WADGAYAWA NHAY DHADJAN WARI

THEY MADE THEM A LONG TIME AGO

Acknowledgment of Country

The State Library of New South Wales acknowledges the Gadigal people, the First Peoples and custodians of the land on which the Library stands and whose skies and waters surround us. We offer our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to other First Nations people.

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This publication accompanies the free exhibition *Wadgayawa Nhay Dhadjan Wari (they made them a long time ago)* at the State Library of NSW from 7 October 2023 to 28 January 2024.

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All photographs of objects have been supplied by the museums they have been loaned from.

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NEW SOUTH WALES

Wadgayawa nhay dhadjan wari

THEY MADE THEM A LONG TIME AGO

I'm blown away by the variety and types of objects that are being found in such random places. It's so fantastic. And that the stuff is preserved and still there for us, for us to look at and learn from. I'm just blown away by the sheer magnitude of what's out there.

Noeleen Timbery, La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council

Despite the impact of colonisation, our old people were able to thrive in coastal Sydney. They made these artefacts ... To us, these objects hold a spiritual connection, representing our unbroken links to our Country (land, waterways and skyways) ...

Ray Ingrey, Gujaga Foundation

Our ancestors' belongings

The 30 belongings in this exhibition were selected by me and other members of the La Perouse Aboriginal community to travel back to Sydney where they will reconnect with people and place. Since Cook in 1770 and invasion in 1788, objects made by our ancestors were taken from Country. Some were probably stolen, but our people also traded their objects and made them for sale. It is often assumed that hardly any survived. This exhibition — and the larger project of which it is part — proves otherwise.

In 2017, I had an opportunity to see some of our ancestors' belongings in the British Museum in London and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge. It was a magical experience. I got to hold the Gamay spears taken by the *Endeavour* voyage in 1770; earlier this year all four were returned to the La Perouse Aboriginal community unconditionally.

This exhibition showcases some of the other objects I saw during that visit; but others I have only seen in photographs — until now.

When it was announced to the media that the Gamay spears would be coming home for good, journalists asked me: 'What else is out there?' This exhibition is a partial answer to that question. Much of what has survived in museums we did not know about until recent research led by Gaye Sculthorpe uncovered it.[1]

The Gamay spears are unusual because we know where, when, how, why and by whom they were taken. For most of the objects in this exhibition that basic information is missing. It has been lost over time or was never recorded in the first place. Through research, some of those details can be rediscovered; but it is the knowledge held in Community that is most vital to bringing these objects back to life. We continue to carry knowledge handed down through the generations about the environment, about social and cultural life, and about making things.

This work with museums must be led by Community. Working to bring objects back on Country, even if only temporarily, so that they can be wrapped again in knowledge, language and culture, is a first step in a much longer journey. We do not yet know where that journey will lead, but we know it has begun and we won't turn back.

By working with libraries and museums here and in Britain, we are following in our Elders' footsteps. Decades ago, our Elders began visiting the State Library of NSW to research their ancestors' stories, and they began building relationships with overseas institutions that hold our ancestral treasures. They longed to see those treasures again, just as we do. We are inspired by our Elders to tell our history and our stories our way. For us, these objects are our stories.

Dr Shayne Williams and Noeleen Timbery looking at shield Z 29058 (object 18), at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, May 2017

Being in the presence of our ancestors' belongings, and learning about as well as from them, is inspiring. It took us nearly two years, and lots of wonderful conversation, to make the selection displayed in the exhibition. We wanted to include a breadth of objects, and we wanted to have a few examples of certain types of objects for comparison. It was important to us to have both men's and women's objects, as well as objects made from a variety of materials. And we wanted to include objects that we still make and those that we don't but which we hope to make again by learning from these survivors.

Knowing how amazing it felt to see and hold objects made by ancestors made me want to share that experience with others. Instead of people travelling long distances to see objects, we thought it'd be great for the objects to make the journey back to people and place. Working on a collaborative research project based at the Australian National University and funded by the Australian Research Council, and with the State Library of New South Wales, made this possible.

These beautiful cultural belongings speak to us. We want their 'voices' to be heard loud and clear because they connect us to our past, present and future. Through this exhibition, we extend the invitation to others to learn from what our ancestors have given us.

Noeleen Timbery, Chairperson, La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council

The objects

While the objects in the exhibition are diverse, most have one thing in common: hardly any accurate information about their past lives still exists. They have become unmoored in museums a long way from home.

Yet, as they are brought back into view, more information comes to light. Back on Country, they can be warmed by kin, nourished in culture, and wrapped in language. Rebuilding knowledge takes time; it is a slow and careful process that is properly led by cultural knowledge-holders and custodians.

The 200 or so years of lost time while these objects were 'asleep' in overseas museums will take more than two minutes, two months or even two decades to make up for. This exhibition, and the larger project of which it is a part, is a small step in a longer journey.

In preparing for these objects to travel back for community engagement and for public exhibition, we undertook detailed archival research, some material analysis, and discussions with Aboriginal research partners to try to work out where these 30 objects originated. In some cases, we could get closer to the truth and learn more about where and when these objects were procured from their makers. However, in many instances the placenames listed are indicative only and subject to further research. That is why these objects are here — so the urgent work of rebuilding knowledge about them can happen.

There are conventions that have developed about how to record and present information about objects — often referred to as provenance. It is common practice, for instance, for the names of collectors or donors to appear on labels. However, this convention has been criticised for erasing or minimising Indigenous history and perspectives; there are now calls to broaden what is included in descriptions of objects held in collections, including acknowledging the makers. We have adopted the convention of 'made by ancestors'.

In this booklet, we provide the details currently known for each object. It is a snapshot in time, and a baseline on which to build. There are still many, many questions that these objects provoke, and that is one of the reasons they were chosen to travel back to Country for community-led engagement and exhibition. We expect, and our hope is, that further details will emerge while the objects are back in Sydney, and we encourage visitors to the exhibition to contribute to this process.

Maria Nugent, Australian National University

These thirty belongings were made by ancestors.

All quotes in this exhibition and publication are comments by members of the Gujaga Foundation and La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council in response to the objects selected by them to travel back to Country.

Photographs: Shield © National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh. Boomerang, string bag, fishhooks © The Trustees of the British Museum. Hatchet © University of Cambridge, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Flared club courtesy Southwark Council, photographer Gary Black

The women would fish out of canoes both day and night using fishhook and line ... They would cook their catch straight away.

Luring fish

Shell fishhooks are ubiquitous along coastal New South Wales, as they were widely used from around Port Macquarie in the north to the Victorian border in the south. They were largely, perhaps exclusively, used by women, who fashioned them from turban shells, which are commonly found around the rocky shore. Twine was made from tree bark. Women fished from bark canoes, using the pearly hooks to lure fish to the surface and to catch them.

