

# From Port Moresby to Perth

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Firstly, some basic facts about Papua New Guinea. In land area, Papua New Guinea is about one sixth the size of Western Australia. While Western Australia suffers from a tyranny of distance, Papua New Guinea suffers from a tyranny of obstructions like mountain ranges that sometimes reach up to 16,000 feet, an abundance of water in swift flowing rivers, very difficult to get across, and swamps which are equally difficult to negotiate. Living on this group of islands are people commonly called Melanesians but who vary in life-style, language and customs in a similar degree that Norwegians differ from Spaniards and Greeks from Celts. There are not as many of them certainly, only between two-and-a-half and three million, but in Europe one cannot find 700 quite distinct languages as in Papua New Guinea — yes, languages, not dialects.

Because the conditions for survival were quite different, economic development has also been quite different. Europe with its large populations has been forced to organise itself and has become highly industrialised but we sometimes forget that this has been achieved only through centuries of war and suffering. Certainly the hundreds of small communities in Papua New Guinea have not always lived at peace with each other, but the scale of war has been a backyard squabble compared to what Europe was indulging in even as long as two thousand years ago.

Libraries and archives, of course, are one result of technological advance, that is, of paper to write on, machines to print with and literate people to produce the goods. Papua New Guinea, up to the time Europeans discovered the country was there, lacked all these skills. There were quite a number of navigators of different nations who visited briefly and made observations, which may be found in published works or in their home archives. These date back to the 16th century, when the Portuguese and Spanish were hovering around, and later the Dutch, French, British and others.

European settlement goes back only a hundred years. The first

European to live for some months on the mainland of eastern New Guinea was a Russian scientist named Mikhluho-Maclay, in 1871. The London Missionary Society established a mission at Port Moresby in 1872 and the Methodists did the same in Rabaul in 1875. There were also a number of trader-adventurers about, and as usual when the law is far away, some would push helpless people around, and some, not always the same ones, would get killed. Then there was the blackbirding trade, as recruiters obtained labourers to work Queensland's sugar plantations, not always with the recruits' or the villagers' consent.

Missionary and anti-slavery societies soon became vociferous about the immorality of all this and called for government action, but such arguments did not induce anyone readily to undertake the expense of acquiring a new colony. What was needed was a threat to annex New Guinea by a rival foreign power and that was forthcoming when Germany decided to take over the north-east portion of the main big island and the Bismarck Archipelago in 1884. The western half of the mainland had already been claimed by the Dutch in the 1840s. Britain by this time had more than enough colonies and was finding them terribly expensive. Australia consisted of six separate colonies, and, although they had got to the stage of talking about Federation, sixteen years were yet to pass before its realisation. The colonies were unable to annex on their own account, as this would not have been recognised by foreign powers. Britain, in fact, had already repudiated a couple of attempts by Queensland and her own naval officers.

The Australian colonies therefore called a conference in November 1883 and it was agreed that if Britain would annex, they would jointly provide £15,000 to finance the protectorate. Western Australian's contribution to this largesse was £161.16.9. While there is an inch-thick file in the Western Australian Archives dealing with the correspondence between the colonies about the levy, it is conspicuously lacking in any discussion of principle, policy or attitude by Western Australia to the annexation. Indeed, within a couple of years, all the colonies had withdrawn their subsidy except Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, who naturally enough were the ones most concerned with any activities in New Guinea.

British New Guinea consisted of the south-east portion of the mainland and the islands of the Louisiade Archipelago and kept this status until Australia's federation when Britain handed the colony over to the new Commonwealth. However, it took Australia five years to get around to passing the Papua Act. A senator from Western Australia, Miles Cater Staniforth Smith, once mayor of Kalgoorlie and an enthusiast for tropical agriculture, was able to provide some first-hand knowledge for these debates, as a result of a visit he had made to the colony in 1903. Staniforth Smith was hopeful of, and indeed had been promised, the position of Lieutenant-Governor of the renamed territory,

but a similar promise was also given J. H. P. Murray, who was then its Chief Judicial Officer. The latter was in fact finally selected. Staniforth Smith had to be content with the rather anomalous title of Administrator. Actually, he was director of all Papua's development departments (perhaps very appropriately for a West Australian) and acted for the Lieutenant-Governor whenever the latter was out of the country. Staniforth Smith stayed in Papua except for his war service, until 1930, but his rival, Murray, outstayed him and died while still in harness in 1940. Murray may be seen as a benevolent ruler with an academic approach to the task of ruling subject races and very anxious not to disturb the structure of Papuan society. However, it could hardly be said that Papuans developed very far economically, politically, socially or educationally, so that the books that were written and the records created were very much the effort of expatriates. Papua New Guinea has also always been a paradise for anthropologists, linguists and scientists of all disciplines, and these scholars have also produced both printed and published records, but they are not always obtainable in Papua New Guinea itself.

