

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

FACULTY OF ARTS

ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT

INTERNSHIP REPORT

IN

NICHOLSON MUSEUM

(PERIOD: 19 JUNE 2018 – 20 AUGUST 2018)



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and thank for their warm welcome and acceptance during the internship period.

With great pleasure, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude a to all museum staffs for their wholehearted advices and encouragement in respect to their professional fields from the beginning to the completion of internship period, providing me an invaluable learning and cultural experience in Australia.

Museum Overview

Sydney University Museums comprises the Nicholson Museum of antiquities, the Macleay Museum of natural and cultural history and the University Art Gallery of visual arts.

The Nicholson Museum is the oldest university museum in Australia with largest collection of antiquities in the Southern Hemisphere. It is in the Main Quadrangle at the University of Sydney and freely open to general public. The museum was founded in 1860 following the donation by Sir Charles Nicholson, the University's second chancellor (1854-62), of his private collection of antiquities. Since then, the collection of the Nicholson Museum has been expanded over the years through bequests, acquisitions and excavations, resulting in nearly 30,000 artefacts of archaeological significance from Egypt, Greece, Italy, Cyprus and the Near and Middle East. From the intriguing to the macabre, the Nicholson Museum provides insight into the minds of the archaeologists, collectors and curators who have contributed to making the museum a unique Australian cultural institution.

Position and Description of Duties

Within this 2-month internship, I was supervised by curator James Fraser and Candace Richard (Fig. 1). They have organized variety of tasks such as researches, database management, stocktaking and object movement, in which I have gained new insight on museum operation by seeing how different parties corporate with each other at the back stage of the museum. Working hours are generally Monday to Friday from 09:30 am to 16:30 pm, when museum is opened for public. However, there were occasions when voluntarily working outside of those hours, for example, on weekday nights for evening lectures.



Fig. 1 Photo taken with curator James Fraser (right) and Candace Richard (Left)

A. Curatorial Assistance

- Researches and Projects

There are many on-going projects across the museum that allows curators and researchers to gain more information about their collections of artifacts. I was engaged in several projects such as the “Woodhouse Project”, that the museum is seeking help from public, via Flickr, to contribute descriptions and identifications of the Woodhouse photographic collection in the archive. I helped summarize all the coordinates that we have gathered from Flickr contributors and converted the coordinates in certain format that allows us to generate the mapping, as well as too help write the descriptions for every photo.

- Exhibition Planning

My supervisor, James, was responsible to plan the content and layout for temporary exhibition, in which he needed to select some objects from the permanent gallery or the store room. To replace the objects in the gallery, I helped choose another object from store room that fit the context and historic background of the original object. For instance, I have chosen a statue of Goddess Isis nursing her son Horus (Fig. 2) to replace a statue of her lower body that was displayed in the gallery. I have also chosen a set of Jericho juglets to replace a Jericho human skull, and designed how to layout the objects in the showcase, in which I decided to display the juglets in varying size that may look more attractive to visitors (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2 Choosing object for replacement



Fig. 3 Designing the presentation of objects for replacement

Moreover, I have drawn the floor plan of the temporary gallery with photos of walls that helps James for better conception of the gallery view in different directions, the size of walls and showcases.

- Database Management

Nicholson Museum uses KE Emu as its museum management system, which could manage artefacts with more end users in the museum. Curators need to update the object list in the database after objects have been chosen for exhibition. Regard to this, I helped update the object lists of the upcoming exhibition in Nicholson Museum, and in the new museum, which allows other museums staffs to take reference from it and help organize the exhibitions (Fig. 4).

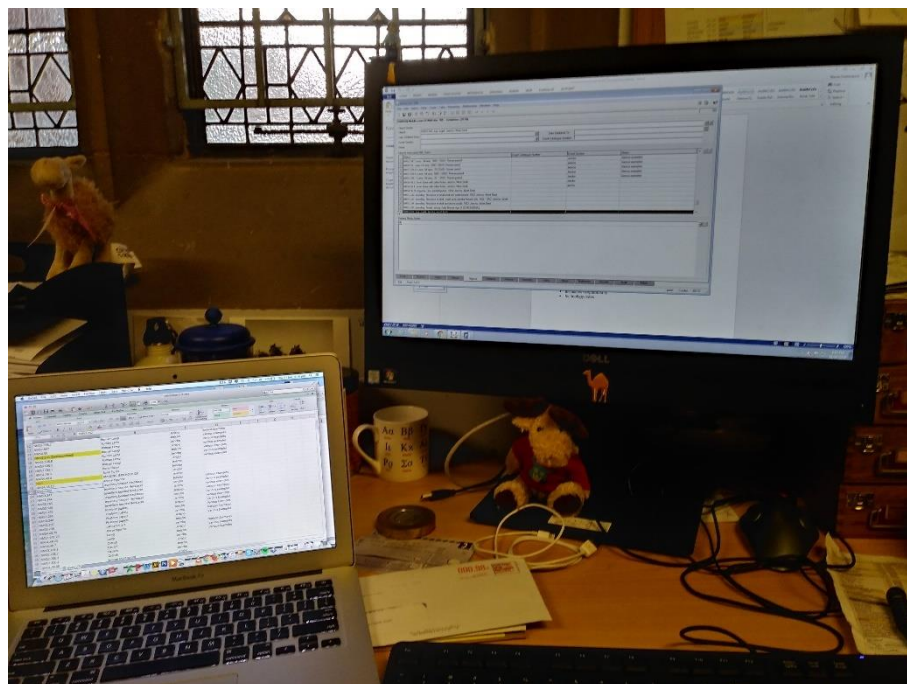


Fig.4 Updating object lists for upcoming exhibition in database

Besides, KE Emu is a visualisation tool that could hold images, video and audio resources for

