NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The fourth General Meeting of the Society for 1979 will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at

8.00PM MONDAY 25 JUNE 1979

AGENDA

1. Apologies.

2. Minutes of General Meeting held, Monday 28 May 1979, to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. The following new members have been elected to the Society.
   Christine WHIPP
   Robert GRAHAM
   Vincent MEGAW

4. Papers and Journals from other Societies and Organizations will be tabled at the meeting.

5. Business:
   (a) Field Project
   (b) 'Magic & Medicine'
   (c) Petition

6. Films.
   Hopefully, the following films will be screened at the meeting:

   1. 'Early Stone Tools'
   2. 'The Survey'
   3. 'The Artefacts'

VERN TOLCHER,
Honorary Secretary,
213 Greenhill Road,
EASTWOOD, S.A. 5063
Telephone Office 272 2311
Home 79 2193
The following is a precis of an address given by DOROTHY BENNETT, a Field Officer in Arnhem Land, at the Society's meeting on Monday 28th May 1979.

Oenpelli is a small Aboriginal town situated in the black soil plains that extend on either side of the East Alligator River in Western Arnhem Land. Nearby is the Arnhem Land escarpment, its rocks and caves sacred to the Aboriginals and in many cases richly decorated with cave paintings. Today 600 people live at Oenpelli. Some live in the town itself while others have returned to their tribal homelands to revive their traditional way of life and beliefs. The population at Oenpelli has been Gunwinggu since before the turn of the century. The Gunwinggu, however, are only the most recent residents in the fertile environment. For 30,000 years Aboriginal tribesmen have hunted the fish, birds, lizards and animals of this area. Although these former residents have disappeared from the area, their spirit lives in the cave paintings they made and their place in the mythology of the Gunwinggu people. History and cultural traditions among the Aboriginal people are passed from generation to generation by the spoken word. In the telling of the myths of creation and the lives of the ancestor spirits the land and its importance to life is clearly expressed. But the spoken word is only a single means by which religious, historical and social beliefs are taught and celebrated. In dancing, singing, ritual and art these ideas are illustrated and continually given new strength.

The great traditions of the cave paintings have been translated into the bark paintings that the Gunwinggu artists produce today. These paintings in ochre on stringy bark embody the spirit of religion and the inhabitants of the land. The Oenpelli style is quite distinctive, with single figures or groups painted in the unique x-ray style against a plain brown, white or black background. Although the style is widespread throughout western Arnhem Land it has been characterised as Oenpelli art.

Increasingly, people living at Oenpelli are returning to their tribal lands. This decentralisation process, known as the outstation movement, is a response to the needs of the people initiated by the Aboriginal people themselves. Many of the finest artists at Oenpelli have returned to their traditional homes to rekindle their ties with the land. At Narragalidban, Gurrghurru, Gumadeer River, Malman and many other outstations artists are producing traditional paintings and passing their knowledge and skill on to their children. The paintings being produced at Oenpelli and its outstations today are traditional in both style and content. The paintings show spirit of the dreamtime, such as Luma Luma, Mimí Spirits, Namadji, Ngalyod the rainbow serpent or Likanaya the mermaid. The most frequently illustrated are the Mimí Spirits whose nocturnal lives parallel that of the Aboriginal people. They are spirits of the escarpment and figure prominently in the cave paintings there.

The other major theme in Oenpelli art is the illustration of the fish, birds and game that constitute the major sources of food hunted in the area. Barramundi, saratoga and bream are frequently illustrated. The emu and bush turkey are the birds usually shown. The other game, wallabies, echidna, flying foxes and possums, are also frequently depicted. But the kangaroo and the goanna occupy the attention of many artists. Crocodiles and other aquatic creatures, such as crayfish, are also the subject of the artists' hands.
THE ART OF OENPELLI Cont'd

Today art has become an important economic resource as well as filling its traditional ritual and social roles. The Oenpelli artists are able to reach the art market in the major capitals of Australia and overseas through the close relationship between the community and Aboriginal Arts & Crafts Pty. Ltd. Paintings are collected by Peter Carroll, a linguist resident at Oenpelli who has for many years acted as advisor to the community and the artists in particular, and the Company's field officer, Dorothy Bennett. Dorothy Bennett visits all outstations monthly purchasing on a cash basis. Their service to the artists in the Oenpelli area has enabled the artists to continue to produce paintings of exceptional quality and vitality. Through the Company's marketing efforts the art of Oenpelli has maintained and increased its position as the most widely recognised and, currently, most popular form of Aboriginal Art.

Painting on bark has undergone a revival as part of the decentralisation process. Through it the artists express traditional beliefs about the work and their environment. Paintings from Oenpelli, in the unmistakeable x-ray style, have become synonymous with Aboriginal paintings. Although there are other regional styles it is the art of the Oenpelli region that has attracted most attention.

Oenpelli is also renowned for its fine weaving. The pandanus fibre is collected, stripped, dyed and woven in the traditional way. The shape of the baskets has been influenced by European needs but the style of weaving and decoration are traditional. The woven pandanus is strong and durable. When woven very tightly even water can be carried in these bags.

ABORIGINAL ARTS & CRAFTS PTY. LTD. was established as a nonprofit proprietary company by the Australian Government in 1971. Its charter is to assist in the preservation and encouragement of the Aboriginal culture by marketing and promoting Aboriginal art and craft.