

'THE ABLEST AUSTRALIAN ANTHROPOLOGISTS'<sup>1</sup>  
TWO EARLY ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND OXFORD

ALISON PETCH AND JASON GIBSON



Figure 1. Howitt and Fison in Howitt's garden in Gippsland, 1887. Copyright Centre for Gippsland Studies pictures collection, Monash University Research Repository: <http://arrow.monash.edu.au/hdl/1959.1/71455>. Higher quality images are available in the online appendix.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotation from a letter from Francis James Gillen to Edward Charles Stirling in 1895, cited in one from Gillen to Walter Baldwin Spencer, 30 August 1895 (Pitt Rivers Museum [PRM] manuscript collections, Spencer papers, Spencer and Gillen correspondence, letter 10).

### *Introduction*

In the Pitt Rivers Museum manuscript collections, there is a series of letters between two key early Australian anthropologists,<sup>2</sup> Alfred William Howitt (1830-1908) and Lorimer Fison (1832-1907) (shown in Figure 1, a photograph taken in November 1887 in Howitt's back garden),<sup>3</sup> and two key figures in the development of Oxford anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) and Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929).<sup>4</sup>

This article will provide information about the Fison and Howitt resources in the Pitt Rivers Museum, including manuscripts, photographs and objects, as well as some information on wider resources elsewhere. These resources will be contextualized by accounts of their work and legacy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fison and Howitt's work was very influential and widely read in the nineteenth century, being mentioned, for example, by Peter Kropotkin, who described their 'capital work' (*Kamilaroi and Kurnai*) in his *Mutual Aid* (1902). Frederick Engels also referred to this publication in 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' (1884).

<sup>3</sup> Fison explains about this photograph to Tylor, 'You would enjoy a day or two with Howitt, & his delightful family at their pleasant residence. He & I were sitting outside the house—at least I was sitting there, & I grieve to say, smoking a short pipe). I had the Dieri MS in my hand, & we were discussing some point in it, when his three daughters—fine, sousy [*sic*], merry girls they are—came out with their landscape camera. "Here's the instrument of torture", said May, the eldest. "Now keep still, & be good." And they executed us before we well knew what was the matter. Next day they presented us with the result, neatly mounted, with "Kamilaroi & Kurnai" written under it in May's handwriting. I told her it was a lasting memento of man's long-suffering & woman's independence. She said she had had a great mind to call it the complete Trio, because her little dog Midge was sitting at my feet when we were taken, & completed the trio, "Kamilaroi, Kurnai, & Curr". ... He is only to be discovered by the aid of a lens, & the girls declare he is Curr present in the spirit with an expression of savage disgust on his ghostly visage, as he listens to the Dieri paper. They are going to print off a copy for your special benefit. I told them you would be glad to have one' (Fison 39, Tylor papers PRM ms collections, 23 November 1887). Howitt's daughters are making a pun on E.M. Curr, another Australian anthropologist, who disagreed publicly with Fison and Howitt's theories. It was not until this letter was matched with the only surviving copy of the photograph known to exist, at Monash University, that the background to the image was known. The photograph is included here by courtesy of the Gippsland Studies Pictures Collection, Monash University Research Repository: <http://arrow.monash.edu.au/hdl/1959.1/71455>. A second, different version of this photograph is shown in Stocking 1995: 21.

<sup>4</sup> Tylor was the first academic to be appointed to teach anthropology at a British university when he was made a Reader at the University of Oxford in December 1883. Spencer was instrumental in helping Tylor and Henry Nottidge Moseley move the Pitt Rivers collection from South Kensington Museum to Oxford in 1885, where it became the founding collection of the PRM. Spencer met Howitt, and then Fison, after he moved to Australia in 1887 to become Professor of Biology at Melbourne University. His discussions with them influenced the shape and form of his anthropological work with Gillen in central Australia and led the younger men to become the most feted Australian anthropologists of the nineteenth century (Mulvaney 1971: 311).

<sup>5</sup> This article is, in part, a by-product of the project 'The Invention of Museum Anthropology, 1850-1920: Scoping the Local Material Resources for an Intellectual and Practical History of a Global Discipline', supported by a grant from the John Fell OUP Research Fund (2012-2013) to Jeremy Coote, Curator and Joint Head of Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Alfred William Howitt was born in Nottingham, England, the eldest son of William and Mary Howitt, both prominent Quaker authors. He was educated in England and at Heidelberg in Germany. In 1852 he travelled with his father and brother to Melbourne, Australia, where they hoped to make their fortunes on the new goldfields of central Victoria. Two years later his relatives returned to England, but Howitt decided to stay, making his life thereafter in his adopted country. For many years he worked as a farmer, drover and bushman, gaining much experience as a 'backwoodsman' and a keen naturalist. Later he became an explorer and leader of expeditions, including the relief expedition for the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition.<sup>6</sup>

In 1863 he began a distinguished career as a magistrate and warden; from 1895 he was Commissioner of Audit and a member of the Public Service Board in Victoria. Outside of work he led a very active private life, travelling a great deal and carrying out private anthropological, botanical and geological research; he published many papers and books on a wide variety of topics. Howitt was very well connected in Australia, corresponding with a number of prominent figures such as the Lutheran missionary Otto Siebert.

Lorimer Fison was also born in England, two years after Howitt and the thirteenth of twenty children of a Suffolk farmer (see Fig. 2). He too left England (after a short undergraduate education at Cambridge University)<sup>7</sup> to seek his fortune in the Australian goldfields in 1856 (four years after Howitt had arrived). Following his father's death, Fison underwent what his *Australian Dictionary of Biography* [ADB] entry describes as 'a paroxysmic religious conversion at an open-air evangelical

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<sup>6</sup> Howitt was an accomplished bushman and had already conducted two successful explorations in the Alpine region of Victoria before he was selected in 1861 to search for whatever remained of the Burke and Wills expedition, including the other men from the failed Victorian Exploring Expedition. Today the role of Howitt in this rescue is not well known, but it was crucial to his development as an anthropologist. As well as finding the remains of Burke and Wills and the sole surviving member of the Expedition, John King (who had been kept alive with the help of the Diyari), Howitt visited parts of the continent that were unknown to Europeans at that time.

