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THE LEGACY OF NORMAN B. TINDALE AT PRINCESS CHARLOTTE BAY IN 1927:
LAMALAMA ENGAGEMENT WITH MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

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Abstract

The cultural record of the Lamalama people of far north Queensland is well-represented in the Norman B. Tindale Collection held at the South Australian Museum (SAM). This record derives from the Expedition to Princess Charlotte Bay in 1926–27, a collecting trip sanctioned by the SAM’s Board of Governors to expand ‘the hitherto meagre Museum collections’ from southern Cape York Peninsula. Norman Tindale would establish his reputation as the Museum’s ethnographer on this trip, and despite spending only a few days at Port Stewart, he and expedition leader Herbert Hale recognised Aboriginal people camped in the bed of the Stewart River as having diverse clan-estate, language and genealogical relationships. A vast quantity of artefacts was collected and many still images and a small amount of moving image were taken. The latter collections, together with their written accounts and documentation, provide compelling testimony of the lives of those people who survived the violence and displacement of the nineteenth century colonial frontier in north Queensland. Over recent decades, the Lamalama have worked closely with the authors to access their cultural patrimony in museum collections, including making two trips to the SAM (1997 and 2010). The aims of this paper, therefore, are to demonstrate the importance of engaging Indigenous people in a dialogue about their cultural patrimony in museums such as may be found in the Norman B. Tindale Collection, consider Lamalama responses to the record created by Tindale and Hale and investigate the nature of Tindale’s archive and its continuing relevance to Lamalama people.
Introduction

The conventional view of museum collections is as sets or groups of artefacts or objects, but Satterthwait (2008:54) reminds us that:

ultimately the creation of a collection entails the making of connections, the establishment of associations...that link things together in networks of meaning. Collections are, then, ultimately objects of the mind.

As such, collections are the products of imagined connections and associations that link material things, people, places, actions and behaviours together in networks of meaning. Collections may have their material bases in artefacts, images and documentation, but they acquire meaning only through human imagination and interpretation. As Jones (2008:1) noted, ‘Aboriginal artefacts not only evoke another culture and another time, but also carry substantial traces of encounters between their original makers or owners and their collectors.’

Museum collections are therefore not static and unchanging, and cannot be so, because our acts of imagination and interpretation constantly change, allowing for the ‘re-imagining’ of objects (see Rigsby 2006). In the case of the Norman B. Tindale Collection at the South Australian Museum (herein referred to as the Tindale Collection and the SAM respectively),¹ major contributors to ‘re-imagining’ material in the Tindale Collection since the 1970s have included Lamalama, Umpila and Yiithuwarra people from the Princess Charlotte Bay region of Cape York Peninsula. Anthropologist Peter Sutton has worked on the Flinders Island component of this collection, including Tindale and Hale’s writings on Yiithuwarra people. While this research remains largely unpublished, it informed the claim documents that Sutton compiled and wrote for the Flinders Island and Melville National Parks land claims in 1993–1994 (Sutton 1993; Sutton et al. 1993). A notable outcome of

¹ The Princess Charlotte Bay component of the Norman B. Tindale Collection was collected by both Herbert Hale and Norman Tindale. The objects and Tindale’s papers are held by the SAM, while two photograph albums and personal papers are amongst the Herbert Hale Archive held by the State Library of South Australia.
that claim was the National Native Title Tribunal’s recognition that contemporary Aboriginal people’s traditions are not limited to oral transmission from their old people and peers, but may derive in part from ‘written materials, tape- and video-recordings, artefacts in museums, home collections, etc’ (Rigsby 2006:129–130). This finding affirms the importance of establishing associations between images, artefacts and documents, and with activities, places, events and people, and demonstrates the potential of research on the Tindale Collection to enhance Aboriginal communities’ understandings of their history and heritage.

For the Lamalama, the aforementioned images and artefacts recall a period that no longer exists. Like other groups engaging with their cultural patrimony in museums, identified by Peers and Brown (2003) as source communities (descendants of those people from whom the heritage materials in museum collections originate), they no longer mainly live on and sustain themselves from their lands. The oldest living Lamalama people were born around or before the end of World War II, and grew up in a period where, to an extent, artefacts were still made and used and some cultural practices continued. Nevertheless, without museum collections, Lamalama knowledge of their past would be more or less exclusively limited to oral transmission across the generations. Few Lamalama families have maintained material records such as photo albums, although that has changed since copies of images taken by the anthropologist Donald Thomson at Port Stewart have been made available and started to circulate in the community in 1990.² Access to other sources via the internet has also contributed to a greater interest in their past among younger people, and the images taken by Donald Thomson have particularly mediated in the transmission of knowledge and representations of the past across the generations.