German New Guinea lasted longer than British New Guinea as such, but was likewise eventually ruled by Australia. This change occurred in 1914, when an Australian expeditionary force simply landed in Rabaul and took over all German installations, with hardly a shot being fired. The military ran the enemy's colony for the rest of the war and then Australia was given a mandate by the League of Nations. Instead of ruling the two colonies as one, for various reasons, mainly different opinions about the manner of development, a separate administration continued in Rabaul.

The first civil administrator of the new acquisition was Evan Alexander Wisdom, who came from Western Australia. He had been active in local and state politics since early in the century and had been mayor of Cottesloe and M.L.A. for Claremont. He had also reached the rank of Brigadier-General during the war and remained active in the militia. Wisdom was well qualified for the task of converting a military administration into a professional public service and this he did till his retirement in 1933. However, neither he nor his successors were able to proceed with educational, political or social development of the indigenous people against the prevailing expatriate attitudes of the period and in New Guinea it was more marked than in Papua.

In 1942 the Japanese over-ran Rabaul. The invasion was so sudden that all prior records were lost. Research into the administrative history of north-east New Guinea up to 1942 has to be traced mainly through Australian archives, or in the earlier period, through German archives. Many of the latter records were taken to Australia after 1914. Papua was luckier in World War II. There was time to transfer the official records to Australia before bombing started on Port Moresby and in fact the

Japanese never landed in Port Moresby. The records have been progressively returned after microfilming in Australia. Civilians in Port Moresby, including some who had lived there for forty years, and who had collected books and papers, written reports and kept diaries, were given just a day's notice by the army to evacuate and were allowed to take only one suitcase. During the early days of the army's occupation of Port Moresby, the troops looted shops and houses and most of these private records were destroyed.

The next stage in this rather chequered history of Papua New Guinea administration is that of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit, known as ANGAU, which was the military government set up to administer the civil population of both territories during the war, and to organise the war effort. Again there was a West Australian playing a prominent role, Brigadier Donald Cleland, who was chairman of the Production Control Board, one of the main components of ANGAU. He was a lawyer who had been active in West Australian politics in the 1930s.

When civil administration was restored in 1945, this time a joint one for Papua and New Guinea, it was suggested that Cleland become Administrator, but for various personal reasons he decided to return to Perth, (The position of Lieutenant-Governor was not revived). In the next federal election, he contested the seat of Fremantle, but lost to Kim Beazley. In 1951 he accepted appointment as Assistant Administrator in Papua New Guinea, and in 1952 became Administrator, retaining the post till his retirement early in 1967. He had been knighted in 1961 and remained in Port Moresby during his very active retirement; he was chairman of the South Pacific Games held in 1969, and also served as Chancellor of the University of Papua New Guinea. Sir Donald died in 1975, about a month before independence, and was buried in Port Moresby. Lady Cleland returned home to Perth at the end of 1978, and in the Queen's Birthday honours of 1980 she was appointed a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her services towards cultural matters in Papua New Guinea. Dame Rachel continues to take a keen interest in public affairs.

Another considerable influence on the post-war affairs of Papua New Guinea by a West Australian was that of Sir Paul Hasluck, who was Minister for Territories from 1951 to 1963. Papua New Guinea issues had very often in the past been relegated to the back row by successive Australian governments. Hasluck never allowed them to do this, and this was quite an achievement during a decade when Australia was developing in many urgent directions. There was plenty of criticism that he was not radical enough, but he brought a trained mind to the development of an effective public service for Papua New Guinea.

Post-war administrative records of Papua New Guinea should in theory be reasonably complete. However, there have been some fires,

and the records have not been in the continuous keeping of qualified archivists. Their housing also left much to be desired until 1972 when a new building was opened by Sir Paul Hasluck, in his new capacity as Governor-General. However, shortly afterwards, the archivist, having trained his local successor, a graduate of the University of Papua New Guinea, "went finish". The local man may have been quite good, but he was never given a chance to show it. So short of local graduates is Papua New Guinea, that he was seconded to become acting head of a department. He did return for a short while a couple of years later, but for most of the time the National Archives has stumbled along with a staff of nine non-graduate local clerks. Although I have never worked in the National archives except as a researcher, I was the only other archivist in the country, and as the struggling clerks often needed advice on their problems, we have enjoyed a close personal and co-operative relationship. It was not till August 1980 that another qualified archivist took charge.

At one time it looked as if the Archives might even be dismembered, when, in 1972, not long before self-government, some Australian records officers were sent to Papua New Guinea to go through and remove files held in the departments that might possibly be "sensitive". Librarians and historians thereupon mounted a campaign of letters and publicity against this and the government took advantage of a change in its ministers responsible for external territories to back down.

