

A SCIENTIFIC STAFF 1874-1894

Krefft's successor, Edward Pierson Ramsay (1842-1916), was the first Australian to head the Museum. Son of a prosperous medical practitioner whose assets included the Dobroyd Estate, he grew up in Sydney and, at the age of twenty-one, entered the University of Sydney, itself only twelve years old, with a single faculty and but three professors. He departed two years later without having taken a degree and, at the age of twenty-five established a successful plant and seed nursery on a portion of the Dobroyd Estate inherited from his father. Seven years later, in 1874, he was appointed curator of the Australian Museum.

While it is conceivable that such a background might have fitted a native son for a junior position in the Herbarium, it would seem hardly to have provided adequate preparation for the senior position in an institution devoted to zoology, geology and anthropology and with some international standing for researches in these fields. One must look further for justification of the trustees' faith.

As a youth, his keen interest in natural history was cultivated in discussions with Pittard, Sir William Denison, and a German schoolteacher-naturalist, Reitmann. At twenty he became treasurer of the Entomological Society of New South Wales and three years later was elected a Life Fellow of the newly reconstituted Royal Society of New South Wales—an honour which may have more reflected the magnitude of his subscription than his scientific reputation which, at that stage, rested on eight short and rather pedestrian papers on Australian birds.

This output might not have justified fellowship of a scientific society but it was a creditable achievement for an undergraduate. His youth and lack of formal training in science were no barrier to the acceptance of his papers in *Ibis* or *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* and by 1874 he was author of several dozen papers and had described eight new bird species. In that year he was also active in the group, led by W. J. Macleay, which established the Linnean Society of New South Wales. Krefft regarded him as a sycophant of Macleay and—since he had eaten Queensland lung-fish without recognising that these were 'living fossils'—as an incompetent naturalist.

In April 1874, Krefft's only scientific assistant, George Masters, had resigned after ten years' service to take a better paid position with Macleay as curator of his extensive private collection (later to become the Macleay Museum in the University of Sydney). It was one of Krefft's many complaints against the trustees that Masters had, in fact, been working a great deal for Macleay while drawing his Museum salary and it seems that he played an active, if not public, part in the Krefft imbroglio.

CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

<i>A. W. Scott</i>	1874-79
<i>C. Rolleston</i>	1880
<i>A. Stephen</i>	1881-89
<i>J. C. Cox</i>	1890

PRESIDENT, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

<i>J. C. Cox</i>	1891-1912
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CUSTODIANS

<i>E. P. Ramsay</i>	Curator	1874-94
<i>C. Robinson</i>	Acting Secretary	1874-6, 1878
<i>E. W. Palmer</i>	Acting Secretary	1877
<i>C. R. Buckland</i>	Secretary	1879-82
<i>S. Sinclair</i>	Secretary	1882-1917

R. Strahan

At the height of the Krefft controversy, Ramsay applied for the vacant position of assistant curator but his application was not considered until the day after Krefft was ejected from the Museum when a special meeting was held and, on Macleay's motion, Ramsay was appointed curator. Macleay had good reason to be satisfied with his dealings with the Museum in the year 1874-5, having seen the demise of his *bête noire*, Krefft, the removal of one protege to his own service, and the establishment of another at the head of the institution. At the inaugural meeting of the Linnean Society in January 1875, with Macleay in the chair as first president, council member Ramsay delivered a short paper on a new species of Honeyeater, which he named *Ptilotis macleayana*.

To imply that Ramsay obtained his position by patronage is not necessarily to deny his suitability: patronage was a normal and respectable procedure and nepotism only slightly less so. Aged thirty-two, with a budding reputation as an ornithologist, active in local biological circles, and moving at least on the fringes of the colonial establishment, he was an appropriate appointee—and much safer than the volatile foreigner, Krefft.

Ramsay brought great energy to his scientific duties. Although his interests remained predominantly ornithological, he described a number of fish species and several new mammals, including the interesting Musky Rat-kangaroo. He was assiduous in establishing exchange programmes with other institutions and, under his direction, the collections expanded considerably: it was a matter of considerable satisfaction to him that, during his tenure, some 18 000 bird skins were added to the collection. His attitude to display, however, was extremely conservative and he tended to regard beautiful cabinets as more important than informative labels.

In the forty-second year of her reign and twenty-seven years after her beloved Prince Consort had organised the Great Exhibition in London's Crystal Palace, Queen Victoria commanded a commission of twenty-four members, including Ramsay, to do likewise in her colony of New South Wales:

Whereas it is deemed advisable to hold an International Exhibition of Works of Industry and Art in Sydney, in the month of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy nine; know ye that we, relying on your loyalty, integrity, learning, and ability, have constituted and appointed, and by these presents do constitute and appoint, you to be Commissioners to take measures for the holding of such International Exhibition.¹

On the Sydney Domain, her dutiful commissioners built a cross-shaped Garden Palace, two storeys high 240 metres from north to south and 150 metres along the other axis, and occupying an area between the present Conservatorium and Parliament House. Eight hundred men, consulting 417 plans and utilising 1.5 million superficial metres of timber, 2.5 million bricks, and 220 tonnes of corrugated iron, constructed the building in eight months, working often under the new electric light. Together with its annexes, it covered a space about half that of London's 1851 Exhibition.

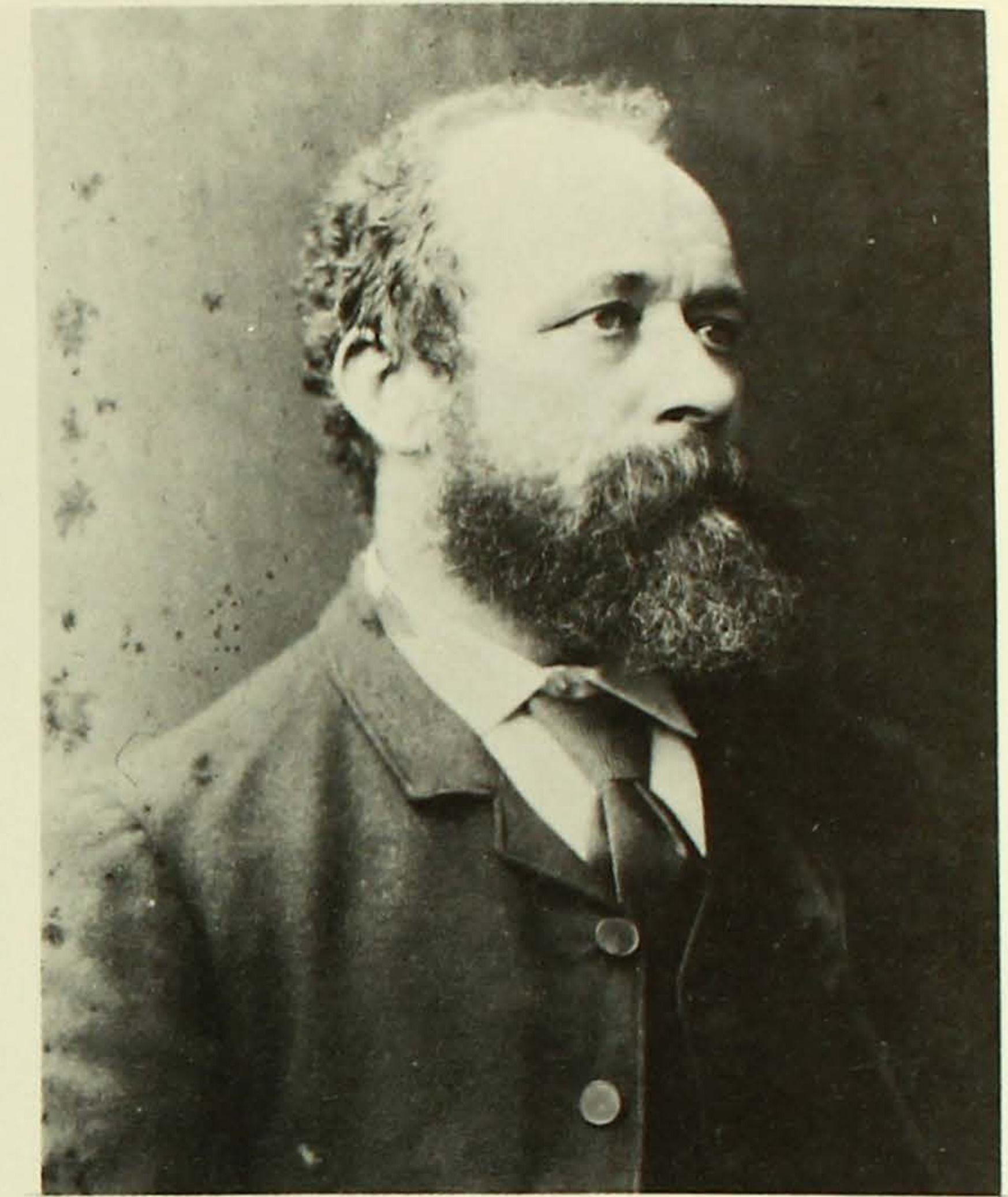
Among the many displays in the Garden Palace was an Ethnological Court

