. The bulk of the collection comprised 317 supposed species of Australian birds and twenty-five exotic species. There were five reptiles, six fishes, 211 insects, twenty-five shells, twenty-eight foreign fossils and 'a large collection of fossils from Harper's Hill, Hunter's River, &c., not yet arranged'.

Nine Australian Aboriginal artifacts were on display as well as sixteen from Melanesia, collected by C. M. Lewis of the schooner *Isabella*. Pride of these was 'A Large and Rude Imitation of the Human Head, originally bedecked with human skulls' to which reference has already been made. That this was the prize of the collection is indicated by its long description. Except for the birds, it was not a very impressive collection and many amateurs such as Macleay could easily surpass it.

After a first flush of enthusiasm, interest in the Museum committee flagged. No meetings were held between November 1836 and September 1837; between October

1837 and June 1838; or between January 1839 and October 1841.

In July 1841, Bennett resigned from the position of secretary and curator. He had been unable to make ends meet on his several salaries and the appointment of Allan Cunningham as Government Botanist ended his hopes of a double curatorship. He resumed private medical practice and subsequently undertook more voyages. While in England in 1869, he wrote his delightful *Gatherings of a Naturalist in Australia*, received the degree of MD of Glasgow University, and was made a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons and of the Zoological Society of London. Returning to Australia, he became active in the movement for the introduction of European animals and was made honorary secretary of the Acclimatisation Society. In 1888, he was elected foundation honorary secretary of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science (now ANZAAS).

His successor, the Rev William Branwhite Clarke (1798-1878), justifiably known as 'the Father of Australian Geology', was appointed to the Museum Committee in 1840 and, on the petition of the other members, was appointed successor to Bennett in August 1841. After taking a BA at Cambridge, he had been admitted to holy orders in 1823 and performed parish duties in England until 1838. His decision to move to Australia in 1839 was made because he could see little hope of advancement at home and because, after several bouts of rheumatic fever, he had been advised to seek a warmer climate. His first appointment in the colony was as headmaster of the King's School, Parramatta, but he resigned after eight months. A year later he gladly accepted the Museum position, remaining resident in Parramatta and conducting most of the official correspondence from his home. In his first year of office the committee came together on six occasions and he wrote thirteen letters; pressure eased in the second year, the committee meeting only five times and only four letters being written.

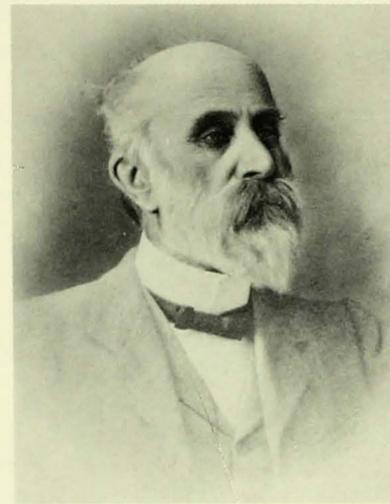
It was perhaps with these facts in mind that, faced with a shortage of revenue, the Legislative Council decided, in late 1843, to abolish his position. Clarke drew up a petition of protest, but to no avail and the rebuff doubtless strengthened the view expressed by him a year previously; that the introduction of an elected Legislative Council was premature and would 'do no good!'.

He remained on the committee and the board that succeeded it until 1874, serving for nearly forty years. These brief notes omit reference to Clarke's great work in stratigraphy and to his long struggle to establish the continuity of geological succession in eastern Australia. A pleasant circularity of history is that the Clarke Memorial Medal of the Royal Society of New South Wales was awarded in 1890 to George Bennett (and subsequently to five other members of the staff of the Museum).

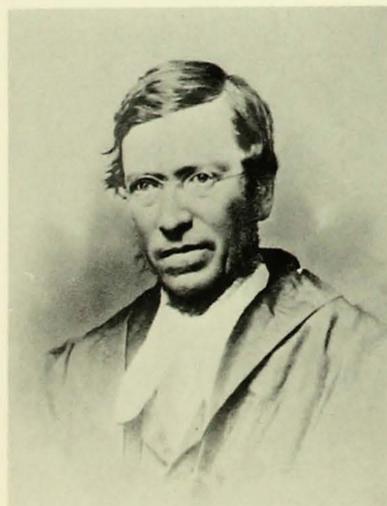
A single room in Macquarie Street premises was quite insufficient for an institution with a distinguished governing body, two salaried staff, and a growing collection. On behalf of the committee, Clarke had complained in August 1841 of 'insufficiency of accommodation in the apartments reserved for the Museum in the home lately vacated by the Surveyor-General. The apartments reserved. . . are, in the opinion of the committee, inadequate for the purpose of arrangement and reception'.⁷ Later in the year he resumed the attack: 'The only room in the Building in Macquarie Street suitable for the acceptance of the Museum is, at present, in the occupation of the Town Surveyor's Department, the other rooms, as I previously had the duty of observing, being quite insufficient for this purpose'.⁸ The committee could not oust the Town Surveyor and remained in its cramped quarters until late in 1841 when the last temporary home of the collection was found in the newly constructed Court House at Woolloomooloo (Darlinghurst).



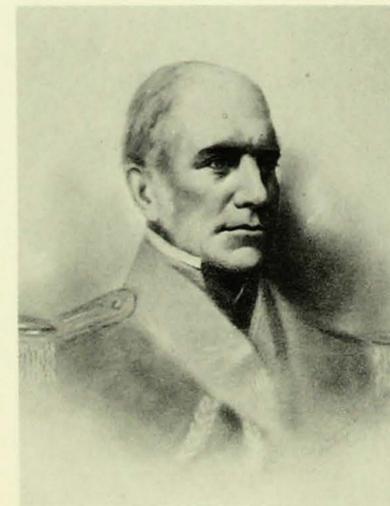
Far left: The explorer, Captain Charles Sturt, who was a member of the Committee of Management of the Museum in 1836.