Fishhooks are sometimes found in archaeological excavations of coastal campsites (middens), occasionally in large numbers. But, because the twine deteriorates in the soil, no fishhooks with fishing lines attached have been found in the ground. This makes the two shell fishhooks in this exhibition incredibly significant.

These two shell fishhooks were probably acquired in the 1830s at Port Stephens, either by William Edward Parry, commissioner of the Australian Agricultural Company, or his wife Lady Isabella Parry, who sent coastal New South Wales Aboriginal objects back to her family in England. A century later, in 1926, Sir Sydney Frederick Parry, a grandson of William Parry, donated several objects from Australia and the Pacific to the British Museum. Among them were two fishing spears, a shield, and a set of four lustrous shell fishhooks with attached twine. When they entered the British Museum, the fishhooks were incorrectly identified as from Tahiti. This error was noted by Daniel Blau in 2018 and corrected to New South Wales through the work of Gaye Sculthorpe and Paul Irish.

Watercolour 43 by the Port Jackson Painter, c 1790, Banks Manuscript 34, Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

1 & 2. Fishhooks

COUNTRY: Coastal NSW, possibly Port Stephens area

MADE: Large turban shell (*Ninella torquata*), plant fibre twine

COLLECTED: 1830s, probably by Lady Isabella Parry

NOW: The British Museum, London, since 1926 1. Oc1926,0313.17 2. Oc1926,0313.18

DIMENSIONS: 1. Shell hook: 2.5 cm (H), 2.5cm (W), 0.5 cm (D); Hook with cord extended: 19 cm. 2. Shell hook: 2.5 cm (H), 2.5cm (W), 0.5 cm (D); Hook with cord extended: 19 cm

Cutting tool

The use of this small lancet is a bit of a mystery. Most of the objects in the exhibition were documented by early Europeans in Sydney in pictures or written descriptions, and most were procured in those early years. But not this one. It is one of only two such objects currently known (the other in the Science Museum in London) and was obtained by English collector Alan Herbert Coltart, who was visiting Sydney in 1910–11 and bought it from 'fur and curio' dealers Tost & Rohu.

We might know how they came to acquire it. In 1899 a huge storm blew the tops off the Maroubra sand dunes, exposing 'thousands of stones that had been used by the Aborigines' including 'a very peculiar lancet-like surgical knife or scarificator' as described by palaeontologists Robert Etheridge and Thomas Whitelegge in 1899.[2] Apparently, another was found at a large campsite exposed at Bondi at this time.

We can also speculate on what they were used for. The Maroubra area is known today by local Aboriginal people as being a ceremonial ground. Early

European resident Obed West described the area as a 'principal camping place' for coastal Sydney people, connected by 'well-beaten paths'.[3] The ochre covering the knife suggests it may well have had a ceremonial purpose. This may also explain why it was kept away from early Europeans in Sydney. Perhaps it was carefully hidden in early colonial times and became buried by sand, only to be uncovered a century later.

3. Lancet

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney, Maroubra area
MADE: Stone (flint or chert?), wood, iron oxide (ochre), resin, plant fibre
COLLECTED: late 1890s, purchased by Alan Herbert Coltart, 1910–11
NOW: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, since 1935. 1935.71.1
DIMENSIONS: 16.5 cm (L)

Adornment

These items are recorded as necklaces, and often categorised as 'personal adornment', but probably would have conveyed social status as well.

Some early colonial images portray Aboriginal men and women in the coastal Sydney area wearing strands of reeds like these. For instance, a drawing made in the early 1800s by the French artist Nicolas-Martin Petit shows a young man, Bedgi-Bedgi, wearing a long single strand wrapped at least seven times around his neck and open at the ends.

Only three reed necklaces from the coastal Sydney region are known to still exist in museums today. These are two of them. A third reed necklace collected during the Baudin expedition, which spent about four months in Port Jackson in 1802, has been identified in the Natural History Museum (Musée d'Histoire Naturelle) in Le Havre, France.[4] The details of how the two in this exhibition were procured are less certain.

Bedgi-Bedgi by N Petit in *Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes* ... 1824, State Library of NSW

4. Neckwear

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney, Port Jackson area

MADE: Cut segments of reed (*Phragmites australis*), plant fibre cord

COLLECTED: before 1821, possibly by Phillip Parker King

NOW: The British Museum, London, since c 1860s. Oc.1892

DIMENSIONS: 44.5 cm (H), 7.5 cm (W), 5.3 cm (D)

5. Neckwear

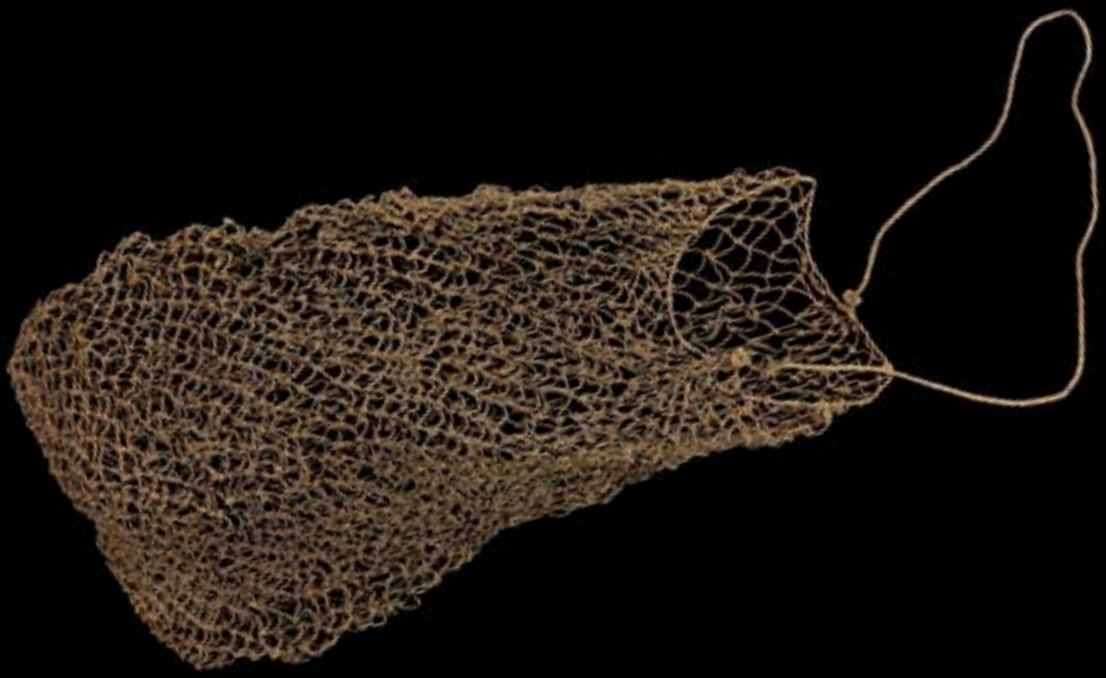
COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney

MADE: Cut segments of reed, plant fibre cord

COLLECTED: before 1840s, collector unknown

NOW: The British Museum, London, since c 1860s. Oc.1788

DIMENSIONS: 41.5 cm (H), 7 cm (W), 3 cm (D)



Looped nets

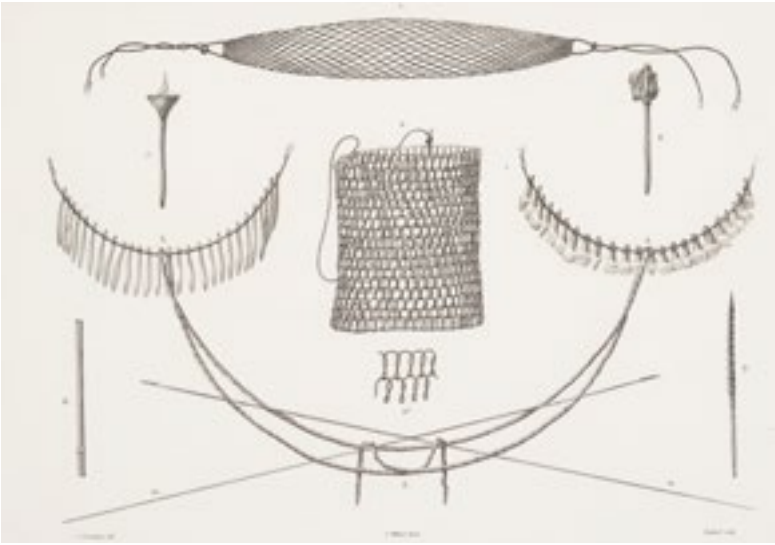
We chose this bag because it is recorded as coming from Port Jackson, and because it has a distinctive handle and opening made from twisted fibre. We are curious to see how the bag is made, and to see if we might be able to learn from it how to make them again …

String bags, also referred to as net bags or nets, were used by both women and men, and could expand to become quite large depending on what they held. They were used to carry an array of things such as knobs of resin, fishing tackle, scrapers, as well as fish, shellfish, fernroots, berries, bulbs and blossoms, and other food.

Well-known local identity Bennelong was observed carrying clothes 'in a net, slung around his neck'.[5]

Coastal Sydney region string bags are generally made by looping (without knots). The 1802 sketch by French artist CA Lesueur (opposite) features a beautifully detailed looped string bag in the centre. Underneath the bag is a diagram of showing how the twine was looped with a double twist.

According to a First Fleet description, 'the meshes of their nets are formed by large loops, very artificially inserted into each other, but without any knots'.[6] The writer praised the technique, writing that 'the peculiar mode in which the loops are managed is very remarkable'.[7] The technique was likened to lacemaking.



Armes, Ustencils et Ornemens by CA Lesueur from *Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes* … 1824, State Library of NSW

6. String (net) bag

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Plant fibre (kurrajong?), bark
COLLECTED: before 1830s, collector unknown
NOW: Cuming bequest collection, Heritage team, Southwark Council. C09486
DIMENSIONS: 36 cm (H), 28 cm (L)

The museum label suggests that this bag is made from the same twined kurrajong bark that was used for fishing line, but that is still to be determined. The museum record mistakenly says it came from Tasmania, but bags like this were not made there — coastal Sydney is the most likely origin.

The bag has a piece of bark in the base. It is not yet clear what purpose this served. Some possibilities are that it was used to hold the bag open, or to widen its base, or to prevent objects from falling out, or that it was added by the collector as an example of the raw material from which the bag was made.

7. String (net) bag

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Plant fibre (Illawarra flame tree, *Brachychiton acerifolius*), bark fibre
COLLECTED: before 1821, probably by midshipman Frederick Bedwell
NOW: The British Museum, London, since c 1860s. Oc.4061
DIMENSIONS: 45.1 cm (H), 35 cm (W), 3 cm (D)

This string bag was most likely collected by Frederick Bedwell, a midshipman on a vessel in Sydney at that time and captained by explorer Phillip Parker King. Bedwell is known to have acquired objects for the private collection of George Annesley, 2nd Earl of Mountnorris, which were housed at Arley Castle in Worcestershire.

The bag previously travelled to Australia in 2015–16 for the National Museum of Australia's *Encounters* exhibition, where it was described as the 'oldest known surviving bag from the Port Jackson area'.[8]

‘Workbox’

This is the only known surviving bark container of this type. It was used to carry and store basic work tools, especially fishing tackle. Similar lightweight containers were used to hold water, and transport food.

The workbox is made from a sheet of light bark, gathered at either end and bound with a length of vine or fibre twine. The design of these small bark containers is similar to nawi — the impressively agile canoes used in coastal Sydney.

The double-pointed ‘pin’ which is attached to it was perhaps used for taking meat from oysters or for winding twine.

These bark containers are sometimes, mistakenly, only associated with women, but they were used by both genders and all ages. For instance, a sketch of the young boy Nanbree (Nanberry), by convict artist Thomas Watling, shows a bark workbox hanging on the end of a fishing spear he rests on his shoulder.

How this bark container came to be in Britain is not known. What is known is that it was transferred to the British Museum in 1872 from Kew Gardens, where it had been registered as donated by Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward in 1857.

Nanbree by Thomas Watling, 1790s, Drawing 34, Watling Collection, Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

While Ward himself did not visit Australia, he had many contacts around the world including in Australia.

The workbox was probably collected by William Grant Milne on a British surveying expedition that spent time in Sydney during 1854–55, and surveyed Port Jackson and New South Wales in 1857–58.

8. Bark container

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Bark (possibly basal cabbage-tree palm sheath from *Livistona lorophylla*), wood
COLLECTED: 1850s, probably by William Grant Milne between 1854 and 1857
NOW: The British Museum, London, since 1872. Oc.1872.a
DIMENSIONS: Container 7.5 cm (H), 41.5 cm (W), 8 cm (D); pin 19.2 cm (H), 0.7 cm (W), 0.7 (D)

Our Elders would talk about how our Ancestors used woomeras to ensure spears were thrown with enough force to penetrate animals when they were much larger here in Australia (like megafauna).