Museum collections help to bridge time and evoke memories and emotions that are deeply implicated in the continuing making of meaning that constitutes Lamalama re-imaginings of their present and their past (see Hafner 2008; ² The photographs were taken by Donald Thomson at Port Stewart in 1928, 1929 and 1930. The photographs are held in the Donald Thomson Collection which is currently on loan from the Thomson Family to Museum Victoria.
Hafner 2010; Hafner et al. 2007). More recently, the objects, photographs and film relating to Hale and Tindale’s *Expedition to Princess Charlotte Bay* in 1926–1927 have begun to contribute to the ways in which the Lamalama are able to understand and interpret their past. During the Expedition, Hale and Tindale, like Thomson in succeeding years, collected material that forms an enduring legacy from which the Lamalama can now re-imagine their past. In this paper, we reassemble something of the context of collecting during the Expedition; focus on the short period Hale and Tindale spent at Port Stewart, home to the Lamalama people, descendants of the people they met there and worked with; and discuss the importance of the record created by Hale and Tindale as a tangible link to a past from which the Lamalama were disconnected for many decades.

*Figure 1* Map showing places mentioned in the text.
The 1926–1927 Expedition to Princess Charlotte Bay

On 3 December 1926, the SAM’s Board of Governors sanctioned a three-month field expedition and collecting trip to expand ‘the hitherto meagre Museum collections’ from the southern Cape York Peninsula region (Hale and Tindale 1933:63). This would be the first time Tindale would directly collect for the museum and these activities ultimately allowed him to establish his credentials as the museum’s ethnographer. In 1921, Tindale had collected on Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory while working for the Church Missionary Society, and later sold that material to the SAM; and in 1924 he collaborated with Hale on a field trip to the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, during which they recorded rock engravings and collected a few ethnographic objects. However the Expedition to the southern coastal region of Cape York Peninsula would result in the collection of several hundred Aboriginal objects from across Princess Charlotte Bay, and the shooting of more than 200 still images and around twenty minutes of silent film, the earliest known ethnographic film footage from Cape York Peninsula.

Hale and Tindale left Adelaide on December 7, 1926, intending to spend three months working in the far north. After their arrival, they were able, on December 30, 1926, to secure passage from Cairns to Flinders Island on the cargo ship, Canonbar, from which they transferred to the cutter, Iorana, somewhere north of Cape Melville (Figure 2). Its skipper Aleck Markwell landed them with their gear and supplies on Flinders Island shortly afterward. Markwell worked for the Morey Brothers trading company, which had two huts on Flinders as a supply base. One was made available to Hale and Tindale, together with two boats. Food supplies for a fortnight were provided (Saunderson and Rigsby 1985:5), as they intended to work for a week only at Flinders, at the end of which Markwell was to pick them up and take them to Port Stewart, from where they intended to also collect inland (Hale 1926–1927).

By Tuesday 2 January, good working relationships appear to have been established with local Aboriginal people. Tindale had ‘examined the native outrigger canoes’ by lunchtime that day and on the following day was able to take a number of portraits. Tindale had also begun investigating practices relating to totemism and marriage, and Hale (1927:46) wrote in his notes
about the first pieces collected for the museum: ‘two string bags and are in hopes of a good deal of stuff’ (see journal entry for 3 January). A few days later Tindale noted that:

several natives brought up dilly bags, pearl shell necklets and grass bead strings. In evening visited the camp to purchase specimens...
(Tindale 1926–27—see journal entry 5 January 1927)

Figure 2 Transferring cargo from Canobar to Iorana in the Owen Channel, 1 January 1927.
However Markwell did not return a week later, and on January 12, Hale (1926–1927:76) wrote, ‘We are now on short commons..., but, fortunately, there is plenty of flour in the [Morey Brothers] store so we shall not starve’. That same day Tindale crossed over to Bathurst Head on the mainland in ‘a sailing dinghy’ with two Aboriginal men, an Aboriginal woman and two dogs, where they feasted on rock oysters, which Tindale noted were ‘such big juicy ones that I could scarcely refrain from overeating them’ (Tindale 1926–27—see journal entry 12 January 1927). The next day, Hale added that:

the natives are very short of food & are willing to sell many valued objects they would not hitherto part with, for a pannikin of flour from...[the] store. Their natural foods are running short...
(Hale 1927—see journal entry 13 January 1927)

Exchanges were made using flour and trade tobacco, which they had brought for this specific purpose, as well as to pay for labour. In a series of newspaper articles published by Hale on his return, he observed that ‘the natives are, almost without exception, heavy smokers, and trade tobacco formed a desirable basis of exchange’ (Hale 1927).