Left: Captain Phillip Parker King, Committeeman and Trustee, 1887-98.



Far left: The Rev G.E. Turner, honorary secretary of the Committee of Superintendence, 1847-53.



Left: Sir William Denison. As governor of the colony, he contributed considerably to the advancement of the Museum.

There are no records of the Museum between the departure of Clarke in December 1843 and the committee meeting of 12 September 1845, the minutes of which naively record: 'It being observed to the Meeting that by the retirement from that office of the Rev W. B. Clarke, the Committee were without the assistance of a Secretary, Mr Lynd, at the general desire of the meeting, expressed his readiness to act as Honorary Secretary'. Lieutenant Lynd RN (1800-51) dealt efficiently with the increasingly frequent and detailed negotiations concerning the new Museum building in William Street but, being called back to naval duty, was forced to relinquish the secretaryship to the Rev G. E. Turner (1810-69) in November 1847.

The inactivity of the committee during 1844 and most of 1845 is difficult to understand, for moves were under way to provide a building for the Museum. In September 1844, Dr Charles Nicholson successfully moved in the Legislative Council that the Governor be requested to direct the Colonial Architect to prepare drawings and cost estimates of a museum and Sir George Gipps forthwith gave his approval (see Chapter 10).

I propose to place on the Estimates for 1846 a sum not exceeding £3,000 for the erection of a Museum and request him [Mortimer Lewis, Colonial Architect] to prepare a Plan of a Building suitable to the purpose. But before doing so, he should confer with the Committee of the Museum, both as to the nature of the Building to be erected, and the situation in which it should be placed. It seems to me, however, that it ought to be in the 'Botanic Gardens'.⁹

In October 1845 the Legislative Council voted £3,000 for the building and it may be that it was an intimation of this largesse which eventually stimulated the dormant committee into activity. Asked to suggest a site, they recommended a portion of the Government House demesne (Domain) but Gipps declined to alienate any portion and, in January 1846, proposed the present site in William Street, land that had earlier been occupied by a convict garden and was reserved for 'government purposes'.

What, meanwhile, of the curatorship vacated by Bennett in 1847? Unlike his predecessor, Clarke did not concern himself with the management of the Museum or its scientific activities, nor could he readily do so while resident at Parramatta. The management of the Museum itself was in the hands of William Sheridan Wall (1815-76), who had been appointed in August 1840 as Collector and Preserver, succeeding Roach in that position.

Wall was born in Dublin and came to Sydney with his brother Thomas in 1840. Little is known of his early life in Dublin and his claims to have studied at Trinity College and to have been curator of the museum of the Royal Dublin Society are neither substantiated nor compatible with his level of literacy. A. R. Eager, present librarian of the Royal Dublin Society, has suggested that he may have been the son of the museum's porter, Thomas Wall, referred to in a minute of the society dated 7 June 1832: 'the Committee, after examining the Zoological and miscellaneous Catalogues which had been lately prepared, under the inspection of Sir Charles Giesecke, by Thomas Wall, Museum porter, assisted by his son . . . are of the opinion that ten guineas would be a reasonable and moderate remuneration for the same'.¹⁰

This is inconclusive evidence but, if it is correct, Wall would have been seventeen years old at the time. That Thomas Wall should produce museum catalogues shows that he was capable of more than mere portage and the work of W. S. Wall in the Australian Museum is evidence of his experience and competence in museum techniques.

He managed the day-to-day business of the Museum, guided visitors around the exhibits, articulated skeletons and, when time permitted, collected new specimens.

In 1844, Wall was authorised by the Museum committee to make a collecting expedition to the Murrumbidgee under the general direction of George Macleay. At this time the journey was not particularly arduous, there being a weekly coach service along the route of the present Hume Highway to Gundagai. Nevertheless, parts of the account of his *Journey from Sydney to the Murrumbidgee River in pursuit of Specimens of Natural History*¹¹ seem more appropriate to the perilous exploration of unknown territory.

Within days of his departure from Macleay's farm near Camden with three yoke of oxen and three drays, the draught animals began to drop in their traces. After two weeks, having travelled about 110 km and been accosted by a bushranger, he was stranded with one dray, two sick bullocks and no money. Rations had begun to run short in the first week and he was reduced to begging potatoes. He walked back to Camden, obtained more bullocks and set out again, but suffered the same fate. Five weeks after his original departure he was stranded again, the soles of his boots had fallen off, and he was starving. 'I now thought it highe time', he confided to his journal, 'to address a letter to Mr G. McLeay'.

Below: This fragment of a series of panoramic sketches by John Rae shows a view across Hyde Park from Elizabeth Street. The Museum is seen in an unfinished state, still without a roof over the Long Gallery. (Courtesy of the Mitchell Library)

Over Page: Hyde Park, the old days of merry cricket club matches: painting by T. H. Lewis. The view faces northwards and is bounded on the left by Elizabeth Street and on the right by a (now vanished) extension of Macquarie Street. In the centre background are (from left to right) the Courthouse, St James' Church, and St James' Parsonage (originally the residence of Surveyor-General Mitchell) in which the Museum was located from 1840 to 1841. The residence of Dr George Bennett lies just outside the left frame of the picture, two doors further down Elizabeth Street than the last building depicted. (Courtesy of the Dixson Library)