where the habits, dresses, ornaments, weapons, canoes and paddles, implements for fishing and the chase and the rude pottery of the various Australian Colonies and the natives of the several groups of Polynesia were illustrated by a collection of samples which, for variety and extent as relating to the races named, has, in every probability, never been got together before . . .

The Court would not have been anything else so complete as it proved but for the



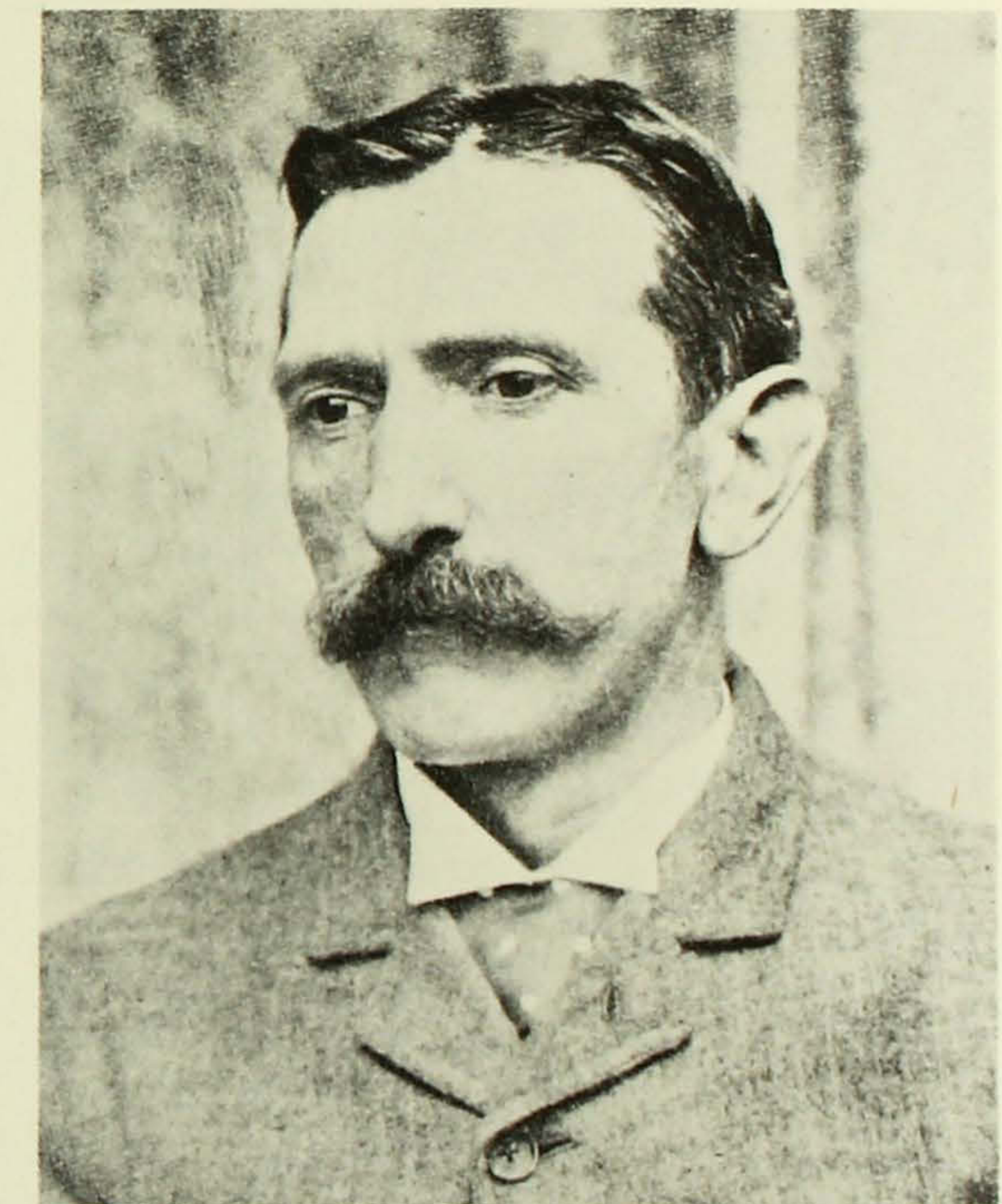
Edward Pierson Ramsay, curator 1874-94.



John Brazier, first cataloguer in a zoological section of the Museum. Tardiness in the production of desired catalogues led to his dismissal during the financial crisis of 1893.



Felix Ratte, first head of the Museum's Department of Mineralogy.



Thomas Whitelegge, in charge of marine invertebrates, 1835-1908.

circumstances that the Trustees of the Australian Museum of Sydney lent their very comprehensive ethnological collection, usually displayed in that institution as part of its permanent treasures . . . it will be almost impossible to get such a large collection together again and we are led to this conclusion by the rapid disappearance of the Australian Aborigines from the face of the earth, while other savage people represented in the Court are suffering from a like decadence in ever increasing ratio . . . The Aborigine seems incapable of the improvement of other native races . . . he appears to have few aspirations beyond satisfying the necessities of nature and indulgence, when near European settlements in acquired but questionable tastes . . . They are represented in New South Wales and Victoria by struggling remnants of once powerful tribes who are too often so debased and degraded as scarcely to deserve recognition as remains even of a savage race.²

The exhibition closed in April 1880 but the Museum's ethnological and technological collections remained in the Garden Palace until the night of 22 September 1882 when the building and its contents were utterly destroyed by fire. Other important collections lost in the fire were W. B. Clarke's collection of minerals, field notes and maps, the Linnean Society's library, equipment and specimens (largely donated by William John Macleay); and the records of the census of 1881.