every object. Nicholson collections has significant historic and archaeological values that attract many scholars to study. I have found some publications, from books, journals or thesis such as *The Mediterranean Archaeology*, that have mentioned the museum's objects but not yet been unreferenced in the database. To enrich the information of the objects, I then referenced the articles in database, and updated the historical notes and provenance if any. While most of the referenced bibliography had no digital attachment, in which I have uploaded the relevant e-books found from the Internet, and scanned books. I have also learnt to embed the metadata in digital images produced by the museum before uploading into the database.

- Public Education

James and Candace have to lead the free gallery tour every Monday afternoon, in which visitors would be introduced with the history of the museum and some highlights of the gallery collections. To gain more experience as a curator, I have run a gallery tour as well. I have chosen several objects from the gallery that I were interested and studied those objects. Although there were only 1 visitor joined my tour, we have discussed deeply on each object, and it lasts for around 35 minutes.

In terms of external affairs, James has been invited for talking in ABC radio (Fig. 5). He kindly invited me to go with him, in turn understand more about the role of curators in terms of public education. He also held lectures in different school and museums, talking about the mummies project of the museum and his excavation in Jordan. I was invited to follow him and sit for his lecture. It was interesting to see how curator interact with people outside of the museum, by gaining

networks with teachers and curators from other museums, which enables curators to fulfill their responsibilities of promoting the museum and educating general public through different channels.



Fig. 5 Watching James' live broadcast in ABC radio

B. Collection Management

- Object Movement

Objects in Nicholson Museum were frequently moved in and out for display, research or educational programme like Hands-on session. I often moved the objects with curator Candace. Through doing that, I have learnt more about the procedure of doing internal object movement in museum, such as to create a movement record in database before checking out the objects, and to relocate the objects afterwards. Also, it was learnt that the objects should always be carried on the trolley (Fig. 6), with two staffs doing the movement, so as to minimize the risk of breaking the objects.

Through engaging in the object movement, I have gained practical experience on object handling, and I have done numerous mistakes that allows me to learn from failure. For example, there was one time after moving back the objects to the store room, I was holding the objects and searching the correspondent shelf at the same time. However, it is always better to confirm the location of the shelf first, and make sure the shelf has enough space for the object to be stored, in turn reduce the risks of breaking and crushing with other objects on the same shelf. Despite of the big mistakes, Candace patiently explained the restriction and rules of moving objects to me, encouraged me to fix the mistake and learn from it.



Fig. 6 Moving objects from conservation lab to research room

- Stock-taking

Nicolson Museum stocktakes all the collections every 5 years. I was very fortunate to help Rachael, the Senior Museum Collections Officer, do stock-taking in the store room. Through the practice, I earned experience on how to physically handle the objects and how to catalogue the objects.

During the stocktake, objects of the same shelf were put on a trolley for checking the physical object number (Fig. 7). I helped read out the physical numbers, while Rachael would check whether the current location of the particular object has been recorded in the database.



Fig. 7 Moving objects from shelf onto the trolley

After that, I packed the parts of objects in bags if any, such as the rim sherds and body sherds of a pot (Fig.8). Sometime object was found untagged or unnumbered, we then created a new tag for it, wrote its registration number on the tag, and knotted the tag with the objects (Fig. 9). Taking part in stock taking was an invaluable opportunity for me to literally get in touch with every object that have not been displayed in gallery, which made me feel extremely excited.



Fig. 8 Packing parts of objects in bags with object numbers written



Fig. 9 Making tag and writing object number for untagged or unnumbered objects

- Physical number writing

Since the museum was decided to use new paper material for writing physical registration number on objects, collection managers and conservators have to discuss the characteristics of the new paper suggested and examined the paper together (Fig. 10). Although I have no opportunities to write numbers on real objects during the internship period, I was invited to join the meeting and learn the technique of physical numbering, such as the standardized way of writing number and dots, and simulating the process of sticking the paper on the object (Fig. 11).



Fig. 10 Testing the new paper material with Collection Manager, Maree Clutterbuck.



Fig. 11 Simulating the process of sticking the number-written paper on the object

- Re-housing

The museum was trying to rehouse all the bronze objects, to stabilize the storage through the creation of a storage mount and minimize the deterioration of objects. Though I did not have chance to take part in rehousing objects, the Collection Manager was so generous to answer all my question regards to rehousing, and allowed me to stand aside and observe (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12 Observing the process of rehousing bronze objects

- Conservation Assessment

I was honored to work with the museum conservator, Alayne Alvis, assisting her with conservation assessment in the store room of Art Gallery and Macleay Museum. Regards to the assessment, Alayne has checked the physical conditions of the chosen drawings and rated them in terms of the treatment duration estimated. I helped search the Conservation Report of all the chosen objects, in which the past treatment details has been recorded, for her reference.