Ploughed Ground
Wednesday October 16th, 1844

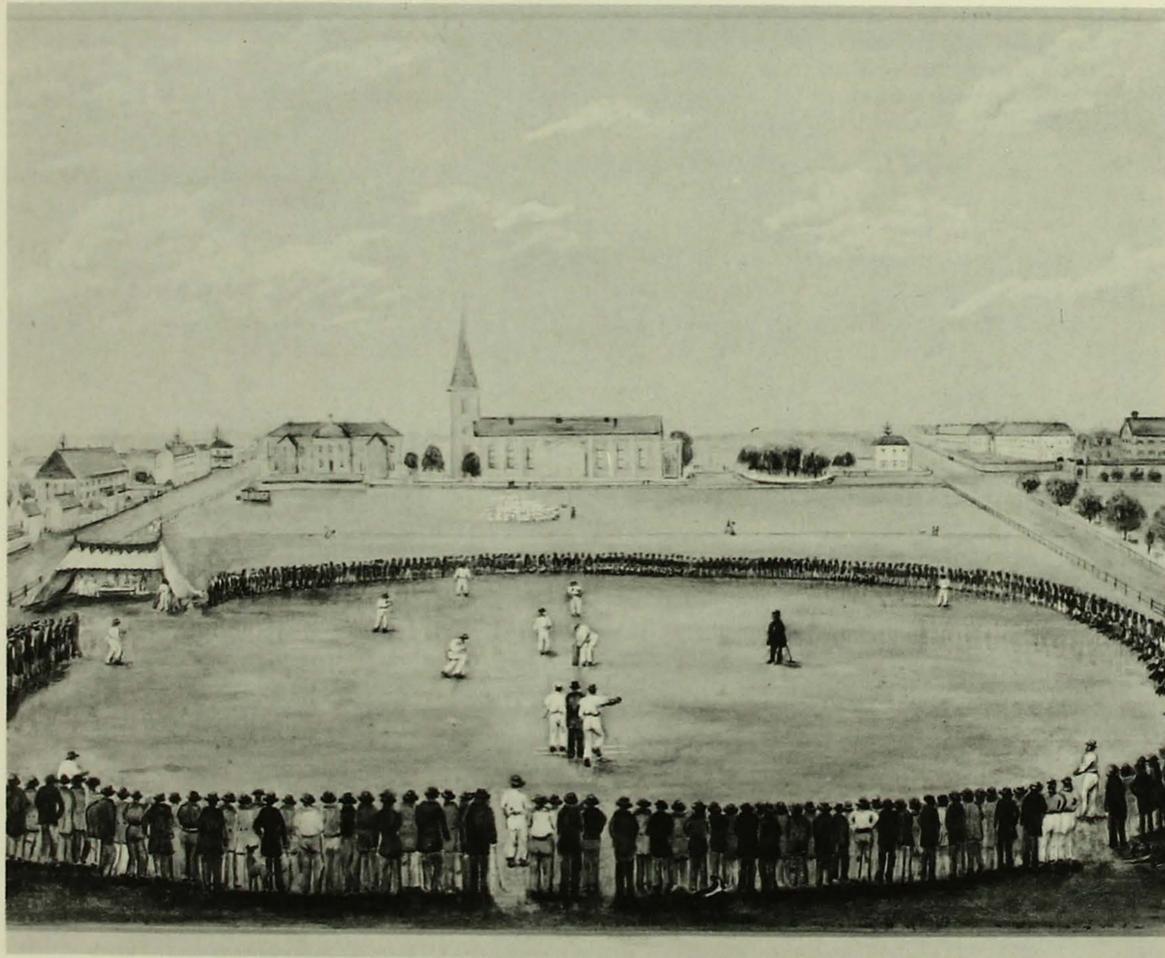
Sir,

I regret to inform you that our journey has been truly unfortunate from the commencement up to the present time this morning we have heard that 2 of our best Bullock died last night and 1 lost so that we cannot proceed any further when I arrived here the man had no provisions so that I have had nothing to eat for the last two days under these circumstances I do myself the favour of writing to you and would feel extremely indebted by your letting me know what I had best do.

Four days later, Macleay provided two horse teams with which Wall was able to make good progress, reaching Gundagai in a week. Macleay's horse teams departed and he was left to his own devices and the charity of the local settlers. He collected as best he could under the circumstances but was without even a box to keep his specimens in. Nearly four months had passed but no arrangements had been made for his return.

Sunday Morning January 5th

In the Evening Mr Gunn [G. Macleay's overseer] arrived he told me that he had seen Mr Macleay who informed him that there was no funds from the Museum so that I cannot leave until Dr Nicholson receives from the Treasury the amount due for last year this I must say is a very unpleasant circumstance . . . I am truly miserable here.



With a remittance which arrived on 24 January he was able to make his way back to Sydney, but not without having to leave IOU's for much of his transport and accommodation. He arrived in the Museum on 2 February, having collected 138 birds, sixteen mammals, and sundry other specimens. His trip was ridiculously disorganised but, despite his long catalogue of misfortunes he was not, as Whitley suggests, reduced to playing his violin at the roadside to make money.¹² Whitley presumably refers to the incident on 20 December 1844 when, quartered with the labourers on a cattle station about 160 km downstream from Gundagai, Wall played several Irish tunes on a borrowed fiddle and was 'looked on as the white headed Boy', the only happy occasion in a miserable five months.

From the time of Bennett's resignation, Wall performed the functions of curator and, when the keeping of minutes of the Museum committee was resumed in September 1845, was so referred to by the secretary, Lynd. However, the appointment had not been sanctioned nor had his salary been increased. In phrases which suggest considerable recourse to a letter-writing guide, he addressed the committee:

Australian Museum
5th September, 1846

Gentlemen

I very humbly beg your obliging *consideration to my situation as Curator to the Museum*. Since my appointment in 1840 I have been in the receipt of a Salary of £100 per annum, which without perquisites of any kind has been all my income: and which I have found, with all the economy I could exercise, very inadequate to the respectable maintenance to my family. I have hitherto refrained from making any application for an increase of salary; but in the hope that you are satisfied with my attention to the interests of the Institution and of my capabilities for filling the office, I would now very humbly request you would interest yourselves so far in my behalf as to obtain for me a remuneration more adequate to the wants of my family and the respectability of my situation.