Judged by the minutes of their meetings, the trustees reacted to this catastrophe with great calm, for the event is not referred to directly and can only be inferred from items of correspondence noted therein. There may indeed, have been some trustees who recalled with embarrassment that, when earlier pressed to make arrangements to remove the specimens, the board had written to the Under-Secretary of the Department of Justice informing him that 'there is no room in the Museum for the ethnological collection which, if returned to this Museum after the close of the Exhibition, must be packed in boxes and stored in the cellars, thereby incurring great risk of being destroyed . . .'³

The attention of the trustees was distracted also by the discovery, at the time, that C. R. Buckland, the secretary ('appointed with very high testimonies'), had been systematically milking the accounts to the extent of at least £554 19s 10p, and they were busily involved in such matters as a defalcation account and fidelity guarantees. At a meeting in late November, in the fortuitous absence of the three trustees concerned with the late ethnological and technological collections, Prof Liversidge, Mr Roberts and Mr Hunt, the remaining trustees composed a verbose resolution in which they desired

to express their sympathy with the Committee of the Technological and Ethnological Branch of the Museum . . . in the misfortune which they more especially have sustained by the destruction of the valuable collection of objects in that department. The Trustees feel it to be due to these gentlemen to record the sense entertained by the Board of the zeal and industry devoted by them to the superintendence of that Branch, by which they had succeeded in completing a most interesting addition to the public property ready for exhibition—when the fruit of their labours was swept away in the general ruin.⁴

A copy of the resolution, signed by the chairman and countersigned by the secretary, was sent to the three trustees concerned and there the matter rested.

Ramsay, however, was faced with the task of reconstituting an ethnological collection. Some 2000 specimens had been lost in the fire but his efforts were so successful that this number had been surpassed by the end of 1883 and within five years some 7500 specimens were housed in a newly constructed ethnological hall. As described elsewhere, the technological collection gradually became separated from the Australian Museum: had it not been destroyed by the fire, the ethnological collection

would also have gone to the daughter institution which might then have developed into a 'Museum of Man', bridging the arbitrary division that traditionally separates the study of pre-industrial from industrial cultures.

The rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne was no less manifest in the 1880s than at present: Sydney's exhibition was followed two years later by one in the southern capital, New South Wales appointing seventy-two commissioners (three times the number that had been found necessary for its own exhibition) to show the flag in Victoria. Five trustees and Ramsay were included in the team, the Australian Museum contributing

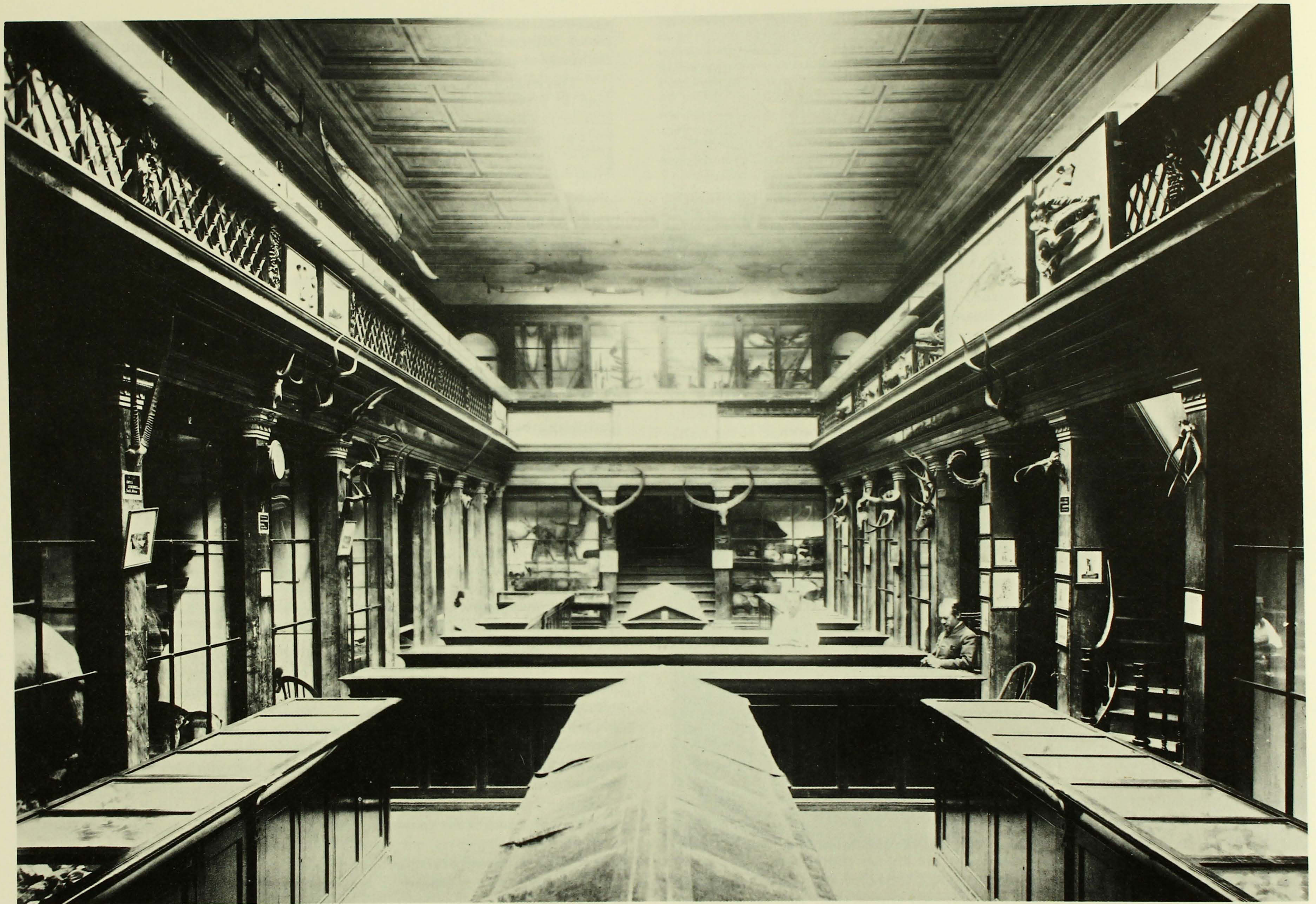
a case containing stuffed specimens of the food-fishes caught in Port Jackson and New South Wales waters . . . There were also three hundred specimens of fish preserved in spirits, with photographs taken from the finest living specimens. Some handsome stuffed Australian paradise birds, lyre birds, bower birds, thrushes, etc., were also exhibited by the Curator of the Australian Museum.⁵

The emphasis on fishes reflected one of Ramsay's current interests. In 1881 and again the following year, the government voted £600 for the Museum to engage in surveys of fossiliferous cave deposits and to make fish collections from the Richmond, Burdekin and Mary Rivers. In 1882 Ramsay was appointed to the New South Wales Fisheries Commission and this, in turn, led to his selection as secretary in charge of the Australian exhibits in the great International Fisheries Exhibition held in London in 1883. Granted a year's leave of absence from the Museum for this purpose, he was able also to travel extensively in Europe, visiting museums and aquaria. An excellent bargainer, he obtained gifts or exchanges from every institution visited and made judicious purchases from dealers and private naturalists. His activities during his year abroad added approximately 3500 animal specimens to the collections, including Dr. F. Day's valuable collection of Indian fishes.