The greatest boost to education and eventual localisation of the public service was the foundation of the University of Papua New Guinea in 1965. Preliminary-year classes commenced in 1966, the same year that the first University Librarian commenced duties. Only two other librarians began before the end of the year, myself being one. In spite of the tremendous task of organising a University Library from scratch at the same time that classes were being held and books demanded, the University Librarian, George Buick, who was not then a West Australian but has since become one, saw that the existing New Guineana Collection was inadequate for the rising nation and that the University should therefore provide a suitable one. The Port Moresby Public Library held a small collection which had originally been Sir Hubert Murray's own library, but there had never been funds to expand it, nor the expertise to exploit it. However, the University had sufficient funds in those early years, it had qualified librarians and the encouragement of academics, and so a priceless New Guinea Collection was created.

The materials held in the New Guinea Collection follow very much the same pattern as in the Battye Library of West Australian History. However, there are some variations in emphasis and priorities. Firstly, as already indicated, the New Guinea Collection contains no government archives at all. Another contrast is in regard to film archives, though there are in fact a few films in the New Guinea Collection. Films have

always been a major concern of the administration's Office of Information, and the film section was transferred to the National Library when it eventually got off the ground after independence. The film archives is being organized by the Papua New Guinea National Library in co-operation with the National Film Library in Canberra.

The Office of Information also has a good stock of photographs, but these are mainly contemporary. No decision has been reached as to their eventual housing, but it will undoubtedly be either the Museum or the National Library. The New Guinea Collection at present has the largest assemblage of historical photographs. These have now all been listed, but only partly indexed. It is nevertheless the most accessible and easily retrievable collection available to researchers. There has never been any professional staff available to do this. The listing and identification has been done by unqualified library assistants over the past seven years, and I did my best to keep half of one eye on them. The Battye Library's provision for photographs seems almost luxurious by comparison. The New Guinea Collection has to compete for the attention of three photographers who serve all the University's needs.

Oral History is another area much better provided for in Battye, and yet it is a function that is of particular importance in Papua New Guinea. Because the society is still largely illiterate, oral history is often the only means of research. History students pursue oral history as an integral part of their courses, and they have produced some good tapes. Usually they go to their home villages, interview their elders in their own vernacular, and on returning to the university they translate and transcribe their own tapes. Their course teaches them to check their evidence against the available documents, and usually an essay is required. Most of the source material thus created ends up in the New Guinea Collection. However, it is all rather haphazard, and the large collection of tapes includes other New Guinea material besides oral history. A systematic programme of seeking out interviewees, researching before the interview, followed by transcription by a competent typist, and then the transcript indexed, is just a pipe dream in Papua New Guinea. For a start, the typist needs to be both educated and fluent in the language of the tape, and Papua New Guinea typists are not. Money is simply not available to employ people in the other skills. What is done is simply done in the process of personal research or study.

Maps form a large component of the New Guinea Collection, but they are only roughly organised. Some cataloguing was done up to 1972, but none at all since then. There has never been anyone available to do a sufficiently skilled job so that the collection can be exploited. Still, the maps are well housed, and will not deteriorate.

As mentioned earlier, Papua New Guinea has attracted the attention of all sorts of researchers, adventurers and pioneers. The literature published about the country is very profuse. A function of the New

Guinea Collection that has always received high priority is the publication of a *New Guinea Bibliography* and a *New Guinea Periodical Index*. This function is not carried out in Battye at all, though of course it has catalogues and indexes on cards. This is not to suggest that any scheme of publishing bibliographies and indexes is necessarily a high priority for Battye, for of course, there are national services which encompass Western Australia. In Papua New Guinea, which had no national bibliography in 1967, it was considered an essential priority and the university undertook the task. However it has meant that the staff of the New Guinea Collection has been left with little time to do very much else. When I took over the New Guinea Collection in 1973, there had never been more than one librarian and one clerk on the staff, and each of these serial publications was three years behind schedule. Within a year I had two more assistants, but it was not till 1977 that I acquired a professional assistant librarian. This enabled me to hand over the bibliography and index to spend more time myself on the manuscript collection.

In fact the bibliography is properly a National Library function, but until lately they have never had any staff to do it. However, in the past few months, fourteen new expatriate librarians have arrived to augment their staff, and one of these has been appointed bibliographer, and another as librarian of the Papua New Guinea Collection, Murray's expanded library having been transferred from the public library. Bibliographic work also entails running around the government departments to collect their publications. A system of legal deposit is not yet in operation, and it is necessary to spend a considerable amount of time just seeking out and collecting material. The National Library of Papua New Guinea, a fully equipped library building together with many new books and films, was Australia's independence gift to the new nation.