An essential tool

Like the spears that they propel, spearthrowers are an essential part of the toolkit Aboriginal men carried as they went about their daily activities. They had multiple uses. For instance, some short spearthrowers were also used to lever shellfish off rocks and open them. Of those with shell inserts, the missionary Lancelot Threlkeld, who lived around Lake Macquarie in the Hunter region, recorded they were usually about 120 cm long and used 'to open an oyster, split up a cray-fish, embowel an opossum, or split a piece of rotten wood in order to obtain the large grubs therein for a lunch'.[9] Those with rounded wooden ends were used for digging. An example of each type is included in the exhibition.

9. Spearthrower

COUNTRY: Coastal NSW
MADE: Wood
COLLECTED: before 1836, possibly 1820s, collector unknown
NOW: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1886.1.1593
DIMENSIONS: 90.7 cm (L), 3.8 cm (W)

This spearthrower is made from a single piece of wood, with a hook at one end to hold the spear. This type of spearthrower was used in coastal Sydney as well as in the Hunter region. According to Judge-Advocate David Collins of the First Fleet: 'Of these [throwing sticks] there are two kinds: the one, name Wo-mer-ra ... the other, which they name Wig-goon ... with this they dig the fern-root and yam out of the earth'.[10] This type, then, is probably a 'wig-goon'. The flat, spatula-shaped end would have been used for digging.

10. Spearthrower

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood (native cherry, *Exocarpas cupressiformis*), resin (*Xanthorrhoea* gum), shell
COLLECTED: before 1810 (late 1700s?), collector unknown
NOW: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, since 1922. MAA 1922.994
DIMENSIONS: 85.5 cm (L), 5.5 cm (W)

This is the only one of its kind identified to date in a museum. It has a long wooden shaft with a sharp shell inserted in one end and a wooden peg on the other, both held in place by gum resin. According to La Perouse community Elder Uncle David Ingrey the shell is probably held in place by sinew, then clamped with a thick resin. The Venus shell inserted at one end has a sharp edge and would have been used for cutting.

This spearthrower was part of a collection displayed at Widdicombe House in Dartmouth, England. The house's owner, Arthur Holdsworth, was a friend and colleague of Richard Howe, 1st Earl Howe, who helped to make preparations for the First Fleet. It is likely that this spearthrower was in use in the coastal Sydney region in the late 1700s. A spearthrower with a shell inserted and a similar groove appears in several eighteenth-century images of Sydney, including one by the renowned Port Jackson Painter (pictured opposite).

Opposite: Drawing 76 by the Port Jackson Painter, 1788–1797, Watling Collection, Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

Axes & anvil

These four objects come from Sans Souci on the western side of Gamay (Botany Bay) and Bondi Beach on the coast south of Sydney Harbour. Three are axes and one appears to have been used as an anvil or grinding stone. They are made from volcanic stone that is not found in this area — so either the axes, or the stone cobbles they were made from, were traded from 50 kilometres or more away.

The hard stone was chipped into shape and one end was ground into a cutting edge on blocks of softer sandstone, forming grooves that you can still see in sandstone around Sydney today. The axes were then bound to a split wooden handle to create a 'hatchet', which Aboriginal men carried around with them in their belts. They used the axes to cut bark from trees and to cut toe-holds to climb trees for possums or bush honey. The anvil may have been used for shaping smaller stone tools or perhaps for opening seeds or nuts.

These axes were used by Aboriginal people who lived at Sans Souci and Bondi Beach hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of years ago. Their descendants were still living there in the 1870s, nearly a century after Europeans arrived in Sydney.

In 1894 English geologist and Sydney University professor Archibald Liversidge wrote that he had 'obtained' some stone axes and other implements 'from the few blacks who, some twenty years ago, used to camp at these places'.[13] It is likely they were traded for other goods rather than simply taken.

Liversidge took the axes with him when he returned to England in 1909, leaving them to the British Museum when he died in 1927. They were part of a larger donation of 116 objects from Australia and the Pacific, mainly stone tools. Descendants of those who lived at Sans Souci still live in the La Perouse Aboriginal community today.

11. Stone axe

COUNTRY:	Coastal Sydney, Sans Souci/ Gamay (Botany Bay)
MADE:	Volcanic stone (dolerite?)
COLLECTED:	1870s, by Archibald Liversidge
NOW:	The British Museum, London, since 1928. Oc1928,0110.1
DIMENSIONS:	13.5 cm (L), 8 cm (W)

12. Stone axe

COUNTRY:	Coastal Sydney, Sans Souci/ Gamay (Botany Bay)
MADE:	Claystone
COLLECTED:	1870s, by Archibald Liversidge
NOW:	The British Museum, London, since 1928. Oc1928,0110.6
DIMENSIONS:	10 cm (L), 6.9 cm (W)

13. Stone axe

COUNTRY:	Coastal Sydney, Bondi area
MADE:	Claystone
COLLECTED:	1870s, by Archibald Liversidge
NOW:	The British Museum, London, since 1928. Oc1928,0110.12
DIMENSIONS:	8.7 cm (L), 6.7 cm (W)

15. Grinding stone/anvil

COUNTRY:	Coastal Sydney, Bondi area
MADE:	Quartzite
COLLECTED:	1870s, by Archibald Liversidge
NOW:	The British Museum, London, since 1928. Oc1928,0110.13
DIMENSIONS:	7 cm (L), 6 cm (W)

Drawing 75 by the Port Jackson Painter, 1788–1797, Watling Collection,
Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

It's important that stone axes come back, as they were one of the first things to stop being made. We stopped making them as metal was stronger and lasted longer.

14. Stone hatchet

COUNTRY:	Coastal Sydney
MADE:	Volcanic stone, wood (mangrove, *Avicennia marina*), resin (*Xanthorrhoea* gum), plant fibre
COLLECTED:	before 1810 (late 1700s?), collector unknown
NOW:	Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, since 1922. MAA 1922.995
DIMENSIONS:	40.5 cm (L), 12.5 cm (W)

Everyday tool

Hatchets were part of Aboriginal men's equipment for everyday use, carried with spears, spearthrower and club. This stone hatchet retains its original handle and the thickly clumped resin that held the axe head in place.

As the gum resin on this one became brittle over time, the head has dislodged from the handle. Some hair and other fibres are mixed with the resin to strengthen it. La Perouse community Elder Uncle David Ingrey has suggested that underneath the resin it might be found that sinew has been wound around to attach the head to the handle.

Stone hatchets were described in early colonial records as being 'made of hard stone much like flint, sharped [sic] at the edge, secured to a stick about 2 feet [60 cm] long by fixing in with gum & lashing'.[11] Suitable stones for axe-heads were found some distance from Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay — further to the west and to the north around the hinterland of the Central Coast.

Hatchets like this one appear in many early colonial images of coastal Sydney tools, and in illustrations of Aboriginal people going about daily life. Men are shown carrying them, either tucked in their waist-belts, held in their hands, or wedged between their teeth.