<sup>7</sup> 'In 1855 I entered at Caius College Cambridge, kept terms such as reckon for one year's residence, passed the College Classical and Theological Examinations and then left the University before the Mathematical Examinations took place and returned [*sic*] to Australia' (Fison writing to Morgan, 26 March 1880, quoted in Stern 1930: 428-9).

meeting'.<sup>8</sup> He was ordained a Wesleyan missionary and in 1863 left for Fiji. When not taking part in normal mission activity in Fiji, he took an active anthropological interest in the surrounding people. As the ADB puts it, 'Fison became the confidant and advisor of natives, officials and settlers alike in his seven years at the Viwa, Lakemba and Rewa stations'.

In 1871 Fison returned to pastoral work in New South Wales and Victoria, Australia. In 1875 he returned to Fiji until 1884 to serve as Principal of the Navuloa Training Institution, a Wesleyan training institution for Fijian teachers and missionaries. After four more years back in Australia working in the Melbourne suburbs of Hawthorn and Flemington, Fison retired from the ministry in 1888 and became a journalist and author. In 1904 he published *Tales from old Fiji* and edited the *Spectator and Methodist Chronicle*. He was a founder and one of the first fellows of Queen's College, Melbourne.

Fison and Howitt first met when Howitt was serving as a drover between the Murray and Melbourne (before 1859 according to Howitt's ADB entry). Fison had first become interested in formal anthropology when he had responded to an appeal by the American ethnologist, Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881), for information about kinship systems from around the world in 1869. He wrote an account of the Fijian and Tongan systems as a supplement to Morgan's book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity in the Human Family* (1871).

After he returned to Australia in 1871 Fison continued his anthropological interest and through the newspapers sought help in the study of Australian Aboriginal peoples. One of the people who responded was Howitt, and after 1872 they began to collaborate on a series of investigations into Aboriginal kinship, marriage, social organization and culture which culminated in their best known work, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, published in 1880. They dedicated this book to their first anthropological mentor, L.H. Morgan. After this Fison wrote about Fijian anthropology, including a treatise on Fijian land tenure, published in 1881.

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<sup>8</sup> The ADB entries for Fison and Howitt were both written by the Australian anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner. Stanner had originally intended to study at Oxford with Radcliffe-Brown but instead enrolled at the London School of Economics under Malinowski.

Fison's contributions to global anthropology were, to some extent, recognized in his lifetime. He was President of the Anthropological Section of the Hobart meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science [AAAS] in 1892. In 1894, at the behest of Baldwin Spencer (among others), he was one of the representatives of Australian science at the British Association meeting at Oxford, where his anthropological contributions were fully acknowledged. In 1906 he received a British government civil list pension of £150 per annum, at least partly in recognition of this anthropological work.

Howitt's anthropological contributions were more fully recognized, as perhaps befits a man who had been a public servant for much of his working life. The Royal Society of New South Wales awarded him the Clarke Memorial Medal in 1903. In 1904 the AAAS presented him the first Mueller Medal, and he was awarded an honorary doctorate in science by the University of Cambridge. In 1907 he was President of the Adelaide meeting of the AAAS. In addition, he was awarded a C.M.G. for his government service.

Fison and Howitt were not only collaborators but also close personal and family friends. Though Howitt was the most successful in a worldly sense, and much better informed about Australian Aboriginal culture and society, Fison was the globally and anthropologically better connected. They were equal, but different, partners.

#### *The Fison correspondence at Oxford*

In Box 11a of the Tylor papers of the Pitt Rivers Museum manuscript collections are a series of forty-seven letters and a couple of part letters from Lorimer Fison to Edward Burnett Tylor and one from Fison to Augustus Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers.<sup>9</sup> The correspondence with Tylor appears to have begun in June 1879 when Tylor wrote to Fison, via Sir Arthur Gordon, assuring Fison that the Anthropological Institute would

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<sup>9</sup> The full listing of all the letters from Fison to Tylor are given at <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/manuscripts/tylorpapers.html>, Box 11a. Many of them are transcribed in full at <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/primary-documents/primary-documents-index/411-fison-1-tylor-papers-prm> and <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/primary-documents/primary-documents-index/412-fison-2-tylor-papers-prm>.

be interested in receiving communications from him.<sup>10</sup> In his direct reply Fison made clear the methodology that he and Howitt had employed in their Australian anthropological investigations, where they relied largely on widespread local informants, mostly Europeans (Fison 2, 17 August 1879).<sup>11</sup> After the first letter, it seems that Tylor quickly realized that, just as Fison and Howitt used other informants to provide them with information from different parts of Australia, he could use them in turn as correspondents with whom to check and ask for new information.<sup>12</sup>

This correspondence followed that between the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan and Fison, which had itself begun in 1869. Indeed, in his first letters to Tylor, Fison expressed some concern that his existing relationship with Morgan might cause problems in his future relations with the Anthropological Institute in London:

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<sup>10</sup> Fison's first contact with English anthropology came earlier. According to Stocking (1995: 18), Fison had started collecting Fijian folk-tales, which his sister in Oxford had shown to Professor Max Müller of the University of Oxford. Tylor, who was then President of the Anthropological Institute, had apparently written to Fison via Sir Arthur (Hamilton-) Gordon (1829-1912), first Baron Stanmore, who was the governor of Fiji from 1875 to 1880.

<sup>11</sup> Howitt explained their methodology to his sister: 'A clergyman, the Reverend Lorimer Fison and I have undertaken the investigation of the system of kinship among the Australian aborigines and our mutual friend Brough Smyth has offered to get printed for us a lot of circulars ... We are now busy sending them out all over Australia and have written to all sorts and conditions of people ... sending circulars and asking for help and information ... I daresay five hundred people know of it by this time and five hundred shall also directly be communicated with before I have done ... I feel a particular interest in the success having invented the scheme and devised the method of analysing the result. But the work will be awful--Fison sent me one informant's batch of communications from one tribe and it took me three evenings hard work before I could turn "chaos into disorder"' (Walker 1981: 225-6). Two uncompleted and twenty-four completed questionnaires are in the Howitt Collection at the Melbourne Museum. Unlike Fison, Howitt also carried out his own anthropological fieldwork among local groups in the Gippsland area of Victoria, and some of his own data was incorporated into *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (Walker 1971: Ch. 17). Both Howitt and Fison were aware of the problems of questionnaire anthropology: not only did respondents not respond, but also it was 'simply impossible to get intelligent helpers who have a thorough knowledge of the dialect spoken by a tribe which is sufficiently numerous to be trusted as to its information. There are men who have the requisite intelligence, but they won't work. And there are uneducated men who would serve admirably as interpreters but who are incapable of conducting the inquiry independently' (Fison to Morgan 17 January 1879, quoted in Stern 1930: 273). Indeed, Howitt recognized that questionnaires were only suitable 'in default of a better opportunity for personal inquiry' (Howitt to Morgan 14 February 1881; Stern 1930: 436). Fison was also aware of some of the pitfalls of anthropological investigation in the field, remarking 'I never accept an account of any custom, even from a native, without further investigation ...' (quoted in Stocking 1995: 31-2).

