

This ceramic jug commemorates the centenary of John Batman's pioneering exploration of Port Phillip in the mid-1830s. Only 200 jugs were made, commissioned by the Mutual Store Ltd.

CASTLEMAINE ART GALLERY

## CHAPTER 5

# ARTEFACTS AND MUSEUMS

---

D. H. BORCHARDT

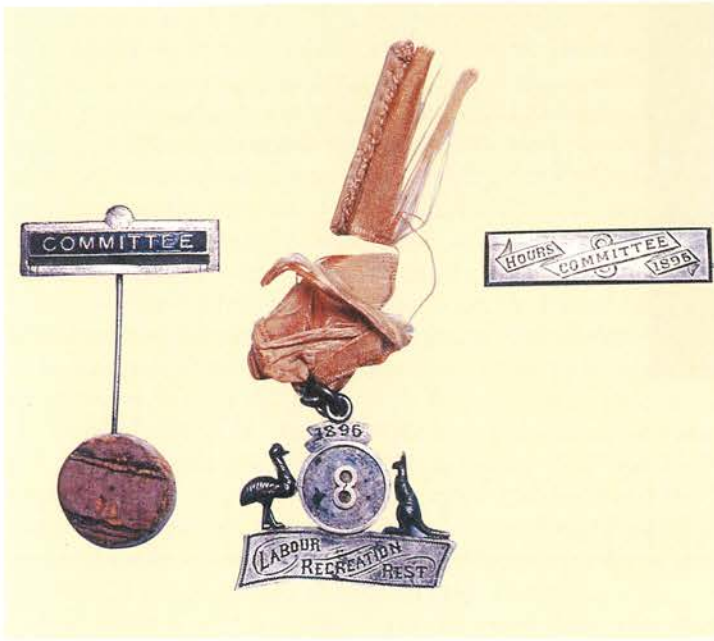
**I**F NATIONAL PARKS and nature reserves present to us a continuous link with the geological past of the continental and Tasmanian landmass, 'snapshots' taken at given moments in time can be found in museums of various kinds. The word 'museum' comes from the Greek *museion*, which means sanctuary, and though these institutions now have as a common characteristic the fact that they house inanimate matter, there have developed quite clear distinctions regarding their names and purposes according to the type of matter they preserve. It was once common usage to refer to buildings housing artistic creations as art galleries, and to restrict the term 'museum' to those institutions that care for and display specimens of natural history and technology; more recent practice tends to do away with this distinction.

Akin to museums are the botanical and zoological gardens that contain Australian specimens and through them offer excellent resources for the support of Australian studies. For historical reasons many botanical and zoological gardens are kept by municipalities—though state governments contribute to their running expenses—and there is quite a large number of them throughout Australia.

Australian botanical and zoological gardens, museums and herbaria, both state-owned and private, are listed in the *Year book Australia* and in the states' *Yearbooks*, details of which are cited below in chapter 7 of this volume. They can also be identified through specialist directories such as the *International directory of botanical gardens*; the *Australian museums directory*, which is more than a decade out of date; and *Museums of the world*, which although more recent than the local directory does not include the numerous small museums outside the metropolitan areas even though it lists 170 Australian institutions alphabetically by city or town.

A useful little guide—though restricted to 147 museums and lacking a subject index—is Peter Stanbury's *Discover Australian museums*. This is a select list with descriptive entries for institutions in all states except Queensland, and includes some botanical and zoological gardens.

This guide demonstrates the wide range of Australian institutions collecting Australian realia. There are the major museums, such as the Australian Museum in Sydney, the National Museum of Victoria and the Australian War Memorial, which have display areas of between 4000 and 8000 square metres; there are the middle-sized museums such as the South Australian Museum, the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, the Western Australian Museum and a score or more in this group with a display area of between 1000 and 4000 square metres; finally there are several hundred small museums in towns, suburbs and country districts with limited



*These Eight Hour Day badges are examples of the range of trade union artefacts now collected by many archives and museums. A. Stephen and A. Reeves, Badges of labour, banners of pride, Sydney 1984.*

display and storage areas, and often maintained by volunteer staff only. The National Museum of Australia in Canberra, planned to open to the public in 1990, is building up major new collections.