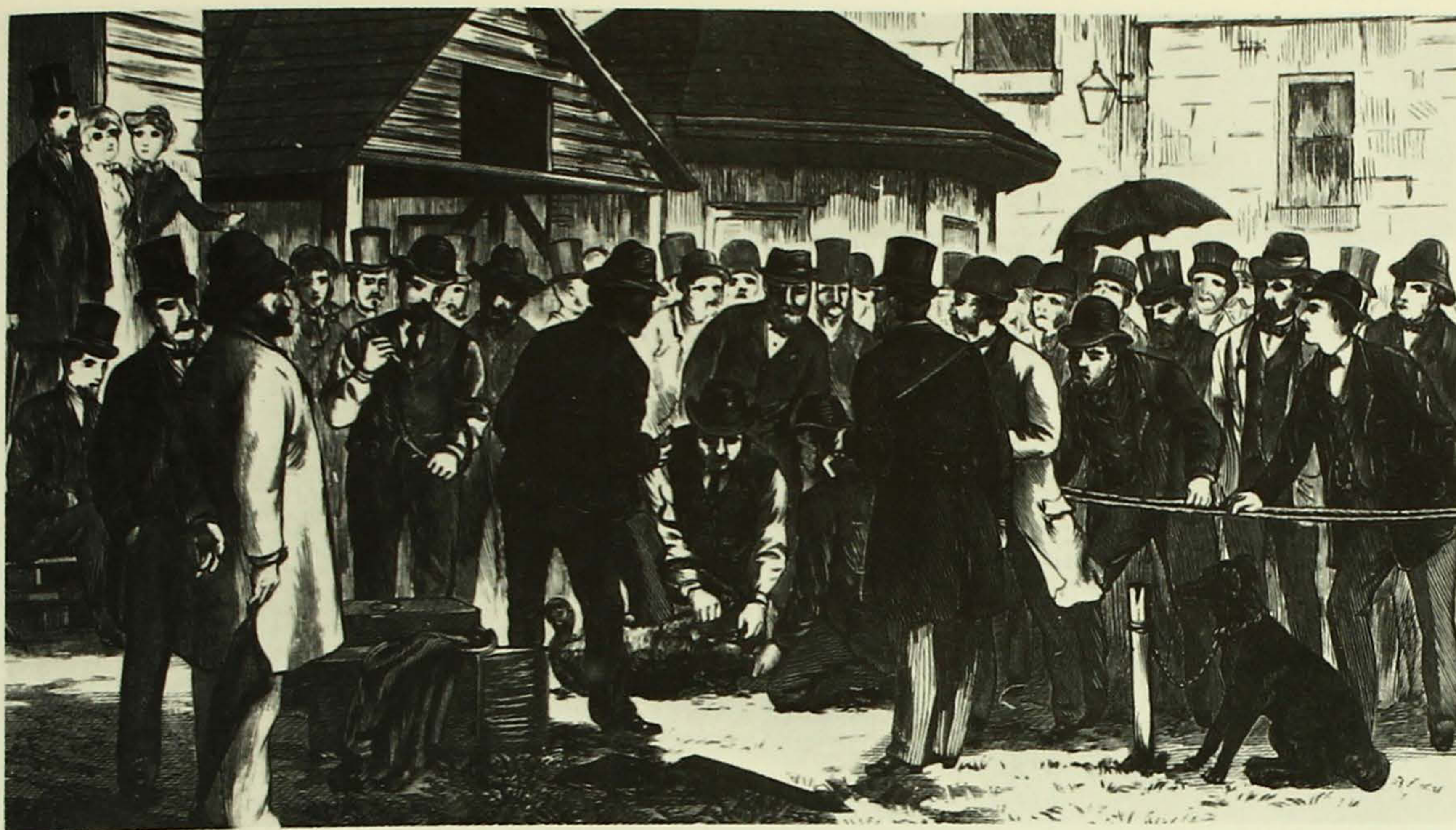
During Ramsay's absence, William A. Haswell (1854-1925), subsequently professor of Zoology in Sydney University and an influential trustee, was appointed acting curator. He made considerable changes to the labelling and classification of the animal exhibits, innovations which distressed Ramsay, although it is said that his experience of overseas institutions later led him to a less conservative attitude.

Undoubtedly the most important development during Ramsay's term of office was the recruitment of a scientific staff. The responsibility thrown upon the early curators to be authorities on the entire animal kingdom (and to profess a more than ordinary competence in anthropology, geology and mineralogy) seems quite unreasonable today but the astonishing fact is that many of these men made scientific contributions in a variety of unrelated fields. Nevertheless the sheer mass of specimens accumulating in the collections made it necessary to recruit staff to sort and describe the material.

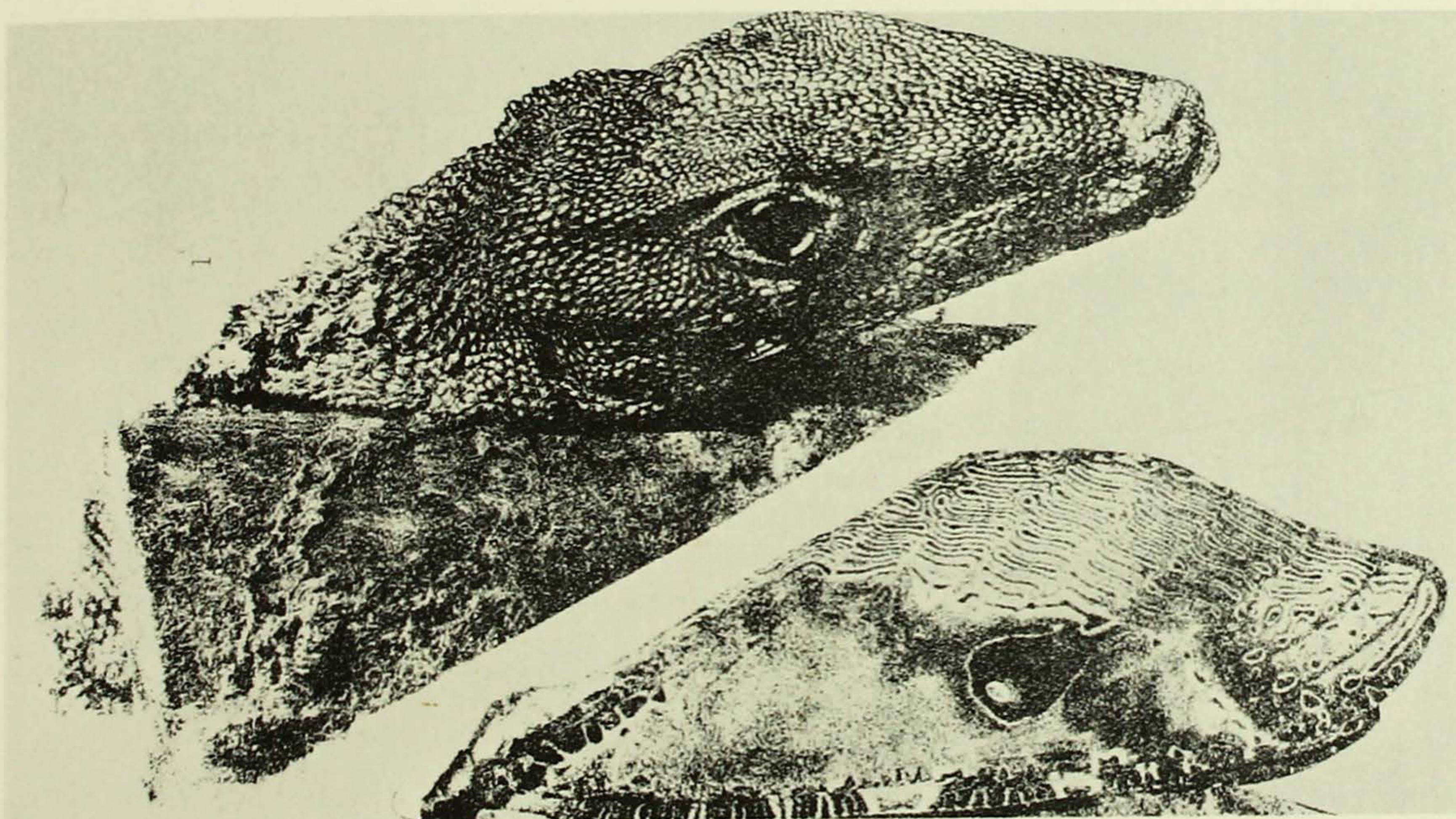
Since the curator was, by his appointment, responsible for all the collections and, by tradition, scientifically omniscient, the first additions to the staff were regarded as temporary conveniences, employed to catalogue parts of the collections. With the passage of time, these 'cataloguer' positions became part of the permanent establishment and were later upgraded to 'assistant'. Subsequently, the experts were known by their disciplines—ethnologist, mineralogist, etc. It was not until 1948 that they were referred to as curators, although the concept of a single overall curator had been discarded in 1919.