<sup>12</sup> Fison had largely positive reactions to Tylor despite his loyalty to Morgan: 'I have a great—the greatest possible respect for Tylor as an authority on almost everything connected with savage life' (Fison to Morgan, 17 January 1879; Stern 1930: 273). It is notable that Stocking (1995: 23) attributes a very negative quote about Tylor to Fison, implying that Fison felt that Tylor used other peoples' work with inadequate compensation, but in fact it is clear from Stern (1930: 424-5) that Fison was in fact referring to Arthur Gordon, who was intending to publish his own book on the Fijians.

You are kind enough to assure me that my communications will be welcome to the Anthropological Institute. I have 'a sense of fear' that some things which I have to say may not be welcome to its President, whom I understand to be Sir John Lubbock. There are not a few statements in his *Origins of Civilization*<sup>13</sup> concerning tribes with which I am well acquainted, which are incorrect. And I have had occasion to say so in more than one place. Moreover both McLennan & himself have so discourteously attacked Morgan that I cannot help feeling towards them somewhat as a savage feels towards a man who has insulted his chief. (Fison 2)

Fison's fears turned out not to be true, and he corresponded with Tylor (and other members of the Anthropological Institute) for many years to come.



Figure 2. Lorimer Fison, from a *carte-de-visite* held by the Pitt Rivers Museum. It is possibly the photograph sent by Mrs Fison to Tylor in 1883. 2000.15.7. Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum.

<sup>13</sup> *The origin of civilisation and the primitive condition of man: mental and social condition of savages*, London: Longmans and Green 1870.

Some six months after his first letter, Fison wrote enclosing his paper 'on the customs of Mota', which had been published two years earlier by the Royal Society of Victoria.<sup>14</sup> Roughly a year and a half later, their relationship had grown so close that Tylor was thanked for reading the proofs of Fison's paper on burial customs in Fiji.<sup>15</sup> On 23 September 1881, Tylor showed how much he valued the information that Fison was imparting in his letters when he proposed 'to make up some sort of record out of extracts' from Fison's letters (then numbering at least sixteen in total).<sup>16</sup>

The correspondence not only provided a conduit for their professional collaboration, but also strengthened their friendship, a friendship which was exactly like one today between people who have exchanged many emails but never met. So important was this 'postal relationship' to Tylor that he even put a petition to provide Fison with free postage before the Colonial Office. As Fison remarked, 'if we can get the privilege of sending bona fide work without postage, it will be a great help to us. Hitherto our work has been very expensive, & we are not at all likely to remunerate ourselves by publication' (Fison 8, 1 March 1881).

Their personal relationship was strengthened by an exchange of photographs. The photograph that Fison's wife sent Tylor is shown at the start of this section of this paper. It is not known which photograph Tylor sent Fison but it elicited the following response:

P.S. I quite forgot to thank you for your photograph which is highly prized by me. I shall send it on to my wife, & it will have an honoured place in our album where Morgan & Howitt appear. I will tell her to send you one of mine, if she has one left.<sup>17</sup> Your carte is altogether different from the mental portrait which somehow or other had formed itself in my mind. I suppose one cannot even think of a fellow creature without a mental picture. You appeared to me as a tall man, of somewhat spare habit, cleanshaven face, mutton chop whiskers, dark brown hair, thin prominent nose, close set but 'flexible' lips, & a habit of inclining your head to the left. Why your imago took that form, & acquired that habit, I cannot explain. (Fison 31, 17 August 1883)

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<sup>14</sup> 'Notes on the customs of Mota, Banks Islands, by the Rev. R.H. Codrington, M.A. Oxford, with remarks by the Rev. Lorimer Fison, Fiji', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Victoria*, Vol. XVI, 1879, pp. 119-43. Mota is an island in Vanuatu (then known as the New Hebrides).

<sup>15</sup> 'Notes on Fijian Burial Customs' was published by the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 10, 1881, pp. 137-49.

<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately this report has not been identified.

<sup>17</sup> This photograph may be the second of those shown in this paper (PRM 2000.15.7)

Whilst their correspondence often seems to revolve around social customs: for example, in a letter written on 16 January 1880, discussing secret societies, ancestor worship, the role of 'priests', and inheritance, Fison also discussed the problems of anthropological methodology. In the same letter he wrote:

The more I learn of savage customs the more plainly do I see the necessity of unlearning our own notions as a preliminary to understanding the working of the natives mind. It is scarcely possible even to state their customs without conveying an incorrect impression, for our words are not conterminous with theirs in their meanings. We cannot—for instance—use the words 'God' & 'worship' with reference to savages without conveying to an Englishman's mind something different from that which is in the mind of the savage when he uses the words which we have to render by those. His idea of God is very far from our own, & he means by 'worship' something very different from that which we mean by it. (Fison 5, 16 January 1880)

Fison and Tylor discussed material culture even before Tylor got his job as Keeper of the Oxford University Museum (and might, therefore, have been expected to take an interest in such matters).<sup>18</sup> On 1 March 1881, for example, they discussed bullroarers (see Fison 8), and later in the same letter Fison discusses Fijian archery in some detail.