Alayne was eager to teach me numerous conservational terms, as well as to analyze the drawing in view point of conservator. I have learnt to assess the drawings by observing their physical conditions such as the cracks and discoloration (Fig. 13) and learnt to analyze the painter in terms of the type of frame chosen and the sharpness of the painting stroke.



Fig. 13 Observing the cracks on the painting

C. Others

- Daily Operation

Everyday morning before opening, I helped unlock the doors, set up the security cameras, lightings, and laptops in the gallery. For the opening, we have to put the promotional boards at two sides of the museum, as well as the tables with books at the front door. For the closure, I helped get back all the boards, lock the doors, shut the security cameras, lights and laptops.

- Museum reception desk

Every visitor with any enquiry should ring to the front desk or speak to the desk, where volunteers were responsible to answer the enquiries. The front desk also performs the function of gift shop, where visitors need to pay for the souvenirs at the desk. However, sometimes there was no volunteer available for the shift, then I helped cover the desk. Most of the inquiries made were asking for public and educational programs, lectures to be held, or the location of toilets. Visitors have to walk pass the desk before entering the museum, which enables me to greet worldwide visitors, and it was lovely to talk with them.



Fig. 14 Covering the Front desk

- Staff Meetings

University Museums holds their regular meeting at the beginning of every month, with all the staffs from Nicholson museum, Macleay Museum, and Art Gallery of University reporting their works. I was invited to attend the meeting on July and August, as well as some general meetings on particular issue.

- Design

At the southern entrance of the Quadrangle, there was a noticeboard occupied by Nicholson Museum. To make the board more attractive to visitors, I have put the name “NICHOLSON

MUSEUM” with big font at the left corner of the board and decorated with artefacts’ images. I have also divided the board in sections: “What’s On”, “Muse Magazine”, “Museum Tour”, “Lecture”, and “In the News”, so as to display the museum information in a systematic way (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15 Redesigning noticeboard of the museum

- Translation

Chinese visitors have made up a major proportion of museums’ attendees as the Chinese tourism market matures. To make exhibition materials accessible to the Chinese visitors, I have created an information sheet featuring the mummies collection of the museum in both English and Chinese (Fig. 16), and translated the Visiting Rules, helping them enrich the experience in a way that transcends the barriers of language. When I was covering the reception desk, I often communicated in Chinese with Chinese tourists who cannot speak English, to ease their experience.



Fig. 16 Designing the information sheet for mummies collection, with Chinese translation

- Joining education programs

I was invited to join the Hands-on Sessions held by Education Officers with students (Fig. 17). Before it starts, I helped prepare the tools in education room. Through the participation, it enables me to observe the ways officers assist students in developing their archaeological sense and skills of analysis and interpretation.



Fig. 17 Drawing objects during the hands-on session

- Social media

Nicholson Museum uses Twitter to interact with general public, in which ‘Object of the Week’ is one of the post series featuring particular object or exhibition, encouraging public to use the Collection Search function in museum website. I have learnt the style of caption and audiences’ object preferences from Sarah Little, the Web and Social Media Officer, and tried to produce posts for ‘Object of the Week’, with captions and images, introducing objects from Egypt, Greek, Italy, Cyprus and the Middle East.

- Special Events

Nicholson Museum often hold evening lectures with champagne and food served. I was able to volunteer in the event, engaging the whole process from preparing food, setting up tables and

glass bottle, serving food, to cleaning up (Fig. 18&19). It was interesting to participate and observe how museum event was held and how the personnel were involved, as well as to understand the Australian food culture, and serving manner.



Fig. 18 Serving pies for evening lecture



Fig. 19 Serving desserts for evening lecture, photo taken with guest of lecture

Conclusion

It is my honor to work in Nicholson Museum, and get involved in various projects and events. Through this cherish internship experience, it broadens my horizon on how the museum parties collaborated with each other to support the daily operations of the museum.

Since the structure of the museum is relatively small than other governmental museums, every parties are closely related to each other that gave me many opportunities to work with staffs of different fields and did a bit of everything. I am surprised how complicated it is for an object to be chosen for exhibition, in which opinions from different parties like conservators should be considered. For example, Alayne, the conservator, shared that some drawings were not safe to move and display because of the old and broken frame embedded, while applying new frame may lower the historical values of the drawings, as the frame also represents the style of painter. Therefore, there will always be a certain compromise between curator, collection managers, conservator and exhibition designers in terms of safety and preservation.

Overall, all the staffs, volunteers and researchers were tremendously friendly, and passionate to provide guidance and support for me. Through talking with them, I am amazed by their enthusiasm towards ancient history, and appreciated their contribution on digging the truth of the objects. Furthermore, everyone has granted me a fulfilling cultural experience in Australia, such as inviting me to join afternoon tea and personal gatherings after-work. It was really an invaluable opportunity for me to work in the Nicholson Museum!