The Long Gallery, about 1878, looking westwards. There were then only two floors. The stairs at the centre rear of the photograph lead into the west (College Street) wing, completed in 1866.



In 1880, Ramsay conducted a public experiment in the courtyard of the Museum to test the efficacy of a snakebite antidote prepared by a Mr Baptiste. One dog, bitten by a brown snake, was treated with the antidote and appeared to have recovered by the following day. The other, bitten by a black snake and untreated was 'somewhat languid'. As remarked by the correspondent of *The New South Wales Agriculturist and Grazier* who reported the trial, 'it would be premature to say decidedly that the antidote has been successfully proved'.



F. A. A. Skuse, assistant in entomology, 1890-6, was one of the less productive incumbents of this position but one of his publications in the *Records of the Australian Museum* (1893) is of interest in the suggestion that the moth, *Zelotypia stacyi*, was protected by the resemblance between its head and that of the goanna, *Varanus varius*. While differences in size make this unlikely, it is still regarded as possible that the moth may protectively resemble the head of a small skink.

Above: head of *Varanus varius*. Below: the head of *Zelotypia stacyi*.

The Museum's first cataloguer had such a brief career that he is virtually unknown. Dr John Rudolph Gygax, employed in August 1859 to identify the collection of minerals, died six weeks after his appointment and twenty years passed before the trustees repeated the experiment.

On the recommendation of the Crown Trustee, Dr Cox, himself an ardent shell collector, John Brazier (1842-1930) was appointed in late 1879 for three months at a wage of 33s a week to catalogue part of the shell collection. Brazier, a year younger than Ramsay, had published many papers on molluscs and had been interested in the position of assistant curator which, however, lapsed with Masters' resignation. His subsequent association with the Museum was a cliff-hanging epic.

His initial contract was extended to twelve months, by which stage Cox felt that work was proceeding far too slowly and moved for his dismissal. Instead, Brazier was instructed to complete the work within the following year. Having nothing to publish by the end of 1881, he was dismissed and immediately reappointed at his previous salary (£200) but on a weekly basis—such insecurity being regarded by the board as a goad to productivity. By mid-1883 Cox was becoming impatient: Brazier was directed to put aside all difficult specimens and to concentrate upon the easily identifiable ones.

Almost annually over the subsequent seven years attempts were made to extract a manuscript from him. The 1890 *Annual Report* noted with evident relief that 'the first portion' of the catalogue would be published early in the following year. Somewhat anticlimactically, the statement was repeated in the next annual report—this time correctly—and in 1892 the first two parts, totalling forty-two pages, were printed. That these dealt respectively with cephalopods and pteropods—molluscs notable for the absence or extreme reduction of their shells—can hardly have pleased Dr Cox, so it is not surprising that, in 1893, when a financial crisis led to severe retrenchment of the staff, Brazier was the scientist to be sacrificed.

There is no question that Brazier's work was of high quality: his productivity in conchology might have been higher had he not also accumulated responsibility (until late 1891 when he was relieved) for the departments of anthropology, numismatics and history. He found no other employment and, according to Whitley, 'for years afterwards, almost penniless, was to haunt the Museum, bringing in shells for sale'.⁶

The concept of a natural history 'catalogue' was broader in the nineteenth century than now. At its best it comprised what we would now call a systematic revision of a group—a scholarly analysis and classification on the basis, not only of the specimens, but of all earlier printed reference to the species concerned. In 1882, Felix Ratte, *Ingenieur des Arts et Manufactures* (Paris), was made cataloguer of the mineral collection and, by repeated extensions of periods of three to six months' employment, remained on the staff for eight years, during which time he compiled catalogues of the Museum's fossils and minerals. With an otherwise perfect attendance record, he was away ill for six weeks in 1890. Disturbed by this, the board sternly resolved 'that Mr Ratte be called upon for an explanation for his absence'.⁷ It reflects sadly on staff relations that neither the director nor the secretary was aware that Ratte was seriously ill and desperately depressed. He committed suicide several days later.

The early life of Thomas Whitelegge (1850-1927) might have been written by Dickens. At the age of eight he was put out to work for three days a week and obtained only the rudiments of literacy from his curtailed schooling. He absconded from an imposed apprenticeship and, working as a labourer, obtained his knowledge of natural history by reading in libraries or attending occasional free lectures. Yet in his mid-

twenties, he was publishing newspaper articles on his limnological researches. Deciding to try his luck in Australia and armed with references from several distinguished British biologists, he emigrated at the age of thirty-three but found no openings in Sydney's scientific circles. Working by day as a labourer, he set up his microscope at a street window in the evening to examine specimens of pond water—an activity that aroused local interest and brought him to the attention of a brewer who shared his interest in microscopy. This led to introduction to members of the Royal and Linnean societies, the patronage of W. J. Macleay, and appointment to the Museum in late 1883 as a cataloguer of marine invertebrates. His *List of the Freshwater Invertebrates of Port Jackson and Neighbourhood* (1889) remains a classic handbook.