In March 1882 Tylor questioned Fison about 'message-sticks', and Fison pointed out that Howitt was 'the man' for such things and promised to pass his questions on (Fison 21, 3 March 1882). However, in the same letter Fison himself gave details about a Fijian nose flute he was trying to obtain for Tylor.<sup>19</sup> By this time Tylor had begun to work as Keeper at the Oxford University Museum, and some of the flutes (or drawings of them) Fison referred to appear to have been destined for these collections (see Fison 30, 26 July 1883). Eventually a flute did manage to reach Oxford and is illustrated in Figure 3 [1884.111.35].<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> It is not generally realised that the Oxford University Museum had fairly extensive ethnographic collections of its own acquired between 1860, when the museum was founded, and 1885, when the Pitt-Rivers collections was first received in Oxford. See, for example, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/articles/article-index/393-photographs-of-displays-in-the-oxford-university-museum>.

<sup>19</sup> The next few letters make it clear that Fison was generally unsuccessful in acquiring and transporting the nose flutes, with many potential specimens being lost or damaged in the post.

<sup>20</sup> This flute was previously undocumented and was believed to have been collected by Henry Nottidge Moseley or to have formed part of the founding collection (hence the accession number). However, it is

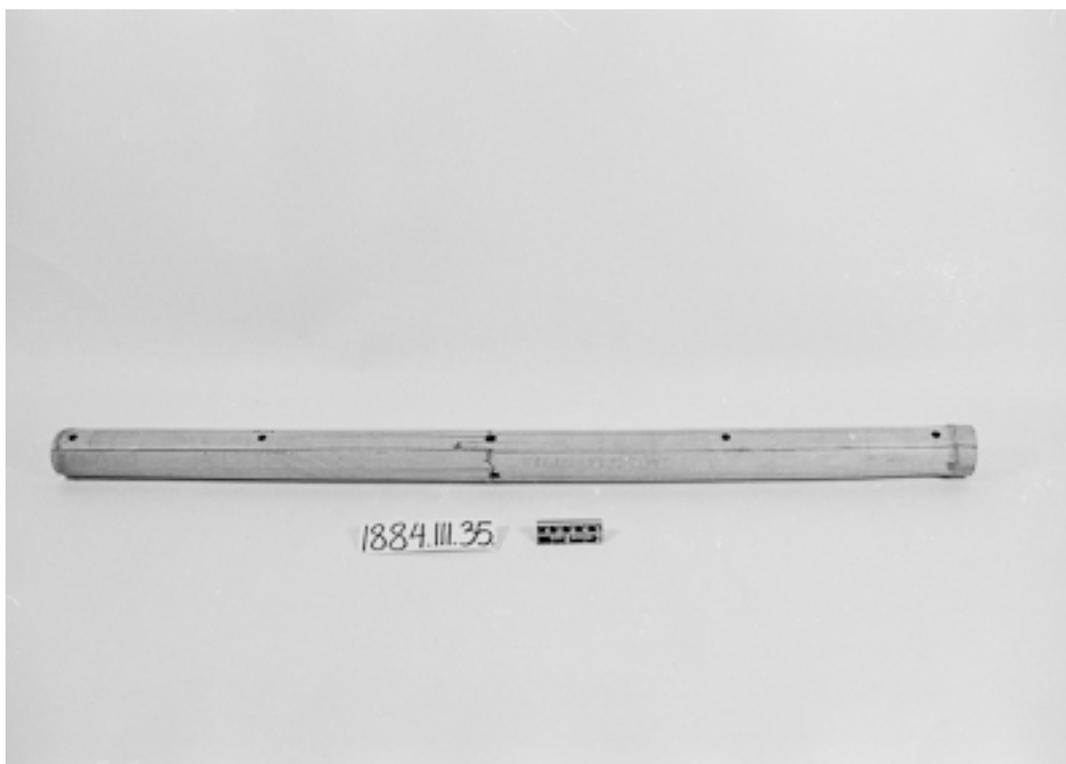


Figure 3. Fijian nose-flute sent by Fison to Tylor and donated to the museum. 1884.111.35. Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum.

At the same time as the above trumpet, Fison sent fish hooks from San Cristoval and a lime box and spoon from Ysabel, in the Solomon Islands, all of these items now being in the Pitt Rivers Museum.<sup>21</sup> Fison told Tylor that the objects had been collected by Captain Martin, from the mission ship *John Hunt* (Fison 31, 17 August 1883). Fison suggested luring further objects from Martin with the promise of attributing the donations to him.<sup>22</sup> Fison appears to have been modest about his knowledge of material culture, pointing out to Tylor that, 'So many things which I have supposed to be non-existent have turned out to be flourishing in full vigour under my very nose that I hesitate to say positively that such & such a thing is not' (Fison 21, 3 March 1882). However, the letters do attest to his experimentation with the material culture he collected for Tylor:

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now clear that, because of the name inscribed on the flute mentioned in Fison's letter, this flute was acquired by Fison and reached the museum via Tylor. See Fison 30.

<sup>21</sup> The fish hooks are PRM 1885.8.1-3; the lime box and stick are 1885.8.4 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately the bait does not seem to have worked, as there are no further items from him.

The Nanga trumpet has made its appearance, but I am not pleased with it, & will not send it on. It makes a great & terrible blare, but the artist has done the graven ornamentation so clumsily—or rather he has 'slummed' the work so shamefully—that I must get a better one made for you. I cannot get any sound out of it, though it roars you horribly under native lips. I observed that the blowers kept their cheeks fully distended, & pushed up compressed their lips in blowing. [...] This may help you in your endeavour to blow the better trumpet when it reaches you. If you are successful you will make a sensation at Oxford when 'the mournful blast of the barbarous horn' makes itself heard. (Fison 32, 30 August 1883)

These objects, and Fison's discussion of them, are the more valuable for their rarity: Fison is not associated with an interest in material culture. It is possible that he only became involved through Tylor's prompting, but his letters do record that he sent other Fijian artefacts to friends and family (Fison 21, 3 March 1882; Fison 30 26 July 1883). After Fison left Fiji for the last time, he wrote to Tylor:

Howitt told me some time ago you wanted Fiji weapons, instruments &c & asked me if I could send you some. There are none to be had now. Govt officials, & others, have cleared them all off, & the natives have taken to making inferior imitations for sale. At Rotuma I once saw a native making an 'ancient stone adze' by the help of an English grindstone. (Fison 36, 4 December 1886)

Presumably Tylor was soliciting items for the Pitt Rivers Museum, which did continue to receive Fijian objects, but from other sources. The two men also discussed physical anthropology: Fison agreed to find out more about the skull deformation that was carried out in Fiji (Fison 8, 1 March 1881; Fison 9, 30 March 1881).