In preferring this request I would only further trespass on your time to observe that under the present prospects of the Institution . . . [paper torn here] . . . responsibilities of my situation must [be] greatly increased then I beg to assure you shall ever be met by me by a faithful and zealous discharge of duty, and with a grateful recollection of any addition to my comforts your recommendations may procure me.

I have the honour to remain,
Gentlemen your very obedient
servant.

(Signed) Wm. Sheridan Wall¹³

Two days later, the committee resolved 'that as Mr Wall has served the Institution very faithfully for some time and as his duties were now likely to be much increased, it was but reasonable some addition should be made to his salary'.¹⁴ Accordingly, his salary was raised from £100 to £150 and, in 1851, to £250.

The increased duties to which the committee referred were in respect of the new building, the foundations of which had been commenced in March 1846 with the assurance of the Colonial Architect, Mortimer Lewis, that the structure would be completed by September 1847. Why the building was not completed until 1852 and why the interior was still being fitted out in 1856 is related in Chapter 11.

In 1847 Wall collaborated with Bennett and Leichhardt in the restoration of a *Diprotodon* skeleton brought to Sydney by Mr R. B. Turner. The *Sydney Morning Herald* commented in a leading article:

Professor Owen comes to this conclusion, that there formerly existed 'in Australia a marsupial *vegetative feeder as large as the Rhinoceros*'. The bones brought down to Sydney fully confirm

this judgement. There is no doubt that Mr. Turner's principle specimen is a DIPROTODON.

... Professor OWEN, be it remembered, had never seen the *upper jaw* of the Diprotodon. Mr. TURNER's animal, in this respect is not only unique but perfect; for the head is nearly complete ... restored by the assiduity of Mr WALL of the Museum, Dr LEICHHARDT, &c. &c.

... it may have been a kind of koala, at the lowest estimate, nearly ten feet high.¹⁵

It had been Leichhardt's intention to purchase the bones but the price was too high, and the skull was eventually obtained by the British Museum.

In 1849 Wall prepared and mounted the skeleton of a whale which, exhibited under a temporary shelter outside the Museum, was a great local attraction. This formed the subject of the Museum's first *Memoir*, written anonymously in 1851. At this time, too, Wall had the care of a small menagerie operated by the Museum in Hyde Park; Sydney's first zoo.

In 1852, as the external structure of the building neared completion and funds were being sought to complete the interior, the trustees turned their attention to a more appropriate system of administration. The committee had no statutory authority or permanence, nor did it exist as a body corporate with powers of ownership, etc. In seeking appropriate models, they examined the constitution of a number of European museums and reached the conclusion that 'these may all be resolved into two classes, to wit, those which are governed chiefly by Administrators of rank or political influence, and those which are administered by Professors of Science or Literature. The British Museum may be taken as a fair type of the former class and the *Jardin des Plantes* at Paris of the latter.'¹⁶ Considering the composition of the committee, there is no need to invoke francophobia to account for their unhesitating preference for the British model and, in any case, no 'professors' were available. An impeccably worded draft bill was prepared by the committee, submitted to the Governor-General and passed into law on 4 July 1853.

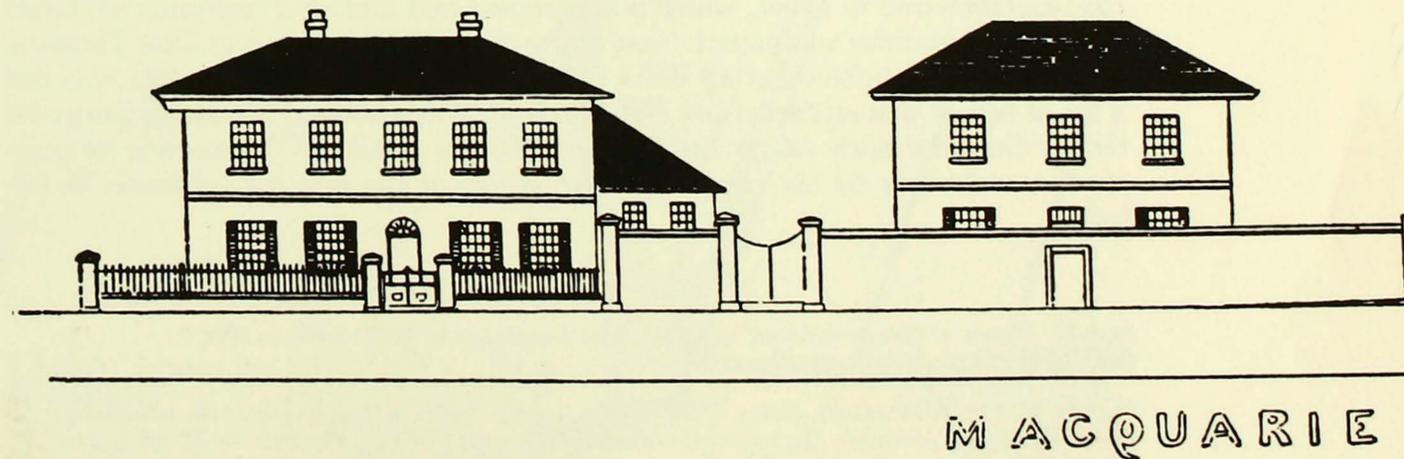
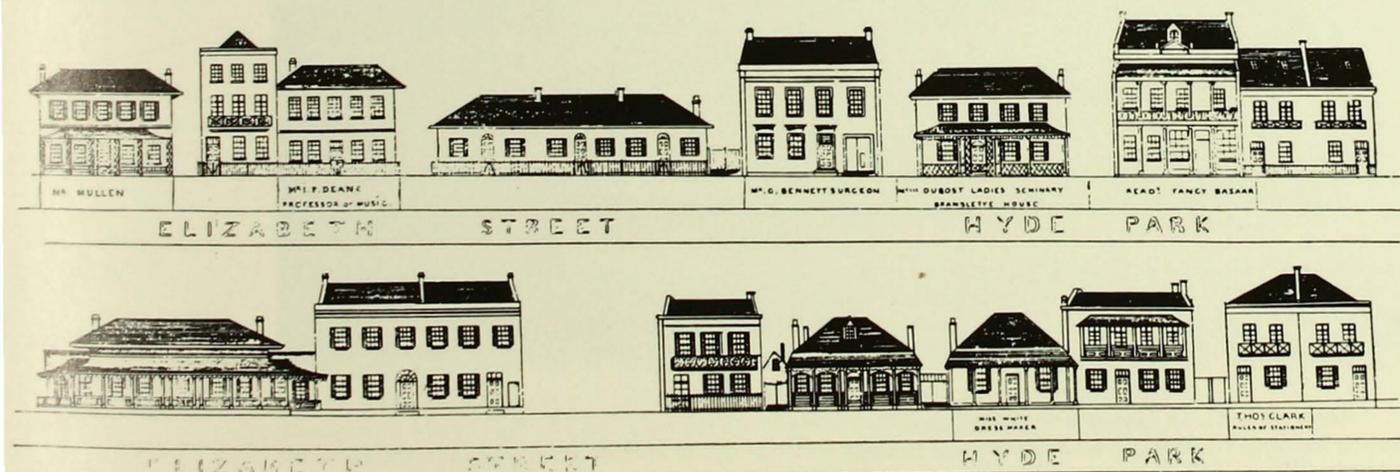
The effect of the Museum Act of 1853 was to create a body corporate of twenty-four trustees, eleven (the official trustees) being senior members of the public service holding their trusteeships *ex officio*; one (the Crown Trustee) being a person appointed by the Governor; and the other twelve (elective trustees) perpetuating themselves by election of 'other fit and proper persons' to fill vacancies caused by death or resignation. No limits of age or tenure were imposed on the trustees.