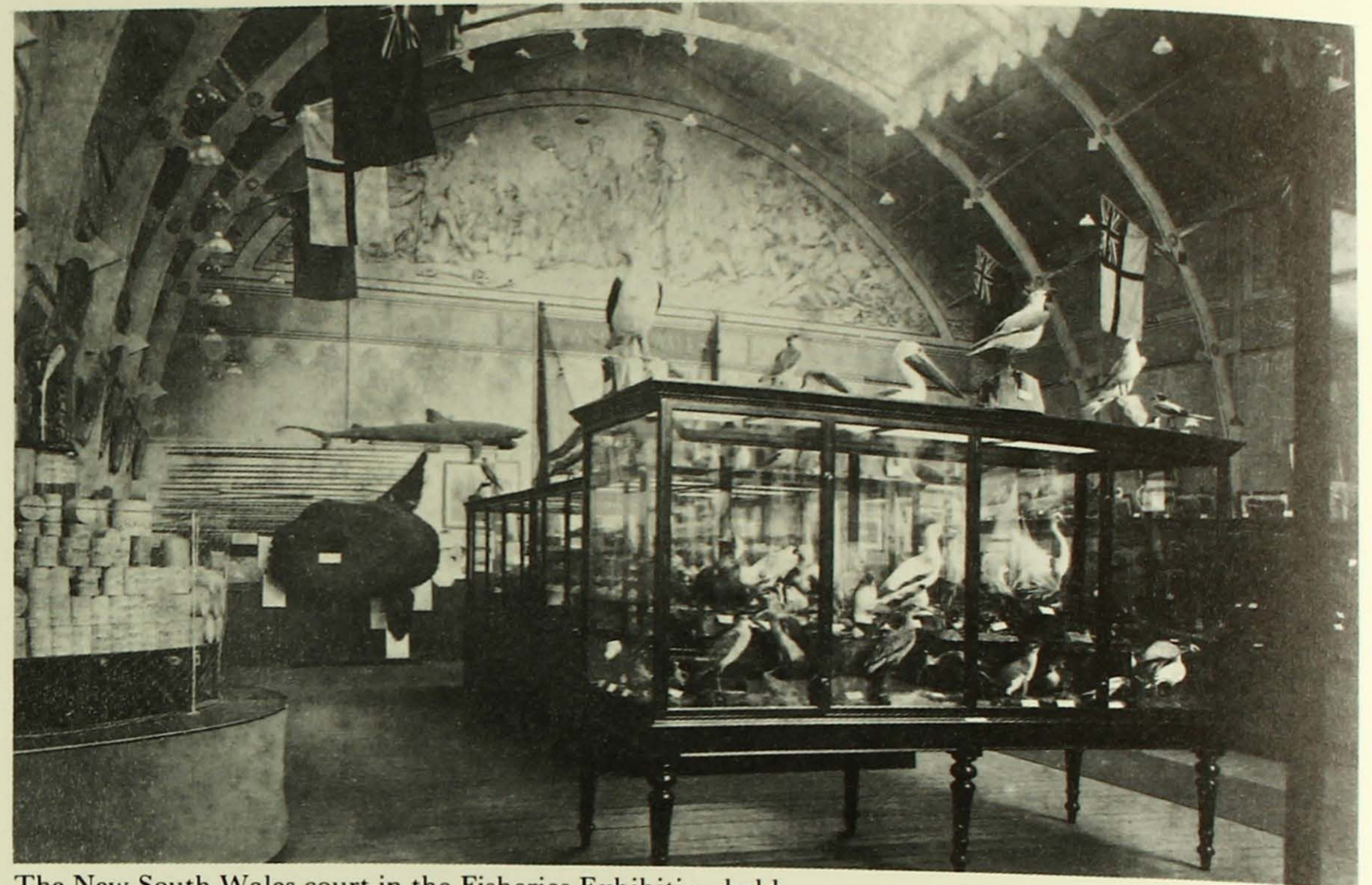
1885 saw the recruitment of A. Sidney Olliff (1865-95) and John Douglas Ogilby (1853-1925), respectively responsible for insects and zoology. (By a quirk of local usage that persisted well into the twentieth century, 'zoology' in this sense meant 'vertebrates'.) Ogilby, son of the distinguished British zoologist W. I. Ogilby, studied at Trinity College, Dublin, and was an excellent zoologist. Unfortunately he had an extreme and indiscriminating affinity for alcohol and his conduct when rolling drunk caused such embarrassment that, after many warnings, he was dismissed in 1890 and subsequently paid by contract to continue his researches outside the Museum. While on the staff of the Museum, he completed the first part of a catalogue of Australian fishes and, subsequent to his dismissal, catalogues of the reptiles and frogs and of the Australian mammals. Some years later he was employed to work on the fishes of the Queensland Museum—where the specimens were preserved in formalin.

Alfred J. North (1856-1917), who had been employed privately by Ramsay in early 1886 to arrange his own collection of bird eggs, was soon after taken onto the Museum staff as a cataloguer. Three years later the Museum published his *Descriptive Catalogue of the Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia*, a volume of more than 400 pages. Subsequently, from 1904 to 1917, he produced an expanded second edition richly illustrated with coloured plates.

The recruitment in 1887 of Robert Etheridge Jnr (1847-1920) as assistant in Palaeontology, completed the Museum's first scientific team. Son of Robert Etheridge, palaeontologist to the Geological Survey of Great Britain, he used the appellation 'junior' not as a matter of family pride but to make a necessary distinction between two individuals working in the same field of science. Like Ramsay, he had not completed a formal education in science but he brought to the Museum a greater reputation than any scientist hitherto employed, for he had previously been assistant geologist to the Geological Survey of Victoria, palaeontologist to the Geological Survey of Scotland, and assistant in the Geological Department of the British Museum. Returning to Australia by invitation in 1887, he occupied, in addition to his Museum position, the post of palaeontologist to the Geological Survey of New South Wales and divided his time, month and month about, between the two institutions. His income from the two salaries was only slightly less than that received by Ramsay as curator.

Three months after his arrival he led a three-week expedition to Lord Howe Island to study its geology and zoology, the first of several such studies by the Museum. In the following year he explored the caves at the junction of the Murrumbidgee and Goodradigbee Rivers. His scientific output was prodigious: author of more than 100 papers prior to his appointment, he published some 300 more during his museum career.

In the decade from 1878, the scientific staff of the Museum had increased from one to eight. An extract from the *Register of Employees* for 1888 shows how these were



The New South Wales court in the Fisheries Exhibition held in London, 1883. Ramsay attended the exhibition as secretary-in-charge of the NSW exhibit and used the opportunity to engage in some very productive bargaining with other exhibitors.



The Ethnological Hall, probably about 1895. This 'temporary' brick building was erected in 1888 and not demolished until 1906. The present Hallstrom Theatre was built in its place.



Staff of the Australian Museum in 1884
Back row, standing (left to right)—S. Lovell, Attendant; R. Barnes, Carpenter; H. Barnes, Articulator; T. Whitelegge, Cataloguer; G. H. Barrow, Ticket Writer; M. O'Grady, Attendant.
Next row, sitting (left to right)—Felix Ratte, Cataloguer; J. A. Thorpe, Taxidermist; J. Brazier, Cataloguer; S. Sinclair, Secretary; A. Moreton, Curator's Assistant.
Front, sitting on ground (left to right)—H. Barnes, Junr., Attendant; J. Turner?, Messenger.



Senior Staff of the Australian Museum in 1892
Back row, standing (left to right)—G. H. Barrow, Artist; A. J. North, Ornithologist; C. Hedley, Conchologist; T. Whitelegge, Zoologist; T. Cooksey, Mineralogist.
Front row, sitting (left to right)—J. Brazier, Conchologist; E. P. Ramsay, Curator; S. Sinclair, Secretary.



Staff of the Australian Museum in 1892
Back row, standing (left to right)—W. Cornick, Attendant; J. Williams, Attendant; M. O'Grady, Senior Attendant; R. Barnes, Carpenter; B. S. Lucas, Assistant Carpenter; F. Kippax, Attendant.
Next row, standing—C. H. Wickham, Junior Clerk; E. Rohde, Cadet; J. A. Thorpe, Taxidermist; S. Long, Watchman; R. Grant, Assistant Taxidermist; H. Barnes, Senr., Articulator; H. Barnes, Junr., Assistant Articulator; J. Sharkey, Messenger.
Next row, sitting—C. Hedley, Conchologist; A. J. North, Ornithologist; S. Sinclair,