The British realised quickly that their metal hatchets were desirable gifts. Governor Phillip's journal notes that in June 1788 some spears were exchanged for steel hatchets; and Judge-Advocate David Collins describes an encounter in which the Aboriginal men 'appeared to admire whatever they saw, and after receiving each a hatchet (of the use of which the eldest instantly and curiously shewed his knowledge, by turning up his foot, and sharpening a piece of wood on the sole with the hatchet) took their leave, apparently well pleased with their reception'.[12]

This hatchet entered the collections of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge in 1922 when it was bought (along with other objects) from the Holdsworth family of Widdicombe House. It is likely the axe arrived in England by 1800 or soon afterwards. Overlooked for some time, it came to notice again in the 1960s when Australian archaeologists, including Isabel McBryde and Vincent Megaw, began to survey museum collections in Britain for surviving Sydney-region material. This hatchet was among the objects they identified.

Shields were not only for combat but for ceremonial purposes as well.

16. Spear shield

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood (mangrove, *Avicennia marina*)
COLLECTED: before 1852, possibly by Admiral JE Erskine
NOW: National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh, since 1922. A.1922.116
DIMENSIONS: 97 cm (L)

This shield was probably obtained in the broader Sydney region, and because it is made of grey mangrove it likely comes from coastal Sydney. The front surface of the shield has a line running down the centre and shorter lines extending across its face from the handle inserts. This is a common feature of shields from coastal Sydney.

It has a distinctive pattern painted (not engraved) on the front like those found etched on possum skin cloaks. Designs on shields communicated identity. The handle is inserted into, not carved out of, the body of the shield.

This shield was in the collection of Admiral John Elphinstone Erskine, who visited Australia in 1849–51 on HMS *Havanna*. He spent time in Sydney, and also went across to the goldfields, where it is known he purchased a boomerang from an Aboriginal man. But it is not known how he acquired the shield. It was among his collection auctioned in Glasgow in 1922, many years after his death.

Coastal shields

Shields were an important part of the toolkit of Aboriginal men in coastal Sydney and NSW. There were two main types of shields: a broad shield and a narrow parrying shield. Parrying shields were used in fighting at close combat — in a fight where clubs were used. They were also struck with a piece of wood or a club to make music to accompany dances and ceremonies.

While parrying shields were used over a broad area of south-eastern Australia, the style of the three broad spear shields chosen by Community for inclusion in the exhibition is understood to come from coastal New South Wales, from the Shoalhaven in the south to the Macleay in the north.

Very few shields have a specific place of collection recorded. Because they are robust items, shields (and other wooden weapons) have survived in greater numbers in museums compared to fibre bags or possum skin cloaks.

Drawing 70 by the Port Jackson Painter, 1788–1797, Watling Collection, Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

17. Parrying shield

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney

MADE: Wood (grey gum, *Eucalyptus punctata*), red pigment

COLLECTED: c 1790–1810, possibly by Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick

NOW: The British Museum, London, since 1878. Oc1878,1101.617

DIMENSIONS: 72.5 cm (L), 9.5 cm (W), 5 cm (D)

This is likely one of the earliest surviving objects collected in the Sydney colony. In 1789, while stationed on the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean, a well-known collector Colonel Robson exchanged objects, possibly including this shield from Port Jackson, with Arthur Bowes Smyth, a surgeon on the First Fleet. In or before 1807, Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick, a major collector of arms and armour, acquired the shield from Colonel Robson. Meyrick published a drawing of this shield in 1830, but he had first catalogued it in 1815 as a shield of 'curious construction from New South Wales'.[14] In 1878, the British Museum purchased it from a descendant of Samuel Meyrick.

18. Spear shield

COUNTRY:	Coastal Sydney
MADE:	Wood (Sydney red gum, *Angophora costata*)
COLLECTED:	before 1820s
NOW:	Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, since 1922. MAA Z 29058
DIMENSIONS:	76.5 cm (L), 30 cm (W)

This shield is made from Sydney red gum — a common woodland and forest tree of Eastern Australia growing primarily on sandstone soils. The handle on this shield is cut out of the solid. When La Perouse community members Noeleen Timbery and Uncle Shayne Williams saw this shield in Cambridge in 2017, they noted how small its handle is (pictured page 5).

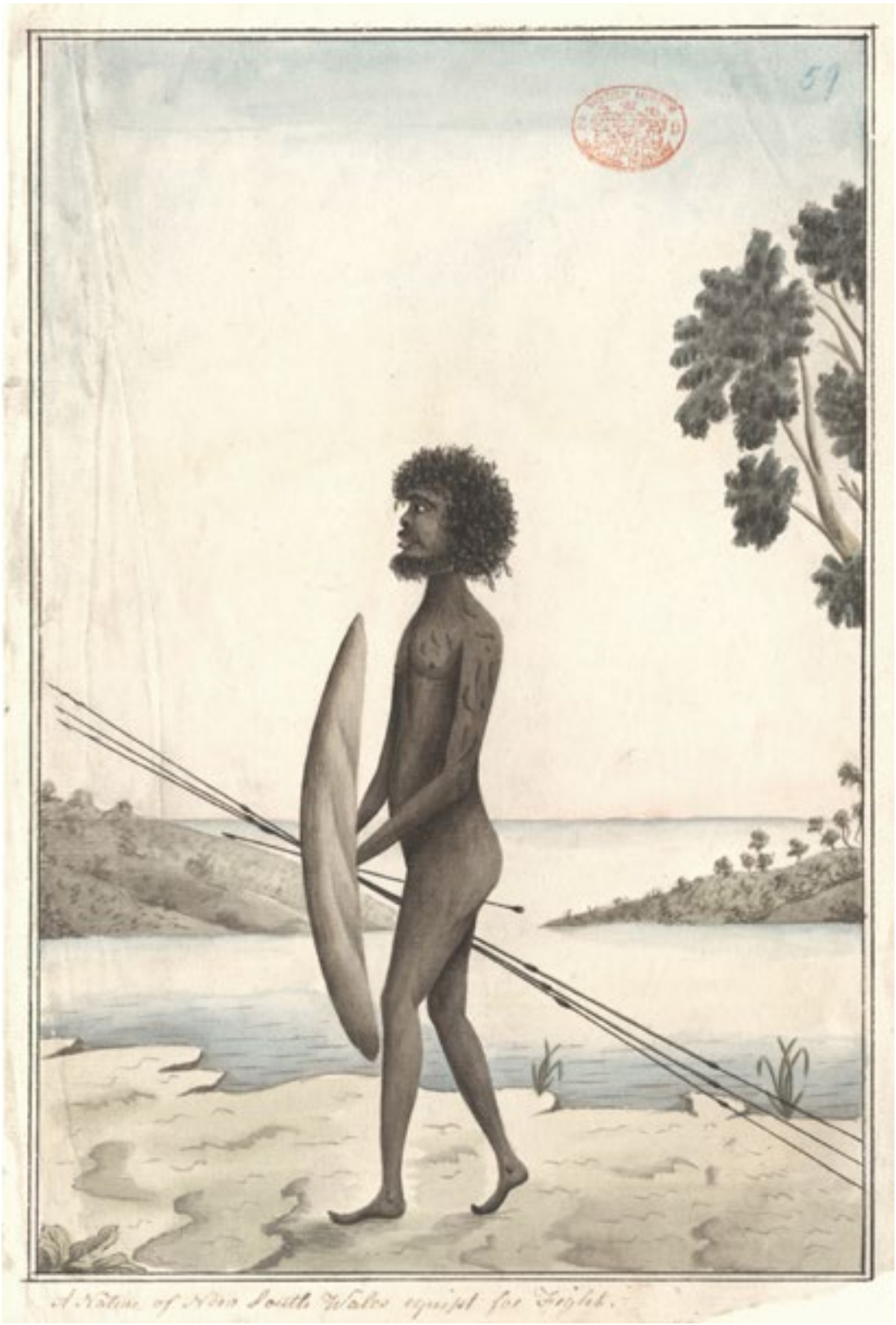
It is not known how this shield was collected or travelled to England. In 1887 it was noticed in the library of Jesus College, Cambridge, by the curator of Cambridge University's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. It is likely to have been given to the college by a former student. One possibility is Edward Daniel Clarke, a traveller and antiquarian collector who presented many objects to the university in 1803.