The New Guinea Collection is the only institution in Papua New Guinea which collects private manuscripts and the archives of non-government organisations. The National Archives does not refuse them, but it has never been in a position to encourage their acquisition, let alone arrange them. The New Guinea Collection has received a number of large deposits of such papers, mainly the archives of early missions which are now the Anglican and United Churches. The London Missionary Society is now absorbed in the United Church, and the New Guinea Collection is most fortunate to have acquired these records, since they reflect the earliest European settlement and contact. They are complemented by microfilms of the London Missionary Society archives in London, and also those in Sydney. The boon of having a professional assistant librarian enabled me not only to complete the basic organisation of the manuscripts (though detailed indexes to many of the collections still need to be done) but also to publish a *Guide to*

*Manuscripts in the New Guinea Collection*, and this was ready only about a month before I left Port Moresby. Again it might be asked, why the emphasis on publishing when money is so scarce? At present, and for some time to come, the most serious users of the New Guinea Collection are likely to be overseas researchers. Before making his trip, a researcher needs to know what sources are available, and a publication that he may purchase or find in his home reference library may tell him all he wants to know. It also enables the archivist to direct detailed enquiries to the publication rather than spend time making individual searches.

The London Missionary Society microfilms described earlier are only one set of the overseas records that are on microfilm. Organisations such as the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau have been an absolute boon in rounding out the source material. Phyllis Mander-Jones' *Manuscripts in the British Isles relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* is not only invaluable, but accurate too, as far as New Guinea is concerned. Many items have been microfilmed by direct negotiation with the owners because they are listed in this guide. The value of published guides to manuscripts is also evident in those which are put out by the Mitchell Library and the National Library of Australia. Again the New Guinea Collection has been able to make direct arrangements for obtaining microfilms.

Resources for biographical and genealogical enquiries are not very good in Papua New Guinea. Genealogy, unlike the trend in more developed countries, is practically non-existent in Papua New Guinea for those most likely to want to use documentary sources. While doing an archives course in America in 1976, I was told that 95% of all enquiries there were genealogical: I do not think it is quite that high in Perth. Papua New Guineans themselves are in fact highly conscious genealogically, but their family trees are mainly a matter of oral tradition. There are some recorded genealogies which were compiled by the Lands Department for the sake of investigating land disputes. Anthropologists have also produced genealogies in the course of their research. Missions, too, often have genealogies and sometimes provide pertinent lists of converts and other villagers. In the early days of contact, patrol officers kept "village books" which listed the names of people living in the villages they visited. However, there are not very many of these still in existence. There is a Registrar-General's Office, and expatriates who were born, married or died in Papua Guinea would be recorded there, but in fact most expatriates would have passed these vital stages of their lives in their home countries. Shipping lists and the like are non-existent. I only met one serious genealogical researcher in all the time I was there. She just happens to be an expatriate librarian, and genealogy is her hobby. She has compiled lists of expatriate people mentioned in all the newspapers and gazettes as having been born, married or died. She has also collected cemetery inscription. If ever she

gets this published, I do hope she will deposit a copy in the New Guinea Collection.

A Biographical Register was started by myself as a sideline and tool for organising the manuscript collection, and to assist historical enquiries. The History Department became enthusiastic about it, and for three semesters provided a student as a research assistant to develop the Papua New Guinea entries. However, that was never very satisfactory, as again I only had a small corner of an eye that I could keep on it. When I announced my intention to leave the New Guinea Collection at the end of my contract in 1980, steps were taken to create a position in the History Department to edit and produce a Dictionary of Papua New Guinea Biography, and I was offered the new contract. However, while I was still considering it, I was offered my present position, and decided that if I did not make the break just then, I never would. Unfortunately, the Dictionary of Papua New Guinea Biography looks as though it will be still-born.

To sum up, the stocking, maintenance and exploitation of libraries and archives in an underdeveloped country requires hard work, persuasiveness, initiative and the ability to improvise. If you have no furniture, you use packing cases. If you have no conservation laboratory, you hunt about for what is available to wrap your manuscripts in. Fortunately, the powers that be have recognised the need for air-conditioned premises in the hot and humid climate. But, because the air-conditioning is ill-maintained, one sometimes swelters for weeks until a spare part arrives from overseas. When one looks around and sees how many people have inadequate health care, that 50% of the population is still illiterate, that most villages have no electric light and that many take days to reach by foot, one has to keep a sense of proportion. It is still possible to achieve viable archives and libraries on a low budget.

Perhaps that is a lesson for the Battye Library. But Battye has been going for very much longer. It really has passed the pioneer stage. Western Australia is, compared to Papua New Guinea, a rich State. It has about half the population of Papua New Guinea, and is, I think, fully literate. The use made of Battye is very much greater than the use made of the New Guinea Collection. Battye's future housing is being well taken care of in the rising Alexander Library Building. However, unless more money is provided for services, the staff will be rattling around in a somewhat hollow shell. If the government continues to see no further than economic development, perhaps those who care about Battye's services will take up the challenge in some other way.