The Act granted a permanent endowment of £1000 per annum to the trustees to be expended at their discretion, although financial accounts were to be furnished annually to government. The trustees were given power to appoint and dismiss all servants of the Museum and to make by-laws governing staff and visitors. The first Board of Trustees comprised:

- The Chief Justice (Sir Alfred Stephen)
- The Colonial Secretary (The Hon. E. Deas Thomson)
- The Attorney-General (The Hon. J. H. Plunkett)
- The Auditor-General (F. L. S. Merewether)
- The Speaker, Legislative Council (Sir Charles Nicholson)
- The Solicitor-General (The Hon. W. M. Manning)
- The Collector of Customs (The Hon. J. G. N. Gibbes)
- The Surveyor-General (Sir Thomas Mitchell)
- The Colonial Architect (E. T. Blackett)
- The President, Colonial Medical Board (J. Mitchell, MD)
- The Crown Trustee (The Hon. H. W. Parker)
- A. a'Beckett, MD, FRCS
- G. Bennett, MD
- J. C. Bidwell
- The Rev W. B. Clarke
- Capt P. P. King
- The Rev R. L. King
- W. MacArthur
- G. Macleay
- W. S. Macleay
- Prof J. Smith, MA, MD
- The Rev G. E. Turner
- G. Witt, MD

Many of the official trustees may have had difficulty in perceiving the relevance of their appointments or the value of their potential contributions. After several months, very few continued to come to meetings and, within a year or two it became accepted that, unless possessed of a particular interest, they were not expected to attend. Deas Thomson, as we have seen, had such an interest; so too did Sir Alfred Stephen and Sir Charles Nicholson.

As 121 elective trustees have served on the board during the 122 years in which it has existed in a form approximate to its first constitution, it would be impracticable



to mention them individually [see Appendix 2]. Of the original committee, four men remained on the board of 1853: Deas Thomson, W. MacArthur, P. P. King and G. Macleay. Alexander Macleay had died in 1848 and was succeeded in the following year by his eldest son, W. S. Macleay.

William Sharp Macleay (1792-1865) studied in Trinity College, Cambridge and received his MA in 1818. Joining the diplomatic service, he served for some years in France where he was much impressed by the work of Cuvier and wrote his book, *Horae Entomologicae*, a rather speculative study of insects and other arthropods in which he proposed his 'quinary' system of animal classification. Had he believed in organic evolution, his ideas would have been germane to problems of animal phylogeny but, as he remained unconvinced all his life, his thoughts on the relationships of major animal groups remained formal abstractions.

Retiring in 1836, he came to Sydney in 1839, partly for reasons of health and partly to pursue his study of insects. Unlike his other relatives, he was of a retiring nature and uninterested in politics. His opinions were much sought after by local naturalists and the young T. H. Huxley struck up a warm friendship with him while in Sydney on the *Rattlesnake* expedition. He was active in the affairs of the Museum and was the major architect of the Museum Act of 1853.

John Smith (1818-85), the first Professor of Chemistry and Experimental Philosophy in the University of Sydney, was the first of a series of distinguished professors to serve as a trustee. He had been appointed to the Committee of Management of the Museum in 1852 shortly after this body had curtly rebuffed a proposal from the university to ascertain 'upon what terms the Museum and grounds might be transferred to the University'.