19. Spear shield

COUNTRY:	Coastal NSW, Shoalhaven area
MADE:	Wood (kurrajong, *Brachychiton populneus*), ochre
COLLECTED:	before 1862, by Henry Moss
NOW:	The British Museum, London, since 1865. Oc.1809
DIMENSIONS:	89.5 cm (H), 34 cm (W), 9.2 cm (D)

In 1836, Quaker traveller James Backhouse saw shields decorated like this from the Cambewarra Mountains. Backhouse, a botanist by trade and a keen observer, described a shield he saw there as 'whitened, and marked with white lines: sometimes they are blackened with blood and soot, under the idea of rendering them proof against injury; and on this black surface, the figure of a hand is occasionally depicted, by means of a white powder, thrown on before the black is dry, or the whole is dotted with white'.[15] Rock shelters with hand stencils, some now destroyed, are quite extensive in the Shoalhaven.

Although it is unclear how it originally came to be in his possession, this shield was loaned by Henry Moss, a prominent local citizen in Nowra, to the International Exhibition in London in 1862. After the exhibition closed, it was among other objects purchased by collector Henry Christy. On Christy's death a few years later in 1865 his extensive collection, including two Shoalhaven shields, was bequeathed to the British Museum.



Drawing 50 by the Port Jackson Painter, 1788–1797, Watling Collection, Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

Sydney boomerangs

Boomerangs are one of the most recognisable of all Aboriginal objects.

From a vast number of boomerangs in museums in the United Kingdom, community co-researchers selected three connected to the Sydney region to travel back to Country. All three are returning boomerangs, but each has distinctive features.

They come with varying amounts of information about where, when and by whom they were acquired, and about the pathways they travelled to England and into museum collections.

20. Boomerang

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood (black wattle, *Acacia mearnsii*)
COLLECTED: before 1846, possibly by Lieutenant JMR Ince
NOW: The British Museum, London, since 1846. Oc.1846,0809.14
DIMENSIONS: 68.4 cm (L), 13.5 cm (W), 1.1 cm (D)

There is a band of colour at each end that is lighter than the rest of the boomerang. This could indicate that it once carried a swipe of ochre or had some other treatment. The boomerang was given to the British Museum by Lieutenant JMR (John Matthew Robert) Ince in 1846. Ince served in the Royal Navy and sailed with HMS *Fly* and HMS *Rattlesnake* during their surveys of Australian coasts in the 1840s.

21. Boomerang

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood (grey mangrove, *Avicennia marina*?)
COLLECTED: before 1859, probably by John Kingdon Cleeve
NOW: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, since 1886. 1886.1.1600
DIMENSIONS: 84.5 cm (L)

This boomerang is described in museum records as long and slightly curved with rounded ends. It was probably collected by John Kingdon Cleeve, who arrived in New South Wales in the 1820s and lived in Sydney. In 1851, he purchased Bungarribee, a house and property now listed on the NSW Heritage Register. The boomerang was originally held in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford before being transferred to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1886. The transfer included: 'A series of Australian articles collected and given by the venerable Archdeacon Scott of New South Wales, C Wood Esq, JK Cleeve Esq and GH Cox Esq of Victoria.'

22. Boomerang (pictured opposite)

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood (grey mangrove, *Avicennia marina*)
COLLECTED: before 1844, possibly by 1821, probably by midshipman Frederick Bedwell
NOW: The British Museum, London, since 1865. Oc. 979
DIMENSIONS: 75 cm (L), 7 cm (W), 0.6 cm (D)

Like many coastal Sydney and New South Wales objects, this boomerang entered in the British Museum's collections in 1865 via Henry Christy, who had purchased it at auction in 1852. Prior to its sale, it had been part of a large private collection assembled by George Annesley, 2nd Earl of Mountnorris, and held at his residence, Arley Castle, in Worcestershire. It was probably collected by a young seaman, Frederick Bedwell, who Annesley had commissioned to collect on his behalf while Bedwell was employed on naval surveys of Australia's coasts between 1818 and 1822.

A faint handwritten inscription on the boomerang reads 'Bumarang Port Jackson NSW'. This was possibly written by John Septimus Roe, who was also on the 1818–22 voyage. If these details are accurate, the boomerang had been acquired by 1821. A paper label on the other side of the object must have been written slightly later, because it features an updated spelling: 'Boomerang from Pt. Jackson New South Wales'.

Wooden weapons

Yoo-long Erah-ba-diang by J Neagle in *An account of the English colony in New South Wales* ... by David Collins, 1798–1802, State Library of NSW

Ridged clubs were used for both everyday and ceremonial purposes. Knowledge about their uses has been passed down through the generations. They were often described in early British records and drawings. For instance, in 1770 Joseph Banks on the *Endeavour* voyage described seeing a 'wooden weapon made something like a short scimitar' at Botany Bay (Gamay). The weapons appeared so shiny they were thought to be 'made of some kind of metal'; others on the voyage said 'that [they] shone like a musquet'.[16]

The engraving by James Neagle titled 'Yoo-long erah-ba-diang', featured in a book published in 1798 (pictured above), shows clubs like these stuck in waist belts. Recent research by Gaye Sculthorpe and Daniel Simpson has identified four ridged clubs in museum collections in Britain; two are included in this exhibition.