On January 16, Hale and Tindale took a party of Aboriginal people in the larger whaleboat back to Bathurst Head, given that Markwell had not returned as planned. Rain squalls and a strong east wind took them across quickly, and they stayed on the mainland until January 20, when they had to row at night back to Flinders. By that date, they had hoped to intercept another vessel, *Kallatina*, and head back ‘south & so get into country near Cairns, where we can at least collect a few birds’. They were obviously discouraged and prepared to give their Flinders and other northern work away. However, Markwell returned the next afternoon and reported he had been held up by bad weather, with a cyclone looming in the vicinity of Flinders Island (Hale 1934:135–136). As the wind had dropped, Markwell was heading to Port Stewart. Hale and Tindale reconsidered their position and sailed with *Iorana* at 4 am, January 21, across the Bay to Port Stewart.

After unloading stores, they selected some gear, engaged three men and walked several miles away from the coast to the old Silver Plains homestead (called ‘Two-Mile’) where they based themselves until February 1, then shifted downstream to a location
known today as the ‘old Bassani Place’, a deserted hotel from the gold rush days. Two days later they got word that Canonbar had been due at Flinders Island on the first of the month, so they could reasonably expect Markwell might return for them at any time. They packed and shifted their gear to the wharf at Port Stewart, and two days later, on February 6, spotted Iorana outside in the deeper water. Markwell sent word that while unloading cargo from Canonbar at Flinders Island the day before, a squall had blown his boat away and so he had sailed to Port Stewart. It was then 9:15am, Iorana was anchored on a lee shore, and Markwell sent word that he could not tarry. Just after midday, Hale and Tindale reached Iorana in two loaded dinghies, boarded and straightaway returned to Flinders Island, where they managed to board Canonbar and head south late the next day into the developing Willis cyclone, which smashed into Cairns for a day.

During the Expedition, Tindale and Hale noted the clan or linguistic affiliations of Aboriginal people from whom they were collecting objects and gathering information, and would later use these to reflect on any apparent differences between these groups. While their designations of clan or ‘tribal’ affiliations were not always correct, the level of detail in their documentation and writing from the Expedition allows this information to be interrogated and re-interpreted in the context of contemporary Aboriginal knowledge. They noted apparent differences between the various groups, for example, that most adults at Port Stewart had ‘the nose pierced to accommodate a splinter of bone or a short, slender piece of bamboo…[and] women wear necklaces made neatly from 30 or 40 small rectangular pieces of pearl shell, fastened with Livistona string’ (Hale 1926–27—see journal entry 13 May 1927). They also noted perceived cultural associations with Papuan traditions, for example:

Mallets (‘otun’) used by women for pulping various foods and for breaking oysters, are made of iron-wood and other hard timbers. The Walmbaria, Barunguan and Mutumui tribes commonly use the form shown in fig.170. This is cylindrical in shape, with one end abruptly narrowed to form the handle, and is very similar in form to the gong-beaters of Melanesian peoples. On Flinders Island and Bathurst Head a much thicker, shorter, and heavier mallet is also made…

(Hale and Tindale 1934:132)
Hale and Tindale noted how objects were used and made, sought to establish local differences between groups and noted the movement of objects between these groups. This localised trade network in and around the Bay was facilitated by the use of outrigger canoes (Figure 3), which together with string bags, red ochre and spears, were obtained essentially from the people camped at Port Stewart, as well as ‘Koko-Lamalama’ people on the southern end of the Bay. They also considered the material culture repertoire of this region within the broader context of Australia, noting, for example that spear throwers with their distinctive shell ornament were only made and used on Cape York Peninsula, and were not found elsewhere in Australia. They further noted that in relation to those made by the people of Princess Charlotte Bay:

>a distinction could be made between those of island and mainland manufacture: those used at Jane Table Hill by the Koko Lamalama are more slender than those of the Walmbaria ...and the PCB people depend only on their throwing sticks to protect themselves from spears, the bailer shell ornament is said to prevent it from slipping out of the hand when thus used...