Fison also acted as an intermediary between Tylor and other missionaries such as Robert Henry Codrington (1830-1922), a Melanesian Mission missionary who served throughout Melanesia and had previously been a fellow of Wadham College, Oxford. Fison passed Codrington's papers to Tylor for onward transmission to the Anthropological Institute, Tylor having, in effect, agreed to act as proposer (Fison 8). This was despite the fact that Fison had actually never met him: 'I am glad to hear that you are in personal communication with Mr Codrington. I have not had the pleasure of seeing him in the flesh, but his correspondence with me has given me a very high opinion of him, & there can be no doubt that he is the best informed of all men as to the Melanesian tongues' (Fison 33, 18 February 1884).

Another missionary for whom Fison acted as intermediary was Benjamin Danks, who was interested in the shell-money of New Britain. Fison first wrote to introduce him to Tylor on 4 December 1886 (Fison 36, 4 December 1886), when he explained at some length the information that Danks had found out about the exchange: 'I have asked Danks to send you a paper for the A.I. on the subject, & I will stir him up until he does what I want him to do'. Danks' work was published in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* in 1888.<sup>23</sup>

In return Tylor sent Fison many copies of books and papers to Fiji. Without this supply it is unlikely that Fison would have been able to keep up with current anthropological literature, not only because of the geographical distance involved, but also because of his poverty. It is interesting to reflect on the texts that Tylor felt were relevant, which included Henry Maine's *Dissertations on Early Law and Custom chiefly selected from lectures delivered at Oxford* (1883) and Tylor's own paper 'On the Tasmanians as representatives of palaeolithic man',<sup>24</sup> about which Fison commented:

Do you think it is quite safe to conclude that the Tasmanians had no handled hatchets because they used handstones? Some of the Australian tribes use them, but they put handles on others. The evidence of Tasmanian settlers is complicated. A man who had been a shepherd in Tas. before the gold discovery in Australia told me that a scar on his cheek was the result of a wound inflicted by a stone hatchet. He said it was handled with green rods bent over it, & fashioned by strips of hide, & gum, like some of the Australian hatchets. This, however, may have been made by an Aust. black. (Fison 44, 30 April 1894)<sup>25</sup>

Tylor arranged, with Spencer, to fund Fison's passage to England to attend the 1894 British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Oxford. This is the

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<sup>23</sup> A full transcription of this letter can be found at <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/primary-documents/primary-documents-index/412-fison-2-tylor-papers-prm>. Benjamin Danks, 'On the Shell-Money of New Britain', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 17, 1888, pp. 305-17.

<sup>24</sup> *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 23, 1894, pp. 141-52.

<sup>25</sup> Howitt was also asked about Tasmanian stone tools by Tylor. In 1890 he explained that he had 'no personal acquaintance with Tasmania but I have friends there to whom I will apply and I will bring the questions under notice at the Anthropological lecture of our Royal Society which will meet in almost a week. I will also [bring?] up the subject of handle-less stone implements here' (Howitt 24, 21 May 1890). Sadly he later reported that he had been unable to find out any information (Howitt 25, September 1890).

only time that Tylor and Fison are known to have met face to face.<sup>26</sup> Fison took full advantage of this, his only journey back to his native home country, visiting not only relatives but also the Pitt Rivers Museum, about which he remarked:

My very kind regards to Mr. Balfour. I am sorry indeed that I could not spend three or four days in the Museum. The one occasion on which I visited the galleries transported me into the seventh heaven. I forgot how the time was going, & that I had an appointment with Dr. Murray of the big Dictionary. That appointment was never kept. I was even unconscious of the pangs of hunger, & lost my lunch. I ought to have had a full week in those galleries, to say nothing of the ground floor. (Fison 47, 6 December 1894)

The last surviving letter (Fison 48) was dated 5 August 1895, and there the correspondence with Tylor apparently ended. However, the Pitt Rivers Museum manuscript collections also contain letters from Fison to Walter Baldwin Spencer.<sup>27</sup> One of these letters perhaps explains why the correspondence with Tylor ended:

What I wrote when I was in England & he being then in a parlous state raises a suspicion in my mind that Mrs Tylor may have something to do with that. I observed that she sat by us when we were talking, & supplied a word whenever Tylor was at a loss for one, which was of frequent occurrence, & a painful symptom of his malady, which I hear has come upon him again. I have given up writing to him, & have heard nothing from him for the last three years, excepting once—a few lines on a p-card. I think it most likely that Mrs Tylor does most of his thinking for him now. (Spencer papers Fison 5, undated but written before February 1899 from internal evidence)

Fison concluded in another letter, written in February 1899, that 'the real Tylor—is a thing of the past' (Spencer papers, Fison 1, 23 April 1893). It would be a decade before Tylor formally retired, but it is clear that as far as others were concerned his anthropological life was drawing to a close. His decline must have been episodic, however, for a later letter from Spencer to Tylor, dated 23 August 1906 (Spencer papers, Fison 7), reports that 'to my surprise I had a letter from Tylor written just in his old style. He sounded perfectly well & says that he is writing another look at primitive mankind which will be his last work'. Sadly this work was never to be completed.

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<sup>26</sup> See Fison 44-46 and also Spencer papers, Box 1 Fison 14-16, PRM ms collections.

<sup>27</sup> A transcription of some of these letters is available at <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/primary-documents/primary-documents-index/425-spencer-box-1-fison>

### **The Howitt correspondence at Oxford**

A total of 33 letters from Howitt are now held in the Pitt Rivers Museum, with two letters from his sister and a typed letter from Howitt to Andrew Lang dated 15 August 1899, a series of notes on bull-roarers (probably notes for use in the Pitt Rivers Museum together with the objects donated by Howitt) and three pages of rough notes by Tylor unconnected with the rest of the Howitt material.

In Howitt's first surviving letter, dated 21 November 1881, he reported that he had been requested by Fison to send some information to Tylor on 'the exceptional intersexual customs of the Australian Aborigines which are being brought under his notice in the Enquiries I am now making' (PRM ms collections Tylor papers, Howitt 2).<sup>28</sup> It is clear that Tylor had also asked Howitt to collect some 'bull-roarers' for him. Howitt reported that he had 'communicated with a number of my correspondents but I regret to say that up to the present time I have only procured one example, or to speak more correctly that one correspondent has procured one example (from Queensland) which is on its way to me'.<sup>29</sup> Howitt himself had collected some bull-roarers from the Kurnai, and he hoped to obtain others, but it was 'no easy matter to get them'<sup>30</sup> (Howitt 2).