23. Ridged club

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood (southern mahogany, *Eucalyptus botryoides*)
COLLECTED: 1820s, possibly by Allen Francis Gardiner
NOW: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, since 1886. 1886.1.1598
DIMENSIONS: 68.5 cm (L), 13 cm (W)

This club was once held in a missionary museum, formerly known as the Ramsden Collection, at Spratton Hall in Northamptonshire. The museum's founder, Robert Ramsden, was a friend of prominent missionary and collector Allen Francis Gardiner.

It is possible that Gardiner was the first to obtain the club. He visited Port Jackson between 1821 and 1822, sending collections home in September 1821. During a six-week stay on the ship *Dauntless*, Gardiner travelled inland to Bathurst, visited the Native School and Female Factory at Parramatta, and witnessed a corroboree at Kissing Point. There, he described and drew objects such as the bummerang, wammera, shields, and waddie, which he observed in use.

24. Ridged club

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE : Wood (southern mahogany, *Eucalyptus botryoides*)
COLLECTED: c 1790–1810, possibly by Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick
NOW: The British Museum, London, since 1954. Oc1954,06.390
DIMENSIONS: 67.2 cm (L), 12 cm (W), 2.8 cm (D)

The British Museum acquired a ridged club, largely undocumented, from the Wellcome Museum in 1954. It may be one of the two items described as 'bent-wood clubs, slightly carved' purchased by the Wellcome Museum from David John Carnegie in 1924.[18] Carnegie's father was a friend and colleague of Augustus William Henry Meyrick, who inherited a very similar object from his cousin Samuel in 1848. If this is the same club, it can be traced back to 1807, and possibly even to 1789.

We are really interested in seeing these ridged clubs because they are quite unusual and not many of them have yet been located. We are curious to see what they are like – and what it is like to hold them …

Most of these [clubs] were for individual use, so it might just be what suited the individual. You created your own club, and it was yours — it was not like one club was shared with that many people — so shape, size and pattern may have been individual.

Clubs

A club was one of the first things British colonists acquired from Aboriginal people when they came in 1788. In his journal, Marine Watkin Tench described an interaction involving several Gweagal people that took place on the southern shore at Gamay (Botany Bay) just days after the British ships anchored. Initially the Gweagal seemed uninterested in the 'toys' and other trifles the sailors offered them, and they were reluctant to give anything of their own in return. However, Tench notes, 'before we parted a large club with a head almost sufficient to fell an ox was obtained in exchange for a looking-glass'.[19]

Along with spears and boomerangs, clubs are the most numerous of coastal Sydney Aboriginal objects in museums in the United Kingdom. The variety of clubs in the coastal Sydney region is reflected in the many names for them recorded in the early years of the British colony such as woodah, cannatalling, doowinnul, cannicull, carruwang, womurrang, gnallungulla and tarrilberre.[20]

Some clubs were made from relatively unmodified stems or tree trunks, while others were worked into shape with scrapers and other tools and marked with incisions. Most have small cuts around the grip so they can be held securely. They are often described as being 'painted', 'brushed' or 'dusted' with ochre, particularly red and white, and some of those included in the exhibition still have faint traces of colour on them.

Drawing 44 by the Port Jackson Painter, 1788–1797, Watling Collection, Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

25. Mushroom-head club

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood (swamp mahogany, *Eucalyptus robusta*), ochre
COLLECTED: before 1826, by Sir Thomas Brisbane, former Governor NSW
NOW: National Museums Scotland via University of Edinburgh. A.UC.673
DIMENSIONS: 54.6 cm (L), 12.7 cm (W)

26. Sword club

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood
COLLECTED: c 1790–1810, possibly by Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick
NOW: Cuming bequest collection, Heritage team, Southwark Council, since 1850. C03500
DIMENSIONS: 69.5 cm (L), 7.5 cm (D)

'Native Arms' in 'Select specimens from … New South Wales' collected and arranged by T Skottowe, drawings by R Browne, 1813, State Library of NSW

27. Mushroom-head club

(pictured previous page)

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood
COLLECTED: before 1826, collector unknown
NOW: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1931.78.16
DIMENSIONS: 58 cm (L), 13.5 cm (W)

28. Long and grooved club

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood (black wattle, *Acacia melanoxylon*), fibre, resin (*Xanthorrhoea* gum)
COLLECTED: 1810–1820, collector unknown
NOW: National Museums Scotland A.1899.57
DIMENSIONS: 76.2 cm (L)

29. Bulbous-head club

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood
COLLECTED: before 1840s, collector unknown
NOW: Cuming bequest collection, Heritage team, Southwark Council. C03198
DIMENSIONS: 66.5 cm (L), 6 cm (W)

30. Flared club (pictured opposite)

COUNTRY: Coastal Sydney
MADE: Wood
COLLECTED: before 1850s, collector unknown
NOW: Cuming bequest collection, Heritage team, Southwark Council, since 1850. TN03551
DIMENSIONS: 61 cm (L), 10 cm (W)

Photograph courtesy Southwark Council, photographer Gary Black

The research project

The exhibition is part of a project, Mobilising Aboriginal Objects: Indigenous History in International Museums, to bring objects chosen by Community co-researchers back to Country where they can be viewed and discussed by community members, historians, archaeologists, art historians, curators, anthropologists, scientists and others.

The project aims to rebuild knowledge about exceptional but poorly documented objects from the coastal Sydney region that are currently held in British and European museums. The project broadly adopts Paul Irish's concept of the 'affiliated coastal zone'.[21] One of its aims is to develop a model for locally grounded collaborative research and engagement with international museums and collections. It is research in action.

The project is a partnership between the Australian National University, the British Museum, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University, and Deakin University. The Gujaga Foundation and the La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council in Sydney are the community partners, co-researchers and collaborators on the project. The host venue, the State Library of NSW, is the borrowing and exhibiting institution.

The research project is based in the School of History at the Australian National University (ANU) and has been funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). Additional funds have been provided by the ANU through the Beyond Reconciliation project (part of the ANU Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Grand Challenge); philanthropic funding; and the ARC Centre of Excellence for Australian Biodiversity and Heritage, University of NSW.

Australian Government
Australian Research Council

Australian National University

Vases, Armes, Pêche by CA Lesueur from *Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes* ... [1807] State Library of NSW

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17 G Sculthorpe & D Simpson, 'Will my boomerang come back? New insights into Aboriginal material culture of early Sydney and affiliated coastal zone in British collections', *Australian Archaeology*, 2023, vol 89, issue 2, pp 149–171

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The collections

The 30 belongings on display are on loan from five cultural institutions in the United Kingdom.