EMPLOYEES of the AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM, during 1888									
Position	Name	Age	Date of Appointment to present position	Date of First Appointment	Salary	Allowances and Wages	Term of Service	Amount	Notes
Curator	E. P. Ramsay	46	22 Sep 1874	22 Sep 1874	600	Honorary Secretary £100	1 Jan 1884	100	
Secretary	S. Sinclair	37	11 Sep 1882	11 Sep 1882	300		1 July 1884	50	
Assistant in Zoology	J. D. Ogilby	35	14 Jan 1885	14 Jan 1885	250		1 Jan 1888	50	
Subsidiary	A. S. Olcott	23	1 Feb 1885	1 Feb 1885	250		1 Jan 1888	50	
Mineralogy	F. Ratte	43	1 Jan 1887	1 Jan 1887	220				
Palaeontology	R. Etheridge	42	18 Apr 1887	18 Apr 1887	250				
Conchology	J. Brazier	45	1 July 1887	1 July 1887	200				
Articulation	T. Whitelegge	38	1 July 1887	27 Aug 1883	156		1 Jan 1886	40	
Ticket Writer	G. H. Barrow	33	1 Jan 1883	1 Jan 1883	200		1 Jan 1883	50	
Taxidermist	J. A. Thorpe	49	3 June 1889	3 June 1889	225		1 Jan 1883	25	
Articulator, Photographer	H. Barnes	51	1889	1889	225		1 May 1884	25	
Carpenter	R. Barnes	53	1886	1886	156	Sundays £25	1 Mar 1882	36	
Assistant - General	W. H. Hill	63	1 June 1885	1 Jan 1884	140		1 Mar 1882	20	
Taxidermist	W. Cornick	41	1 Aug 1886	1 Aug 1886		7/6 a day Sundays £35	1 July 1887	35	
Articulator	H. Barnes Jr	25	1 Oct 1883	1 Oct 1883	60		1 May 1882	12	
Attendant	M. O'Grady	73		1884	132		1 Jan 1883	12	
	S. Lovell			1880	120	Sunday £25	1 Jan 1884	10	
	B. Lucas	36	10 May 1887	1 Mar 1883	100	Laboratory £15 Sunday £25			
	R. Hillierdon	44	1 Jan 1883	12 Sep 1887	105	Sunday £25			
Female	A. Dashwood		1 Sep 1882	15 Sep 1882	65	Sunday £25	1 May 1884	13	
Boy	F. Kippax	19	5 Nov 1888	5 Nov 1888		10/- a week			
Messenger	H. Woodroffe	16	4 Sep 1886	4 Sep 1886	35		1 July 1888	35	
Night Watchman	J. Williams	39	10 May 1887	10 May 1887	100				
Temporary	W. Parkins		2 Oct 1888			5/6 a night			
Cataloguing	A. J. North		12 May 1886	1 Dec 1886	200		1 Aug 1888	50	
Collectors	C. J. Grant		Oct 1888	3 Oct 1887		£3 a week			
	R. Grant		Oct 1888	3 Oct 1887		£2 a week			

Register of the employees of the Museum in 1888.

Secretary; E. P. Ramsay, Curator; J. Brazier, Conchologist; T. Cooksey, Mineralogist; W. H. Hill, Clerk.
Front row—F. A. A. Skuse, Entomologist; T. Whitelegges, Zoologist.

supported by nineteen other employees.

Since the staff required working space, the trustees instructed Ramsay to move out of the building, which he did in 1888. Bedrooms, parlours, dining rooms and kitchens now became available as laboratories and as accommodation for the growing library.

The establishment of scientific positions remained almost unchanged until 1892 when a scheme akin to apprenticeship was introduced and three youths, paid ten shillings per week, were appointed as cadets. The arrangement had no opportunity to mature for the sudden financial depression which hit New South Wales in 1893 led to the retrenchment of twelve employees, including all the cadets.

It having become evident by 1890 that the research output of the scientific staff warranted an outlet other than the catalogues, Ramsay inaugurated the *Records of the Australian Museum* for publication of papers relevant to the Museum's collections. Thirty volumes have since been published. Initially, staff were required to publish all their findings in this journal unless specifically exempted by the trustees, but most of the contents are now written by outsiders and the greater part of the Museum's research output is published in specialist journals.

In accord with the spirit of the industrial revolution about to be celebrated in the Sydney Exhibition, the trustees recommended to the government in 1878 that 'a Technological or Industrial Museum with classes for instruction, would afford much valuable and practical information to a large class of the community',⁸ and requested a grant of £500 to be placed at the disposal of Professor Liversidge, a trustee who was at that time visiting England, to purchase drawings and working models. The grant was readily forthcoming and, by the following year, a shipment had arrived and was ready for display in the Garden Palace. As already mentioned, the collection remained in the Garden Palace after closure of the exhibition, it being the hope of the trustees that this would provide a permanent home. However, the fire of 1882 destroyed both the hopes and the collection.

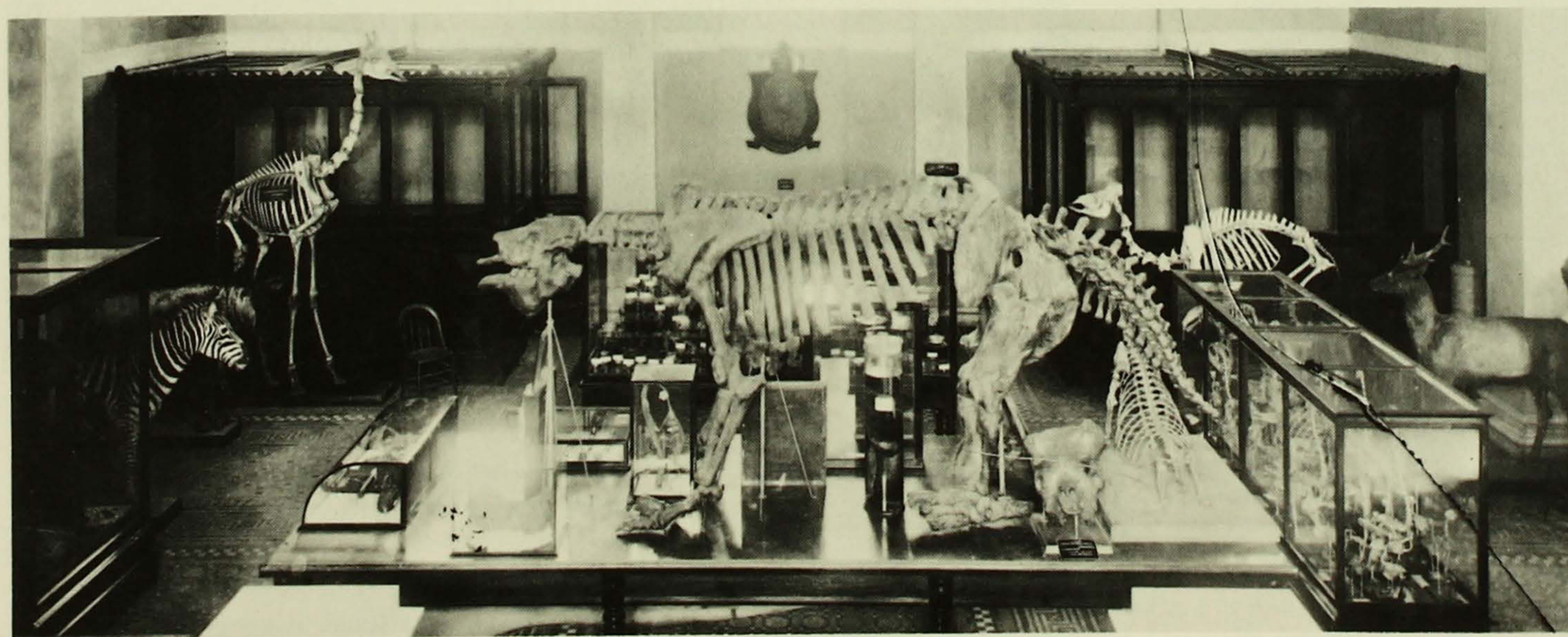
Joseph H. Maiden (1858-1925), a young English chemist who had been appointed curator of the branch museum in 1881, obtained the loan of a portion of the Agricultural Hall, an outlying unlined, corrugated iron shed behind the Sydney Hospital, to house the relics of the fire and the rapidly accruing collection. There it remained for years despite the complaints of its three trustees and the equally strong objections

of the Board of Health, which found the building to be decrepit and foul from seeping sewage: ironically the full name of the institution at that time was the 'Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum'.

Eventually, in 1889 the three trustees resigned in protest at the lack of state support, the institution passing from their hands, and those of the Australian Museum, to the new Department of Technical Education. Four years later, that Museum moved to its present site in Ultimo. This would seem to have been an appropriate time to demolish the shed that had been its home but it continued in use, with the Mining and Geological Museum, an adjunct of the Department of Mines, as a new tenant.

A travel writer has left a description of the Australian Museum as it was when Ramsay was at his peak.