(Hale and Tindale 1934:100)

In fact the cine film shot at the end of their first week on Flinders Island shows a Koko Lamalama man, John Tarpaulin, grinding down the shells to make discs to be attached to the proximal end of the spear thrower (Figure 4).

![Figure 3 Outrigger canoes on Flinders Island, 1927.](image)
Figure 4 John Tarpaulin grinding shell discs for a spear thrower on Flinders Island, 1927.
Ethnography and Ethnological Collecting at Port Stewart

In all, Hale and Tindale spent six and a half weeks from January 1, 1927, in Princess Charlotte Bay, 16 days of which were spent in and around Port Stewart, from January 22 to February 6 1927. During the latter period they essentially lived away from Aboriginal people, collecting terrestrial animals and insects, and on February 5 remained in their camp preparing the animal skins, developing films, writing notes and labelling specimens (Hale 1927; Tindale 1926–27). In total, they therefore spent only two-and-a-half to three full days distributed over January 29, February 2, 3, 4 and 6 with Aboriginal people at Port Stewart, collecting from them, photographing them and talking with them.

According to Hale and Tindale, the Aboriginal people were in three camps on the sand spits at the mouth of the Stewart River (Tindale 1926–27), a traditional wet season location. The countries or estates of those in the camp on the southern side were from Balclutha Creek and further south of the Stewart; those in the larger camp on the northern side were local Stewart River people whom Hale and Tindale called ‘Entjinga’, a word that derives from the locale known to the Lamalama as Yintjingga [Yintyingka]. A smaller adjoining camp was of ‘Konanunuma’ [Kunangunuma] people, whose:

main camps were along Massey River. In recent years they have become greatly diminished in numbers, and have linked themselves with the Entjinga survivors, although they still keep their camps about fifty yards apart. The Massey (Apowuna people) have now practically amalgamated with the Pt Stewart...peoples owing to their diminishing numbers...
(Hale 1927:93)

On the afternoon of February 2, the day after Hale and Tindale shifted downstream to the deserted hotel, they hired the Port Stewart man Tommy Thompson to help them in their field and ethnological collecting. Tommy guided them through the mangroves to the southern camp at the river mouth. Tindale noted that they crossed the river in a punt and Hale photographed two people from south of Balclutha Creek. They traded tea and tobacco for several fine stingray spears, but had to pay ‘two bob’ (two shillings) for a grindstone at Port Stewart as ‘the owner would not part with this stone for tea or tobacco—it was too valued a
possession’ (Hale 1927—see journal entry 2 February 1927). Stone was gained from the Range country inland towards Coen, as, Hale and Tindale noted, stone at Port Stewart was of a poor quality, ‘...the soil being sand and clay; stones are obtained 40 miles inland, and for this reason are exceedingly valued by the coastal natives’ (Hale 1927—see journal 13 May 1927). The morning of February 3, Tindale wrote that he:

[O]btained some interesting notes from Tommy [Tommy Thompson] our boy...The Pt. Stewart Barunguan Tribe is divided into three, the Enchinga, Ompeila, and Apowuna and marriage appears to be from his example + that of his parents, within this subdivision...They do not marry outside the Barunguan tribe and regard the Kaanju and Kokolamalama peoples as strangers who talk another way. They have dialects within the language thus the Pt Stewart word for water is apola but the Rocky word is pii...
(Tindale Journal 1926–27)

On February 4, Tindale went back to the river mouth with Tommy, where he spent six hours in the three camps. Hale joined them in the early afternoon and they met a very old man they identify as Peter or ‘Koaji of Massey...one of the oldest members of the tribe [who is] deaf and nearly blind’ (Figure 5). They photographed him in front of his hut, with one of these images published as Figure 156 in their report of the Expedition (Hale and Tindale 1934:126); shot some cine film of the old man and recorded a short genealogy (Tindale 1926–27). They also acquired Old Man Peter’s bird wing fan.