1. The British Museum, London

Objects 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11–13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 22, 24

2. Cuming Bequest Collection, Heritage team, Southwark Council, London

Objects 6, 26, 29, 30

3. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Objects 10, 14, 18

4. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

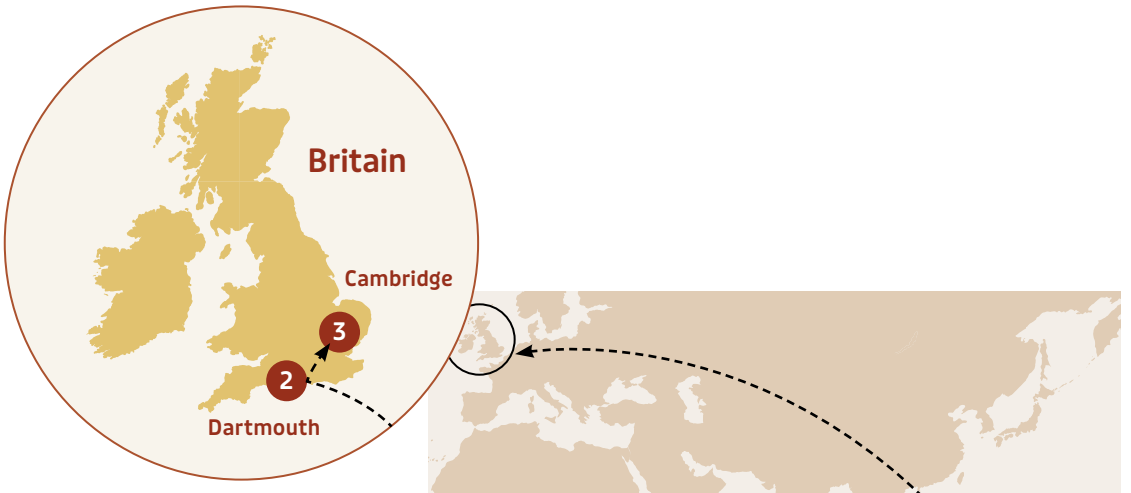
Objects 3, 9, 21, 23, 27

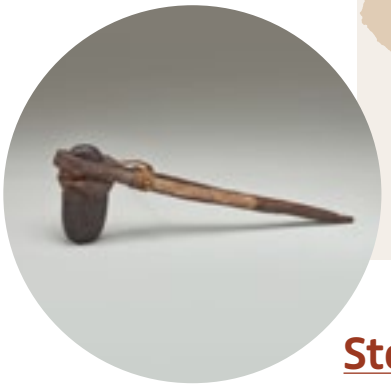
5. National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh

Objects 16, 25, 28

Tracing an object's path

For most of the objects in this exhibition we don't know exactly where, when, how, why and by whom they were taken. That information is incomplete, has been lost over time, or was never recorded in the first place. Many objects travelled through multiple stops to finally arrive at the current museum location. Here are two examples showing likely pathways.



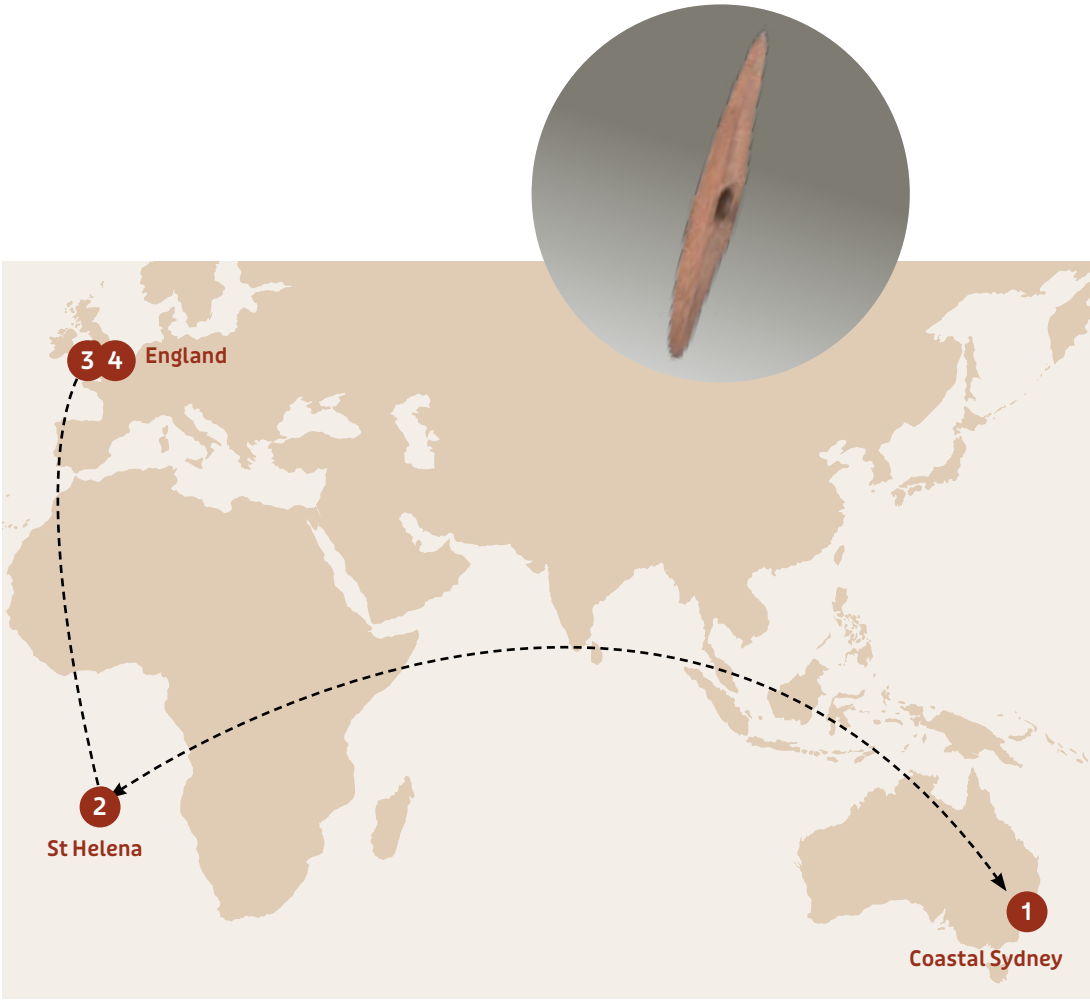


Stone hatchet

1 Coastal Sydney, before 1810

2 Private collection at Widdicombe House, Dartmouth

3 Purchased by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, 1922



Parrying shield

1 Coastal Sydney, c 1789–1810

2 Possibly acquired through exchange, St Helena, 1789

3 Private sale in England, c 1807

4 Purchased by the British Museum, London, 1878