It is clear that Howitt and his correspondents were aware that the difficulty of obtaining these artefacts was due to their secret-sacred nature, Howitt's correspondent making this clear by stating that 'the Blackfellow who gave it to him earnestly

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<sup>28</sup> This letter was sent direct to Tylor but refers to notes that were being sent separately via Anna Mary Watts (Howitt's sister).

<sup>29</sup> The 'bullroarer' from Queensland is 1917.553.461, recorded as being bequeathed by Tylor after his death in 1917 and described in the PRM accession book as 'bull-roarer, bribbun, swung at initiation ceremonies, Chepara tribe, south Queensland coast (south of Brisbane)'. According to Mulvaney (1970: 207-14), it was this object that Howitt produced to prove his 'credentials' with the senior men during the Jeraeil ceremony. Oddly enough it was this same bullroarer that was later 'whirled' by Tylor before members of the Anthropological Institute meeting in 1885.

<sup>30</sup> The Kurnai example may have been 1911.32.10, donated by Tylor when he left Oxford on his retirement in 1909 and described in the PRM accession register as 'Bull-roarer, "large Tundun", Kurnai, Gippsland, Victoria', and in the card catalogue as 'used in the jeraeil ceremony (initiation) or possibly 1911.32.11 or 1911.32.12 described as "2 Bullroarers, rukut tundun"'. All three are recorded as having been collected by Howitt.

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requested him to keep it from the sight of women and children' (Howitt 2). In the end Tylor received seven Australian 'bullroarers' from Howitt.<sup>31</sup>

Tylor continued to press Howitt for objects for the Pitt Rivers Museum. In 1900, for example, he wrote to ask for further stone tool specimens; Howitt replied that he had shown Tylor's letter to Walter Baldwin Spencer, then Honorary Director of the National Museum of Victoria, and that he (Spencer) would 'take steps to supply [his] wants' (Howitt 35, 7 September 1890). This is just one indication among many of the very close relationship that endured over several decades between Howitt and Spencer.<sup>32</sup>

A new departure for Australian anthropology occurred in January 1881, when Howitt reported on a European enabling of an Aboriginal people's ceremonial cycle in order to promote anthropological study:

My latest move has been, after consultation with my aboriginal friends here to send two messengers to the tribes east of Gippsland calling them to a ceremony of initiation in the Monaro tableland. I have in this 'taken the bull by the horns' in an unprecedented manner, but my two messengers seem to be no wise doubtful of success. I trust that the result will justify their confidence. [...] If I succeed I shall be present at the ceremonies early in April next. I mention this as I know that you take a kind interest in the work I am attempting to carry out here. (Howitt 3, 21 January 1881)

Howitt later reported to Tylor that he intended retaining some 'humming or roaring instruments' (that is, what he also called 'bull-roarers') for his use at this specially arranged initiation ceremony: 'I reserve them for the present. I am desirous of producing them at a meeting which the Blacks tell me they will certainly hold about the new year and nothing I could show them thereat would be of so much interest to them as these things' (Howitt 6, 23 August 1882). Howitt eventually sent the bull-

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<sup>31</sup> The Howitt collection at Melbourne Museum has a small number of objects collected by Howitt, including a number of Kurnai clubs and a small possum skin wallet collected at Coopers Creek (during the Burke and Wills relief expedition). The collection also contains manuscript material, some of the earliest wax cylinder recordings made in Australia and over 300 letters.

<sup>32</sup> Spencer had great respect and admiration for both Howitt and Fison, but he was probably closest to Howitt. They first met shortly after Spencer moved to Australia, and Spencer's letters to Howitt record an extremely close personal relationship until Howitt's death in 1908. Spencer kept a portrait of Howitt in his office at the University of Melbourne and, at Spencer's instigation, much of Howitt's research material ended up at the Melbourne Museum after his death. Howitt also seems to have liberally shared his research materials with Spencer. Spencer wrote an excellent paper about Howitt after his death in 1908, published in the *Victorian Naturalist*.

roarers to Tylor after June 1883 (Howitt 10 and 11 and 14, June and August 1883 and April 1884). The ceremony was held in May/June of 1883, and Howitt reported:

I mentioned in a former letter that I had sent my messengers to gather together the tribes in the southern coast of N. South Wales to meet me at the Kuruigal or Bunan. About two months ago I received a return message that they were assembling at Bega and I hurriedly prepared to go there. [...] However I found about a hundred collected and we held the initiation ceremonie [*sic*]. I ... obtained a great deal of most curious information. [...] I saw the old wizards dancing round the magic fire, round the figure of Daramulun cut in relief out of the ground; saw them doing their magical tricks of bring[ing] quartz crystals out of themselves; saw the teeth knocked out on a cleared spot in front of a tree marked with a figure of Daramulun ... and heard all the prohibitions made for the boys initiated 'under pain of death.' The ceremonie although abbreviated within the shortest limits took exactly 30 hours from the time we went from the camp with the boys until we returned to it with them again as 'young men.' I have obtained a full explanation of the whole ceremonie and I have carefully written down a detailed account while they are fresh in my mind. (Howitt 9, 4 June 1883)

Even immediately after the initiation ceremony Howitt had already decided that he needed to publish: 'I shall before long write out a paper & send to you on 'Australian Initiations' which will give you further particulars', and he duly accomplished this less than a year later.<sup>33</sup>

This ceremonial initiative by Howitt was a precursor to the more famous series of ceremonies arranged by Spencer and Gillen in the winter of 1896-7, the 'Engwura' ceremonies that formed the majority of those anthropologists' ground-breaking 1899 publication, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*. It may even have been Howitt who suggested to Spencer and Gillen that they might provide their financial support to enable the Engwura set of ceremonies to be held, though there is no surviving evidence that he ever made this suggestion. Gibson points out that references to Fison and Howitt formed a central part of Gillen's address to the assembled Arrernte elders soon after Spencer arrived at the Engwura, and it may be that he thought to refer to them so prominently precisely because they were influential in promoting the idea of the two younger anthropologists backing the Engwura series at that time and place (see Gibson 2013: 60ff.). The practice of sending Aboriginal 'messengers' to gather