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3 Tindale’s ‘Kokolamalama’ here refers to those Lamalama-speaking people who continued to live in the coastal saltpan country between the North Kennedy and Normanby Rivers.
4 We can’t identify the source of this word for certain. Donald Thomson (Notebook C1, 1928) recorded the Coastal Ayapathu form at Port Stewart as okol and okolo.
During the same visit, Hale and Tindale purchased an *ulkan* or palm spathe cradle (SAM Registry No. A13647) from Nangayonomo [Nangkayunumu]. Jones (2008:336, 351–352 and endnotes 69–72) has discussed this item and wrote that Hale ‘[p]hotographed a baby in one of these & then purchased the basket’ (Hale Diary 1926–27). He identified it as the cradle in Figures 182 and 183 in the report published of the Expedition (Hale and Tindale 1934:135). Jones also drew attention to the image published as Figure 3, ‘Native pad, coast of Princess Charlotte Bay’ (Hale and Tindale 1933:68) that shows a man walking towards the camera with a cradle reposing on his right shoulder, apparently with a baby inside it, to judge from the man’s stance. Jones (2008:352) wrote that this was a ‘photograph of the owner, Nangoyonomo, a Baranguan man, carrying the basket (with his child in it) along a ‘native pad’’, noting however that the image was ‘without specific reference to the basket or its owner’.

Figure 5 ‘Koayl’, a Massey River man in camp at Port Stewart, 1927.
Jones (2008) observed that ‘Tindale recorded the name of the father and the baby as Nungarali’, and Tindale similarly identified the child in one image he took on February 4: ‘Nungarali the baby is shown lying in a basket; the child is always carried thus when on long journeys; at other times when they are only a short distance the child is seated on the shoulder of one of the parents’ (Tindale 1926–27). Identification of the man in Figure 3 with the same name is of some importance to Lamalama people and to their understanding of their rights in country. Was he Nangkayunumu or Frank Port, a Lamalama man and mother’s father of the late Sunlight Bassani, or Noongorrli, also known as Old Harry Liddy?

A short Tindale genealogy that centres on ‘Nungurali ♂ 60 yr. Harry[] Pt Stewart’ and his wife, ‘Atjawu 18 yr Jenny[]. Claremont N of Pt S’ (Tindale 1926–27) puzzled Rigsby for some time in the early 1990s. The late Florrie Bassani (née Liddy, born about 1934), a senior Lamalama woman was also confused, as her own father, also named Noongorrli or Harry Liddy, was a young unmarried man in 1927. Donald Thomson’s genealogy and fieldnotes in relation to Florrie’s father Noongorrli/Harry Liddy, the leading dugong hunter at Port Stewart in 1928–1929 when he was there (Thomson 1934:251; Rigsby and Jolly 1994) are clear on these points (see discussion in Rigsby 1999:116). It was not until 1997 after talking with several senior Umpila women at Chester River, then again with Florrie Bassani, that Rigsby could interpret the genealogy satisfactorily. Tindale’s older ‘Nungarali’ was in fact Florrie Bassani’s father’s father, whose name she remembered as Ngaakamburu, which closely matches Ngokomboro, the name Tindale recorded for the older Nungarali’s father (Figure 6).

Such a conundrum is typical in piecing together genealogies, but it demonstrates some points of importance to our purpose in this paper. First, it bears witness to the fact that on Cape York Peninsula personal names are property, owned by clans in the classical period and by cognatic descent groups in this post-classical period. They are bestowed and used across generations. People who share a name, that is, namesakes, act towards each other in a formalised manner, much the antithesis of a joking relationship, and this still tends to be the case among Lamalama people today. Further, Tindale’s genealogical work,
and Rigby’s later assiduous investigations have allowed the Lamalama to re-construct their past with considerable certainty, and this stands as but one of many instances in which the connections between people, places and things yield greater knowledge for both Aboriginal people and researchers, and in which Tindale’s work is foundational.

Other individuals photographed by Hale and Tindale have also been identified by name, particularly in the captions on photographs in the albums found in Hale’s archive at the State Library of South Australia. Charlie King is one man identified as ‘wearing around his neck an elongate roll of black hair similar to the other we collected at Bathurst Head…but [he] declined to let us have it as it ‘belong dead feller” (Hale 1926–27:160–161). Similarly Minnie Peter is identified as a ‘woman with very little clothing…plentifully daubed with brown mud, probably another sign of mourning’ (Hale 1926–27:160–161) (Figure 7). Images of these two were reproduced as Figure 71 and Figure 155 in the articles published on the Expedition (Hale and Tindale 1933:95 and 1934:124 respectively).