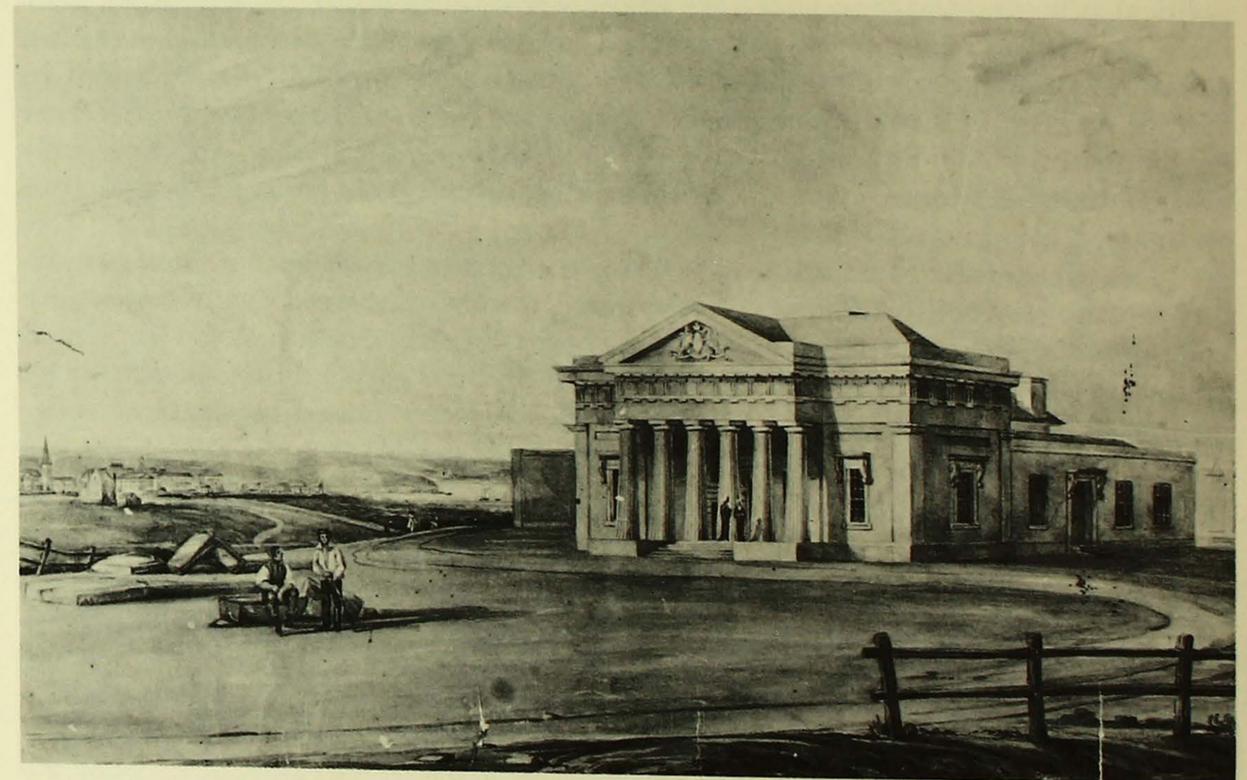
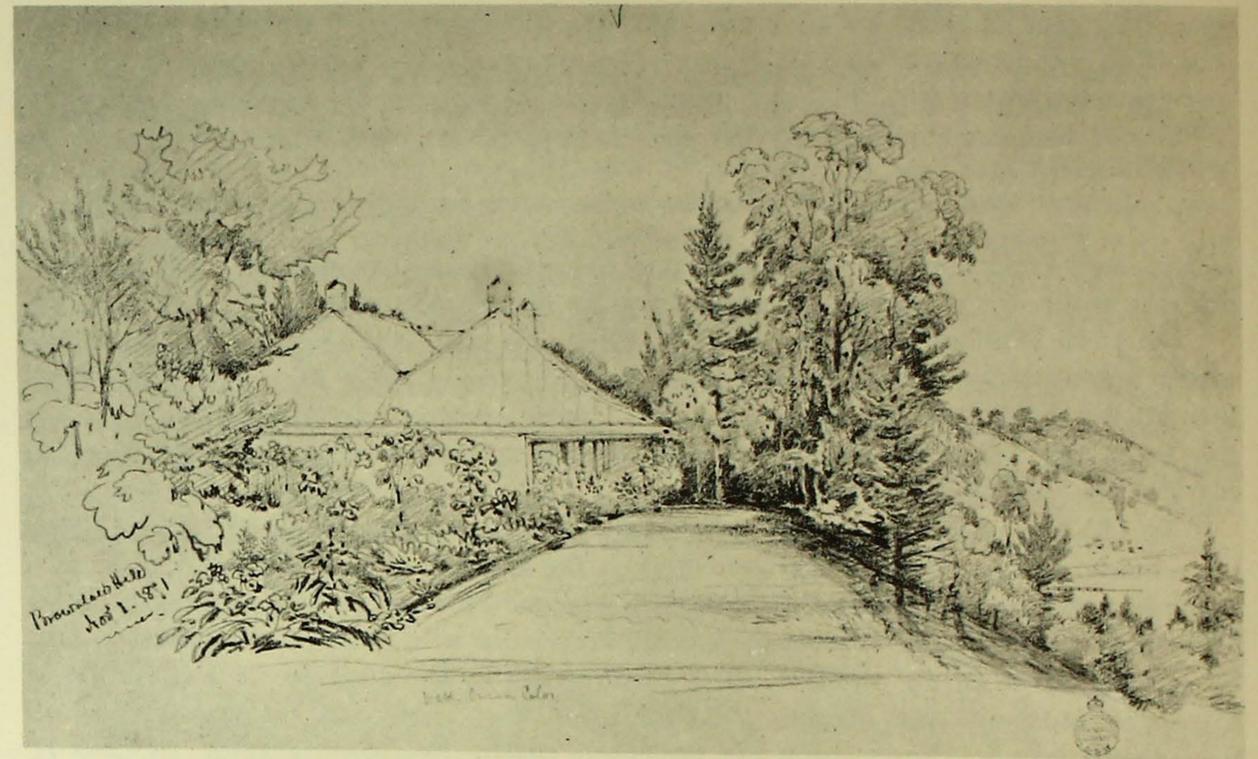
The incorporation and endowment of the Museum put it on a secure footing and it was clear that it would require a more formal organisation. A sub-committee set up to consider the matter drafted a series of rules and also a recommendation that serious consideration be given to the appointment of a salaried secretary:

Much of the anticipated advancement of the Museum depends upon the judicious appointment of this officer. The requirements are such as are not ordinarily combined in one individual who, in addition to a good share of classical attainments, ought to possess facility in correspondence, aptitude in business, correct and punctual habits, and with a certain amount of enthusiasm in natural history and a love of the arts generally.¹⁷

How did the board go about the selection and 'judicious appointment' of such a paragon? The minutes of 30 July 1853 are informative. The meeting began with the report referred to above, which was accepted and tabled: a resolution of thanks to the sub-committee was passed. Next a vote of thanks was passed to Deas Thomson for 'the zeal and interests at all times evinced by him'. The meeting then recorded a list of twenty-one artifacts from New Zealand, Polynesia and Melanesia presented by Mr George French Angas and resolved that the thanks of the meeting be communicated to him by the chairman. The record of the meeting continues as follows:

Page 21: Portion of Elizabeth Street, as depicted by Joseph Fowles in his *Sydney in 1848*, showing the house of Dr George Bennett.

Page 21: Portion of Macquarie Street as depicted by Joseph Fowles in his *Sydney in 1848*, showing St James' Parsonage, previously the residence of Surveyor-General Mitchell, in which the Museum was located from 1840 to 1841. The public library was housed in the lean-to annexe.



Top: Brownlow Hill, George Macleay's property near Camden, from which Wall began his ill-organised expedition to the Murrumbidgee in 1844. (From a sketch by Conrad Martens, courtesy of the Mitchell Library)

Above: The Court House at Darlinghurst: painting by Anon (1841-65). The Museum was located here from 1841 to 1847. (Courtesy of the Dixson Library)

A letter was read from Mr George French Angas applying for the office of Secretary, with accompanying Testimonials. Whereupon, it was moved by the Hon E. Deas Thomson, Esq and seconded by Rev George Edward Turner and carried unanimously:

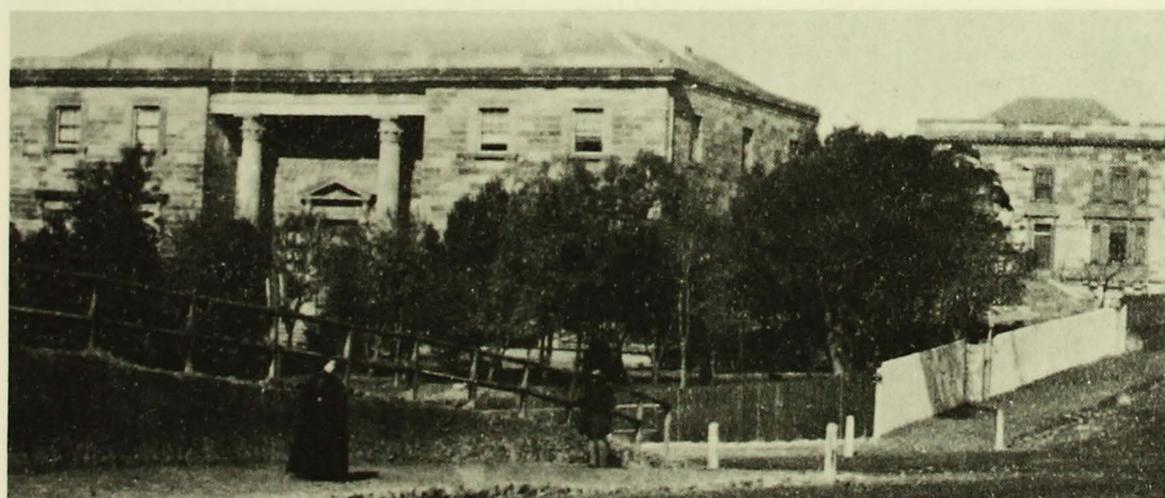
That Mr George French Angas be appointed Secretary and Accountant upon the terms of his letter of the 27th inst.—the salary to commence on the 1st October next at the rate of £300 per annum with apartments for himself and family in the Museum—the Office subject to such regulations as may be hereafter fixed upon.

Certainly George French Angas (1822-86) started with a reputation for facility and promptitude in correspondence, his application being written three days before the position was created. He also possessed, in addition to manifest generosity, a number of relevant qualifications. He had studied drawing and lithography as a youth and at the age of twenty published an illustrated book of his travels in Malta and Sicily. His travels in Australia and New Zealand between 1844 and 1846 led to four more illustrated books. He had an interest in shell-collecting, a knowledge of Latin, some acquaintance with Greek, and had been granted an audience by Queen Victoria.

Angas' salary of £300 was £50 greater than that paid to Wall, the curator. Since Wall had been accustomed for eight years to being the senior employee (of a staff of five), Angas' appointment called for some redefinition of duties. Unfortunately, the board failed to attend to this and, for five years, the only guide was an interim clarification of September 1853; 'the Secretary and Curator to take instructions from the Committee'. *De facto*, the situation was clearly that the secretary controlled the institution and this led to friction.

Of the eleven rooms in the original building only the board room was used for Museum business. The others were residential and had been occupied since 1846 by Wall and his family and the family of the museum messenger. With Angas' advent, Wall's accommodation was reduced to a bedroom on the ground floor and a sitting room in the basement (now occupied by the officer-in-charge, Administration). Occasionally, Angas used the board room for his larger dinner parties.