One of the problems facing the researcher in Australian studies is the absence of a reliable guide to the principal categories of objects held in Australian museums and similar institutions. While it is relatively easy to guess that the state herbaria contain specimens of the flora native to the particular state, it is not easy to find out where one can see specific preserved specimens. Nor is there a source of information on where one can find examples of human artefacts stored in institutions of different kinds. In those rare cases where the name of an institution indicates a specific purpose—aircraft museums, steam museums, war memorials—the problem is of course partly resolved.

Since the publication of *Museums in Australia, 1975*, the report of a commonwealth committee of inquiry, museum development has increased considerably. Public interest and government support have made new buildings possible and encouraged considerable growth in the quantity and quality of the collections. An important report on Victoria was prepared by Roger Trudgeon but there have been to date no similar examinations of the museum scene in other states. However, heartening changes have occurred: in Queensland a new building was opened in 1985 to house one of Australia's most important scientific and ethnographic collections; the Western Australian Museum has opened branches in Fremantle and other regional centres and developed excellence in marine archaeology; and in Melbourne the amalgamation of the National Museum of Victoria with the Science Museum of Victoria created the Museum of Victoria in 1983 with the extension of its collecting responsibilities to include 'the history of human society'. Extensive expansions are being planned for other metropolitan institutions of this kind, the most important being the addition of the Powerhouse site to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney. Due to open in 1988, it will include displays of transport, decorative arts and social history. The compilation of a comprehensive index to museums should be a high priority.

It is but a natural development that there should be some museums specialising in rather narrow fields, developing real depth in collecting. An obvious example is the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Dedicated to the memory of Australians who died while serving in the armed forces since Australia participated in the Sudan War, this museum has outstanding collections and innovative publishing and education policies.



Special attention must be drawn to the score or more of open-air museums that have sprung up since the 1960s. Most of these are joint ventures by local government and state authorities and usually occupy quite a large site. The objective is to reconstruct history with the help of reconstituted old buildings or reconstructions, and all contain a rich mix of artefacts, pictures, appropriate equipment of the period and models (human and animal); they are frequently staffed by attendants dressed in period costume and engaged in occupations appropriate to the time. The most elaborate are Sovereign Hill, a recreation of Ballarat in the gold-rush era, and Old Sydney Town, north of Gosford, a recreation of Sydney in the early nineteenth century. These *tableaux vivants* are considerable tourist attractions, but their authenticity and purpose are questioned by some historians.

Folk museums of a modest kind can be found in most medium-sized towns and in the larger cities some quite extensive collections have been brought together to illustrate the social life of the past. Though the building housing the collection may have been donated to the community, the upkeep and the employment of custodial and educational staff usually depend on the local authority. State governments provide limited financial assistance to such museum services.

Another type of gallery-museum, recently developed under the aegis of the National Trusts, is the historic house museum. An excellent example is the gallery at Springwood in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales, which consists of the house once lived in by the artist Norman Lindsay and in which paintings and memorabilia related to the artist are preserved. These house museums are intended to present the objects of daily life—furniture, household goods, photographs, pictures—as they were when occupied. Other examples of this kind of gallery are Como in Melbourne, Old Government House in Parramatta and Entally House in Tasmania. In the last few years more modest houses have also been restored and opened to the public.

Specialisation in collections is particularly noteworthy in the several conservatories and museums maintained by Australian government departments. A list, now somewhat out of date, is contained in the Piggott report *Museums in Australia* which shows the principal collections; some have been discussed already in this chapter.

The literature on Australian museums is not very large. Although many museums produce booklets about their origin and purpose, and occasionally a monograph about a special exhibit, only a few large state museums can afford to publish serials, monographs and series relating to their research. A bibliography of this literature has been compiled by J.G. Marshall as *Australian museums: a preliminary bibliography*.



Mark Arbuz (b Australia 1953), 1980 Royal visit.  
Teatowel, screenprint on cotton, 69.5 × 62.0 cm, 1980.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GALLERY