Figure 6 Noongorrli demonstrating how to carry an infant in a bark container at Port Stewart, 1927.
On February 6, their last day at Port Stewart, Hale and Tindale were back at the river mouth by 8 am (Tindale Journal 1926–27). They ‘went first to the eastern camp’ (Hale 1926–27:174–175) for a little over an hour, however they cancelled their visit to the western camp telling people ‘to fetch all the remaining material they wished to exchange for flour to the end of the sandspit in an hour’ (Hale 1926–27:178). After loading two dinghies at the Port and heading out through the river mouth, they pulled up for ‘a few minutes collecting sundry things [the people] brought to the end of the sand spit’ and were aboard Iorana just before noon (Hale 1926–27). By this time, they had collected over 600 ethnographic objects from across Princess Charlotte Bay, taken around 250 photographs and shot cinefilm they would edit into a 13 minute short documentary film.

![Minnie Peter in camp on the Stewart River, February 1927.](image)

**Figure 7** Minnie Peter in camp on the Stewart River, February 1927.
The Cultural Legacy and the Lamalama Today

Over the few days spent at Port Stewart in late January and early February 1927, Hale and Tindale collected around 300 objects. Today these represent the largest material cultural record pertaining to the Lamalama, a post-classical group of Aboriginal people, whose country is at Port Stewart and the coast thereabouts (Verstraete and Rigsby 2015). Today they mainly live inland at Coen, and are direct descendants of the people who Hale and Tindale met and traded with at Port Stewart. Unlike the experience of most people on Cape York Peninsula, a number of Lamalama people remained on their country up until the 1960s. The exception is those who worked on cattle stations or elsewhere such as in Coen, yet nonetheless maintained an ongoing presence in the region.

These family groups, camped at ‘Yintjingga’ near the mouth of the Stewart River, were subjected in 1961 to the full force of Queensland’s policy of removal when they were taken onto the supply boat *Melbidir*, and relocated to Bamaga/Cowal Creek (now known as Umagico) at the tip of the Peninsula. Their homes and possessions were burned and dogs destroyed. Two old men attempted the long walk back to Port Stewart, taking with them their dugong ropes, which one of them, Harry Liddy, would describe in a letter to a white friend as being hunted down by police with dogs and returned to Bamaga, never to see his country again (Rigsby and Jolly 1994).

Establishing an outstation on the Stewart River in the 1980s proved to be an important catalyst for Lamalama people seeking to affirm their knowledge and memories of the past, and later seeking out their cultural patrimony in major Australian museums. As indicated above, this coincided with their pursuit of formal title to parcels of their country through land claims, and the Tindale and Thomson Collections, particularly the photographic and genealogical material, have made an important contribution to that process. Overall, engaging with their cultural patrimony in museums has allowed the Lamalama to gain access to their past and reaffirm their identity as a group after decades of being unable to access their country freely, speak their languages, or, in many cases, visit relatives who were removed to other parts of Queensland.
As we have found, this engagement with their cultural legacy has resulted in a significantly enhanced record and the emergence of new and alternative meanings, understandings and narratives of the past. Key senior Lamalama people have been able to contribute from living memory, and thus make an invaluable contribution to filling out and reassembling this dispersed record. This knowledge and associated insights have been crucial to resolving questions that arose due to the incomplete or conflicting nature of the record, such as resolving the identity of Nungarali/Old Harry Liddy in Hale and Tindale’s images, discussed above.

In January, 1990, seven Lamalama people, including Elder Sunlight Bassani, journeyed to Melbourne from Coen and spent four days with Rigsby and Allen at Museum Victoria, viewing and examining the Port Stewart component in the Thomson Collection. On this first visit, they were delighted to find a set of several hundred images of their Old People, or forebears, many of whom they recognised immediately. Such images and the artefacts provided evidence of past customs, laws and practices, and for Sunlight Bassani, the museum visits meant that young people would no longer dispute his accounts of traditional practices, as the evidence was there in the historic photographs and artefacts, collected mainly in the 1920s. Lamalama people have made at least another seven visits to the Thomson Collection since then, mostly in groups but also on their own.