The strained relations between Angas and Wall snapped in November 1858 when the trustees received a written complaint from Wall that, having found the front door



Above: The oldest known photograph of the Museum; one of a stereo-pair taken by William Macarthur, about 1855. To the right are the original buildings of Sydney College, now Sydney Grammar School. (Courtesy of the Mitchell Library and the Macarthur-Onslow family)

Right: Ludwig Leichhardt, as drawn by J. F. Mann in his *Eight Months with Dr Leichhardt in the years 1846 to 1847*.



of the Museum open on the night of 19 October, he had asked the messenger for the keys so that he might lock it but had been refused on Mr Angas' orders. A sub-committee set up 'to define the relative positions of the different persons belonging to the Museum' deliberated on the charges and counter-charges emerging from this confrontation and produced three recommendations:

That the Secretary of the Museum should be entrusted with the general charge of the Institution and supervision of the other officers connected with it.
The Curator should be directly responsible to the Trustees for the preparation, arrangement, and safe custody of the specimens entrusted to his charge.
No dogs should, under any consideration, be kept on the premises.¹⁸

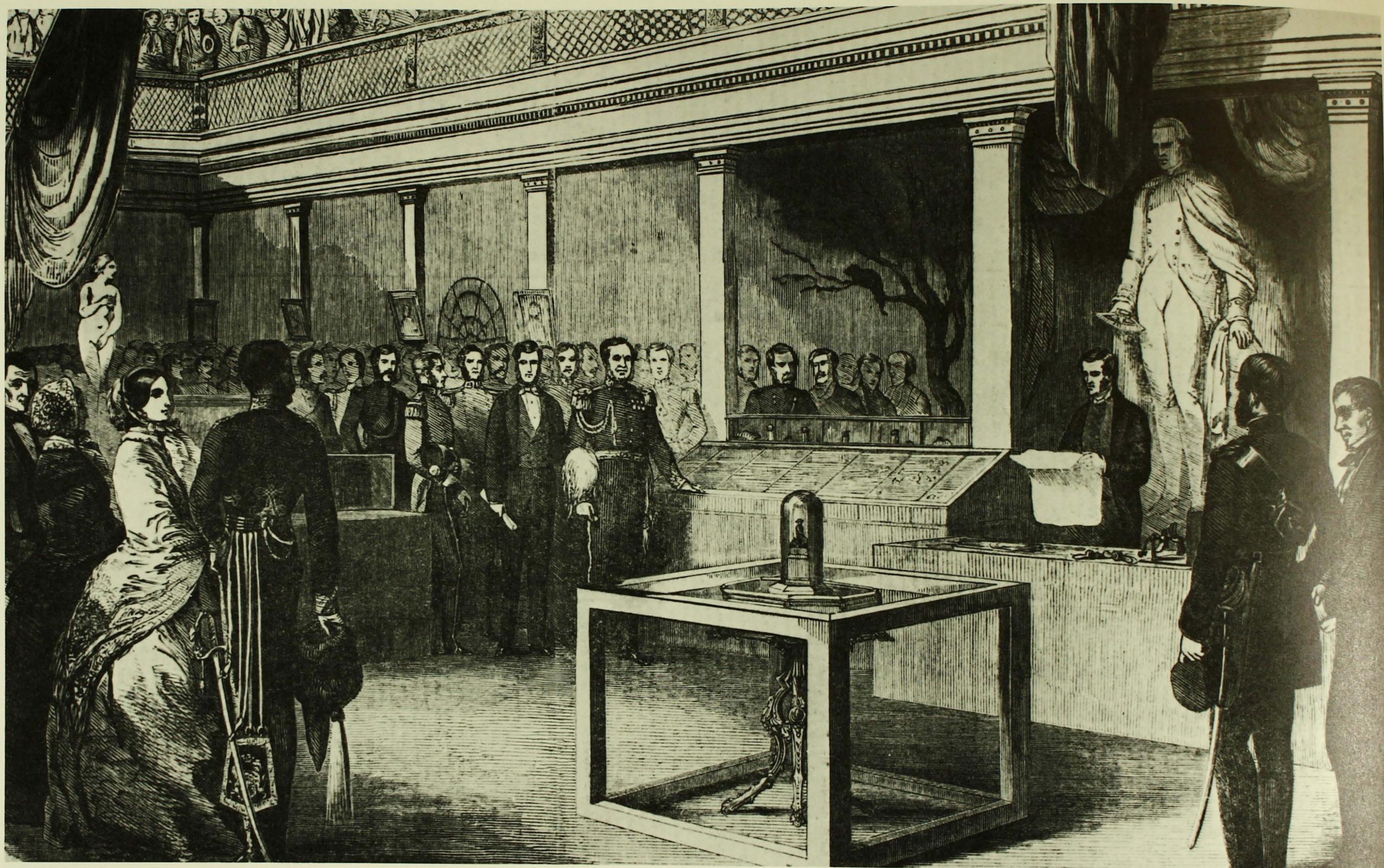
The third ruling, which seems somewhat incongruous, drove to the heart of the incident, for Angas explained that the main door of the Museum had to be kept open to remove the smell of faeces deposited on the stairs that day by a dog kept by Wall in the basement.

The arrival of the governor-general, Sir Charles Fitzroy, on 14 November 1854, to open the exhibition of New South Wales products, displayed in the Museum prior to its despatch to the Paris International Exhibition (1855). This was the first major display to be held in the Museum.

Wall was not in good health and his quarrel with Angas led the trustees to retire him at the end of 1858. There appears to be some barely repressed satisfaction in Angas' report to a later meeting of the board that Wall had been told 'to clear out of the building' but within a year he was required to engage in correspondence concerning his own downgrading.

Before dealing with Angas' problems it is necessary to consider the contribution to the museum of General Sir William Thomas Denison FRS (1804-71). A well-educated military engineer and author of numerous publications in arts, science, and technology, he was appointed Governor of New South Wales in 1855 and almost immediately elected as a trustee. This unusual act was strictly improper but it served the Museum well, for Denison used his inside knowledge and influence on the trustees' behalf, even to the extent of suggesting in detail how they should approach his colonial government. He strongly urged the preparation of catalogues to demonstrate how the collections had outstripped the space available for exhibition and, in respect of an extension to the building, wrote to the trustees:





Right: The opening ceremony. Standing before a statue of Captain James Cook, Sir Alfred Stephen reads an address of welcome.