The Sydney Museum is a noble building, formed of the beautiful sandstone of the district. It is capacious, well lighted, and remarkable for its cleanliness and order. All the collections are well and distinctly named, as one would expect from knowing that the curator is Mr E. P. Ramsay, FLS. Perhaps nowhere in Australia is there anything approaching the magnificent collection of Australian marsupial mammalia here exhibited, and the specimens are so well preserved, and most of them mounted in such picturesque attitudes, that there is none of the formal stiffness we usually see in museum collections. Many of these marsupials are now very rare, and in a few years many more will be completely extinct. It is, therefore, a fortunate thing for Australian naturalists that such a good collection as this has been made in time. The marsupials already extinct are represented by the fossil remains of *Diprotodon*—a gigantic fossil wombat, the marsupial lion (*Thylacoleo carnifex*), and of *Nototherium*. The skeletons of different animals from the Australian sperm whale to those of local fishes, are all well prepared and mounted. It is seldom one sees such a capital collection of fish and bird skeletons as is here on view. Another numerous series is that of the Australian rats and bats. Prominence has in every case been given to Australian animals—insects of all classes, birds, reptiles (especially the lizards and snakes), amphibians, fishes, and mammals. Australian conchology and zoophytology (both abundantly rich in selected specimens) occupy considerable space. The geological and mineralogical collections are in a separate room, which appeared to me to be too small for them. The specimens are largely Australian, and their localities are all mentioned—a boon to the student which curators do not always remember. But the general palaeontological collection contains typical and characteristic fossils from all parts of the world, or casts from them.⁹



The Entrance Hall, seen from the staircase, about 1878. The box-like structures to the right and left communicated with the public entrance doors and served to reduce draughts. In pride of place is the skeleton of giant sloth, since rearticulated and now at the entrance of the Hall of Fossils.



Part of the Skeleton Gallery, about 1878.

In the early 1890s Ramsay was showing signs of stress. He quarrelled with Etheridge, accusing him of insubordination, obstruction, and calumny (as Etheridge was later to accuse *his* senior scientist), and his relationships with the entomologist, F. A. A. Skuse (who had succeeded Olliff in 1891) were decidedly distant. Communications with the secretary, Sutherland Sinclair, seem to have been entirely in writing. The fault was by no means all on his side, for the administrative system was divisive. Every decision, major or trivial, was made by the trust—often, indeed, on the recommendation of the curator—but implementation lay almost entirely in the hands of the secretary. Thus, in November 1890 when Ramsay instructed Etheridge to move into the room left vacant by Ratte's death, Etheridge complained to the trustees. By February 1891, a decision was reached but it was necessary for the secretary then to send a letter to the curator, authorising him to inform Etheridge that the board upheld his original instruction.

In what was believed to be a clarification of the position, the board decided that it would no longer give instructions to individual employees but that

The officers and servants of the Museum shall receive all instruction as to their respective duties from the Curator and they shall be responsible to him for the due performance of same. Any communication they may wish to make to the Trustees must be forwarded to the Curator. The Secretary shall receive his instructions in all matters pertaining to his Department from the Trustees and shall be responsible to them for the due performance of his duties.¹⁰

In other words, the curator was *not* responsible for *all* staff, nor could he—as authorised by the *Regulations for the Museum Staff*, 'direct the general working of the establishment'. Even the questions of responsibility for correspondence was confused, for the regulations required the secretary 'to take charge of all correspondence', while requiring the curator to sign 'all letters on scientific subjects'.

His health declining, Ramsay was absent on sick leave for the latter half of 1893 and Etheridge acted in his place. He returned to duty at the beginning of 1894 but, towards the middle of the year, several of his friends and relatives called on the president (as the chairman of the board had been designated since 1890) to suggest that Ramsay would be prepared to resign if offered a less demanding scientific position. Accordingly an agreement was reached whereby he was granted six months' leave on half pay (£274 per annum) at the end of which he was re-employed at £250 per annum as consulting ornithologist, a position which he held for a further fifteen years.

He retired at the beginning of a dismal period in the Museum's history. Funds from the state government had been reduced by half, the support staff had been stripped to less than a functional minimum, and acquisitions and collecting had come to an end. Nevertheless, most of the scientific staff recruited by him were retained and the building was expanding. In 1890, work commenced on a third storey above the old (William Street) wing and in the following year he was pleased to report on reallocation of space, thus:

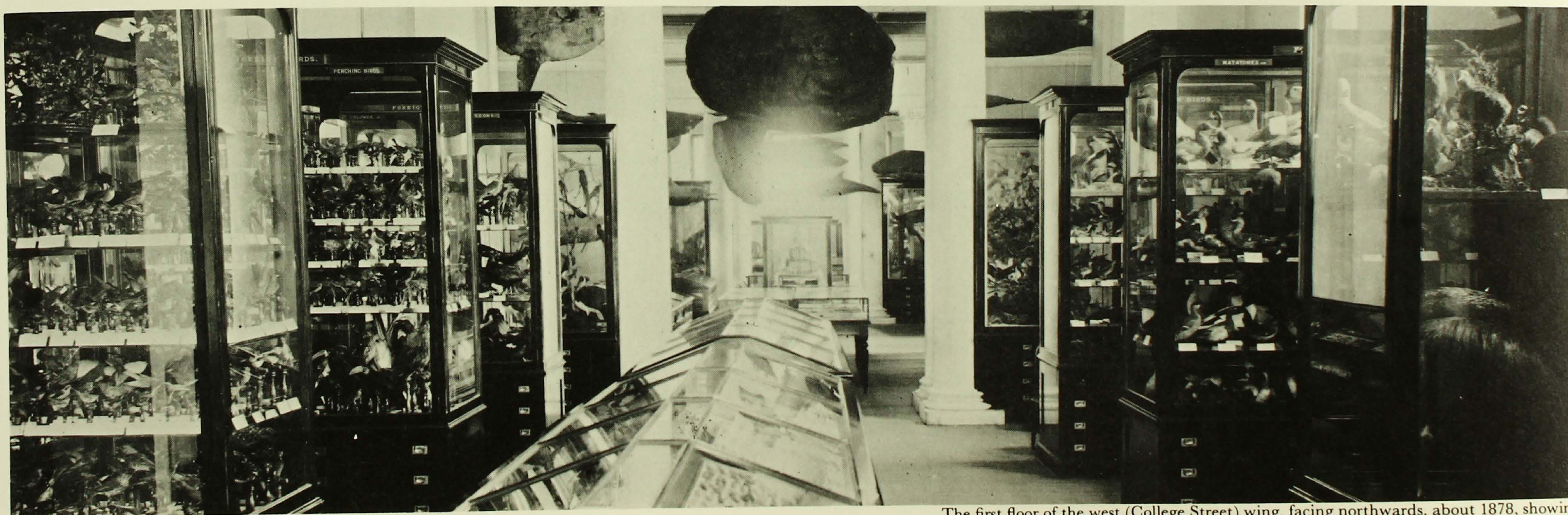
Basement: storeroom, strongroom, kitchen, bathroom, lavatories.

Ground Floor: Boardroom, Secretary's offices, Curator's rooms, Ornithological workroom.

First Floor: library, ornithological cabinet rooms.

Second Floor: scientific workroom for Conchology, Entomology, Marine Invertebrates.

In his last year as curator, the new Geology Hall (now known as the Long Gallery) was nearing completion and in his final report to the trustees he informed them that fossils would be displayed on the ground floor, minerals on the first floor gallery, and invertebrates on the second. With these achievements, he could return with some satisfaction to the full-time study of his beloved birds.



The first floor of the west (College Street) wing, facing northwards, about 1878, showing the bird and fish exhibits. The crowded bird cabinets remained virtually unchanged until the 1950s.