In August 1997, Rigsby and Sunlight Bassani together with Jimmy Peter and Elaine Liddy went to the SAM for the first time. Their main purpose was to collect four sets of ancestral remains collected by the Kuranda entomologist ‘Mr Dodd’ at Breakfast Creek about 1914, as well as a set of remains of another individual who had been disinterred by Hale and Tindale during the Expedition to Princess Charlotte Bay. The group stayed for several days to view and examine the Port Stewart material in the Tindale Collection working with the curator Philip Jones, and some of their interactions with and discussion about artefacts from the 1927 Expedition were captured on videotape.

These early museum visits were mainly driven by a combination of the wish of Lamalama people to see, read, handle and talk about the items and documents, and for the authors as
researchers to draw out additional information of relevance to Lamalama inquiries about their heritage and history. Allen’s interests were in more fully documenting the material in collaboration with and from the perspective of the Lamalama, while Rigsby and Hafner’s needs and interests were at this point concerned with gathering evidence in support of land claims and land-related matters on behalf of the Lamalama. Subsequent visits to Melbourne were all led by Sunlight Bassani mainly with Rigsby, and by the time of the 1997 visit to the SAM, some Lamalama people were talking about the importance of these two Collections for display at their local cultural centre, and for making personal connections to the past through images of the people, activities and artefacts at Port Stewart.

Securing a three-year Australian Research Council Linkage grant in 2006 allowed the authors to bring together a team consisting of anthropologists, museum curators and a filmmaker for a joint project with interested Lamalama people. A specific purpose was to enable a broad representative Lamalama group to travel to and directly engage with their cultural heritage in museum collections, and for the collections to also be taken to the community, allowing many more people to see the material, albeit a small sample. As a part of this project, Rigsby was able to further document photographic materials and Lamalama genealogical knowledge (see Allen forthcoming; Allen and Hafner 2008; Hafner 2008; Hafner 2010; Hafner et al. 2007). As such, this engagement confirmed the significance of these collections as a part of the Lamalama cultural record. It highlighted the value of linking the dispersed elements of their history and making connections between the various holdings, particularly between the Thomson and Tindale Collections, as well as including the archive of Hale, held at the State Library of South Australia. Amongst Hale’s archive, Allen located two annotated photograph albums containing images of the Expedition to Princess Charlotte Bay. This was a particularly important find given that Tindale’s photographs from the

6 The Australian Research Council funded research project (LP0667418)—Oral Tradition, Memory and Social Change: Indigenous Participation in the Curation and Use of Museum Collections (2006–2008), was a collaboration of Museum Victoria, the University of Queensland, Deakin University and the Lamalama. It was led by Diane Hafner, who also led an earlier pilot project in 2005 funded by the University of Queensland.
Expedition held in the SAM’s Archives were incomplete and not captioned or well documented.

Allen was able to continue connecting current Lamalama people with the visual record of their Old People at Port Stewart, taking a copy of the most complete version of Hale’s albums to Coen in early 2009. This prompted some interest in going to Adelaide to see the Tindale Collection, a trip planned as part of the ARC project but postponed a few times due to deaths in the community and weather conditions on Cape York Peninsula. However in May 2010 three Lamalama people, who had not been to any museum before, travelled with Allen for the purpose of viewing the Tindale Collection. As discussed earlier, at least half of the 600 objects in the Tindale Collection from the 1927 Expedition were collected at Port Stewart, together with other objects from Port Stewart people who were residing on Flinders Island and the mainland opposite at the time still to be identified. A number of women that Tindale met at Flinders Island in 1927 in fact were Port Stewart people, and others such as their camp cook, Lena Webb, were married to Port Stewart men. In fact of the 40 or so Aboriginal people we know Hale and Tindale met on Flinders Island and the mainland, about a third of them are recognised now as the forebears of today’s Lamalama people.

While Sunlight Bassani had accompanied the Lamalama on all visits to museums before his death in early 2008, the trip to Adelaide in May 2010 revealed the significant shift in Lamalama understandings of these collections and their relevance and importance to them. Having worked closely with the authors over almost two decades on the cultural record provided by the Tindale and Thomson Collections, Sunlight’s absence was acutely felt on this first museum visit without him. His stewardship in relation to the collections and his understanding of the histories associated with the collecting of these objects, gained essentially from working closely with Rigsby on the related documentation (field notes, journals, and so on), had meant Sunlight acted as the cultural broker between the museums and the Lamalama. In particular he had taken an active role in engaging with Museum Victoria and taking responsibility to direct staff regarding the storage, management and exhibition of the Lamalama material in the Thomson Collection (see Allen and Hamby 2011). Further, he had a good
understanding of how the objects were likely gained, either voluntarily or through persuasion to be exchanged for tobacco, flour and, in some instances, as discussed above, for money.

Having only two to three days to look at the Tindale Collection required selecting a cross-section of the cultural material, comprising some 80 to 100 objects. These included those items associated with named individuals such as two necklaces collected from an Aboriginal woman identified as ‘Okaneimi’. This woman was known to the Lamalama visitors, and during the visit it became clear that one of the men, who asserted a direct familial connection with this woman, had claimed one of these necklaces and put it in his pocket. When asked why he had done this, his understanding of the discussion in the museum store room was that the necklaces belonged to him and so he took one. It was duly returned to the museum the next day, however this episode made it clear that Sunlight Bassani’s stewardship in guiding the Lamalama in relation to their cultural patrimony in museums and their collective ownership and responsibilities for ensuring the continued survival of these collections was now missing. Sunlight had an enduring concern to see that this material was preserved and cared for, and therefore would remain accessible to future generations of Lamalama people. He believed this function was best carried out by museums, as he and his community did not have the resources to effectively store, display and conserve the materials. The exception to this in his opinion was the photographic materials, which provide a clear view into the past, and which continue to inform Lamalama narratives of identity.

Conclusions

The most vital and enduring legacy for the Lamalama in engaging with their cultural patrimony in museums is the photographic images and in particular the portraiture. For the most part, the Old People at Port Stewart were on the cusp of memory of the eldest Lamalama people who made the journeys of discovery to museum collections in the 1990s. They brought younger people with them in order that they learnt and to ensure survival of this knowledge into the future, particularly the stories of the old Port Stewart people who continue to be well remembered by name and deed. While the authors’
research interests have been concerned with the mediation between the Lamalama and their past, between Lamalama of different generations, between the Lamalama and the museum, and to a lesser extent the Lamalama and the museum-going public, the fundamental thread has been the intersection of the Lamalama people today with the traces of the lives of the people at Port Stewart embedded in the museum collections.

The materials remain important for the Lamalama, with the photographs being the only images in existence of their relatives and family members from the time before the classical way of life was disrupted, and before many of the same Old People depicted in them were removed from their country. Important connections have been made between the people photographed and filmed by Hale and Tindale and those photographed only fourteen months later by Donald Thomson. Old Harry Liddy who was discussed earlier had passed away in the interval, and so the image from the Expedition in 1927 is the only known image of this very important patriarch for the Liddy family.

When Thomson arrived at Port Stewart in May 1928, Old Harry Liddy’s funeral was well underway and Thomson’s extraordinary photographs of his grave piled over with masses of dugong bones have become iconic images for the Lamalama (Figure 8). By contrast, the Queensland government’s harsh interventionist policies facilitated the removal of Old Harry’s young child, who he had carried in the bark container in order for Hale and Tindale to photograph and film him. Charlie Liddy was removed to Palm Island with his mother, Tapilmuta, and while his name changed in time, Tindale in fact would meet him again in 1934 at Palm Island and record his genealogy. However, Tindale failed to realise or make any connection to him as that same child who he photographed at Port Stewart in 1927. As such, these images with all their connotations and readings are, most importantly and enduringly, an invaluable resource for working with Lamalama people seeking to identify their relatives. They also perform the functions of intimate family memorabilia, quite apart from any importance as historical or cultural records, and for those same families they are keepsakes of their Old People.
The engagement of the Lamalama with these records and collections has confirmed and shaped their understandings based on the evidence and their own memories of their past. These collections have allowed for the past to be ‘re-imagined’ and a fuller and richer interpretation has emerged of a life-world with its people, their society and their property in artefacts, land and waters. At the same time, it has evoked memories which have provoked new or alternative narratives of Australia’s northern frontier history to emerge, and given the material from the Expedition to Princess Charlotte Bay a new significance, and more importantly, a new relevance into the future, for the Lamalama at least.
Acknowledgements

The images in this article have been reproduced with permission of Elaine Liddy, Cultural Heritage Advisor, Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation on behalf of the Lamalama people. Figures 2–7 are from an album amongst the Herbert Hale Archive at the State Library of South Australia [13/6/1] and were taken between December 1926 and February 1927; and Figure 8 is a photograph by Donald Thomson reproduced courtesy of the Thomson Family and Museum Victoria [TPH3103] taken in 1929.

References