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<sup>33</sup> 'On some Australian ceremonies of initiation', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 13, 1884, pp. 432-59.

dispersed people for the purposes of anthropological study continued and became common practice until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

It is clear from even the earliest letters from Howitt that Tylor had recruited him as one of his global informants. Tylor used these correspondents to provide raw data on topics which interested him. In 1881, for example, it is clear that fire-making was interesting Tylor, though Howitt was unable to provide information, as 'fire making apparatus has not been used in this district for at least 25 years' (Howitt 3, 21 January 1881).<sup>35</sup>

However, Howitt's reply to Tylor about fire-making does make it clear that he had long experience of anthropological research: 'at Coopers Creek the Dieri [Diyari] and Yantui-unta [Yandruwandha] obtained fire 20 years ago by similarly twirling a hard spindle in a small hollow in one end of their shields' (Howitt 3). A later letter gives even more evidence of Howitt's careful observation of material culture over a substantial period of time:

I shall also send you ... a firedrill as used by the Melbourne blacks (woi-worung). It is called Jeil-wurk ... The old man who gave it to me could produce fire in about a minute. [...] What is required is to press the drill downwards with sufficient force while rotating it. [...] The wood dust becomes ignited and falls down the notch onto the little cone of carbonised wood dust below. This takes fire and smoulders. A few minute shavings from the rest are cut off and laid on it and the whole carefully [?wrapped] up in the 'stringy bark' and gently blown into a flame. [...] You will find four holes at one end of the rest. Three of these were used when the old man showed me the process—one by the way was already used. The fourth hole opposite the others was the one in which I made fire with his help. The solitary hole further up is one which I used the other day for experimenting. [...] I obtained fire with ease ... If you can make your hands hard enough and adhesive enough not to slip down too quickly you can I am sure make fire come. [...] I have made a new hole ready for drilling and I send a supply of 'stringy bark' for use. (Howitt 7, 30 December 1882)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For example, in 1901 Spencer and Gillen again gathered groups at Telegraph Stations in return for food and commodities; in 1932 Norman Tindale sent a young T.G.H. Strehlow into the Western Desert to gather Pintupi people for anthropological and medical studies.

<sup>35</sup> Howitt lived in the relatively remote Gippsland region in the south-east of Victoria, where European influence was keenly felt. For a detailed explanation of the rapid expansion of Europeans in the mid-1800s across the state of Victoria, see Boyce 2011.

<sup>36</sup> See Howitt 6, 23 August 1882; Howitt 7, 30 December 1882. The Melbourne fire-drill is 1911.1.70, described in the PRM accession register as 'Prof. E.B. Tylor, ... Jan. - fire drill set, Woiworung (Wiranjuri), Yarra R., Victoria, Australia.' This fire-drill only came to the Museum after Tylor retired in 1909. As Howitt had only one Woiworung informant, it is highly likely that this fire-drill, and the descriptions regarding its traditional usage, came from a man commonly referred to as the last 'chief'

It is this kind of early research work which makes Howitt one of the first, and most interesting, of nineteenth-century Australian anthropologists.

It is clear from his letters that Howitt was a careful observer of Aboriginal culture and material culture and that this interest had begun very early in the 1860s, when he was still a backwoodsman and explorer. Writing to his sister in 1882, he remarked: 'I have a tremendous hankering after tent life ... I am sure that in some state of existence I must have been a blackfellow and have lived in a mimi on possum and grubs. I am sure it would be very nice to wander about in a blanket and eat everything one could get if one had not been spoiled by being civilised' (quoted in Skerritt 2011: 45).

Much of Howitt's early correspondence with Tylor related to message sticks (see Figs. 4, 5). Tylor's personal interest in these stemmed from his interest in the early development of writing. Howitt made his first reference to them in his second letter:

In the matter of message sticks I have been at work for a long time. I have secured some which I will send to you after I have made careful drawings of them for future use. I have not yet found one instance where the marks upon them convey any meaning by the blacks from ~~which~~ whom they have been obtained. They say the marks are only for ornament and that the 'stick' is more of a token to accredit the messenger. [...] Message sticks were not known to or used by the Kurnai. The messenger sometimes carried a boomerang, shield or spear as a token from the sender of the message. (Howitt 3)

As Fison later remarked, Howitt had:

... got blacks of his 'own people' to make message sticks, & has got others from trustworthy correspondents who set the blacks in their neighbourhood to make them. Howitt has made careful drawings of these sticks, with full explanations. (Fison 39, 23 November 1887)

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of the Yarra River and Melbourne area, William Barak. It may even have been this fire-drill which resulted in the incident, recorded by J.L. Myres over fifty years later, when Mrs Tylor could not prevent 'the conflagration when he demonstrated the fire-drill, and his long beard became entangled with the bow. Usually, however, he got no fire' (Myres 1953).

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It is clear from this letter and others that Howitt (and Fison and Howitt together) set their own research agenda. Rather than being influenced by what metropolitan 'armchair' scholars like Tylor requested, they made their own decisions about which parts of Aboriginal culture they felt to be crucial for study and how they should be investigated. Even their publications were produced to suit their own agendas and the messages they wished to disseminate, uninfluenced by the better-known anthropologists of their acquaintance, like Morgan and Tylor:

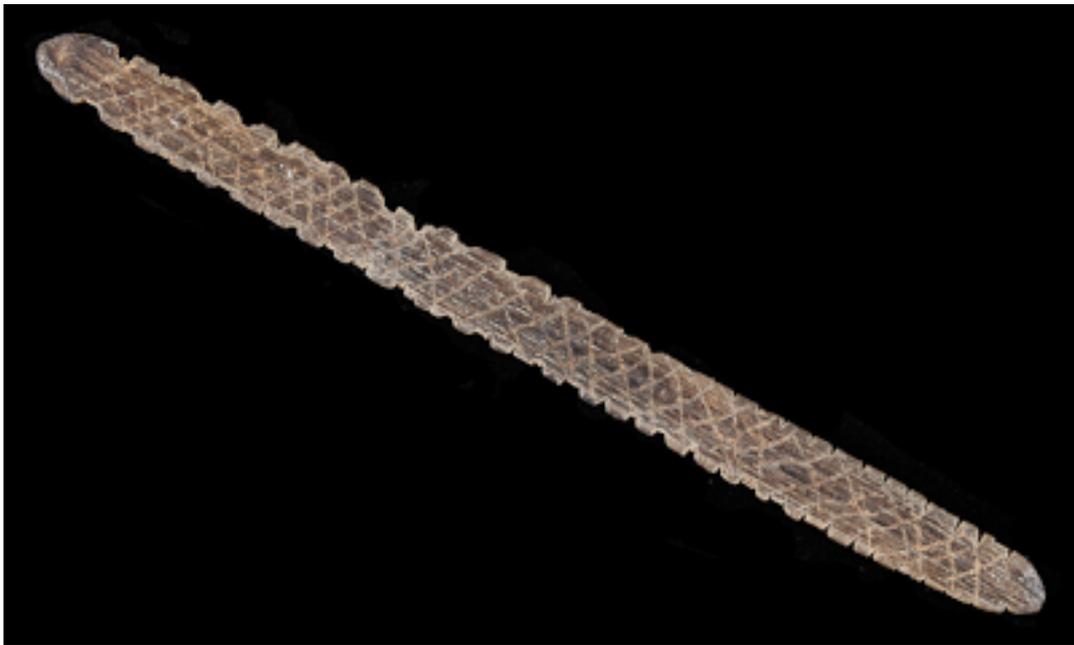


Figure 4. Notched message stick from the mouth of the Murray River. Collected by Howitt and sent to Tylor in June 1883. 1989.46.2. Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum.



Figure 5. Notched message stick from Diamantina River, Queensland. Sent by Howitt to Tylor in June 1883 and described as 'So far as I can learn the marks are the enumeration of men who are invited to attend the details being given by the messenger'. 1989.46.6. Copyright Pitt Rivers Museum.

[Howitt] asked me to tell you that he is preparing a paper for you on Message Sticks. He showed it to me as he has it now on the stocks, & I was delighted with it. You will find it to be done after his usual thorough & accurate manner ... The paper will prove conclusively that the message stick among the Aust. blacks is only an aide memoire. (Fison 39, 23 November 1887)

By 1888 Howitt had completed his paper about the sticks which he asked Tylor to present to the Anthropological Institute, sending it with several further specimens (Howitt 16, 21 February 1888).<sup>37</sup>

Howitt's primary interest was not, however, material culture but instead social organization or, as he called it, 'class systems'. Many of his letters to Tylor alluded to this interest, and one in particular dwelt on it at some length (Howitt 36, 10 August 1899). The length of this letter probably indicated that Howitt was better able to concentrate on anthropological matters after his retirement; at the time, he was writing his 1904 book, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*.

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<sup>37</sup> Published as 'Notes on Australian message sticks and messengers', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 18, 1889, pp. 314-32.

As with Fison, Tylor repaid Howitt's hard work on his behalf by mentoring his papers through the Anthropological Institute. In Howitt's case this went on for a long time; the first paper Tylor promoted was one on 'the Australian class system' in June 1882 (Howitt 4).<sup>38</sup> Howitt even came to depend on Tylor's work on his behalf in this regard, telling him in 1882 that:

I have several other papers in hand on 'Early migrations of Australian tribes', 'The Kurnai ancestor', 'Ceremonies of Initiation', 'Gesture language', 'Chiefs and Headmen', 'Messengers and Message sticks' which I will venture to trouble you with if you do not mind. I think it is well to adopt the means of 'Reporting progress' from time to time. If you will kindly order for me 50 copies of each paper I shall feel extremely obliged as I like to send papers to correspondents some of whom are thereby stimulated to more work. (Howitt 7, 30 December 1882)

Howitt even presumed on Tylor's support so far as to ask him to promote other Australians' papers at the Anthropological Institute, like one by a Mr Palmer of Parramatta, one of Howitt's regular informants, on some local groups.<sup>39</sup>

In 1890 Howitt decided to retire from Victorian public service:

I do not know whether I have mentioned that I have made up my mind to give up official life. I shall retire from office the end of this month and am intending to go to the sea coast at the Gippsland lakes where we have a home waiting for us and there I shall spend twelve months in completing my long contemplated work on the Australian aborigines. I have roughly drafted it and find that it will make five or six hundred pages, without new materials which I am still gathering from the tribes about Lake Eyre. (Howitt 35, 7 September 1890)

This work was *The Native Tribes of South-east Australia*, published in London in 1904 by Macmillan. It is possible that Tylor promoted this book with George Macmillan just as earlier James Frazer had sponsored Spencer and Gillen's first publication, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, in 1899 with the same publisher. Both books have become absolutely indispensable resources for contemporary Aboriginal people and Australian scholars more generally.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Notes on the Australian class system', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 12, 1883, pp. 496-512.

<sup>39</sup> This paper was published as Edward Palmer, 'Notes on some Australian Tribes', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 13, 1884, pp. 276-347.

## Conclusions

The letters from Howitt and Fison in Tylor's papers in the Pitt Rivers Museum are a vital record of an extremely important time in the development of anthropology as a separate discipline. Not only do they clearly show the agenda of metropolitan anthropologists like Edward Burnett Tylor, with his constant search for local (largely European) informants and correspondents; they also show, for Australia at least, the first faltering steps of a local form of anthropology. It is, of course, a pity that the corresponding letters from Tylor do not seem to have survived, but there is sufficient surviving correspondence worldwide to make a more in-depth study of Fison and Howitt well worthwhile.<sup>40</sup> As Stern said, Fison and Howitt were 'men of no little originality, who with much assiduity ... were primarily responsible for inaugurating ethnological investigations in Australia' (1930: 257). Their work, with its methodology combining intensive fieldwork and the distribution of questionnaires, may have been more influential on global modern anthropology than its metropolitan 'armchair' cousin.<sup>41</sup>

Fison and Howitt's work in Australia prefigured a long disciplinary involvement in social organization: they have long been recognized as early analysers of 'class' systems.<sup>42</sup> It is their long-term involvement in this analysis, in Howitt's case spanning nearly fifty years, that hints at their influence on the future development of their discipline. The effect that they had upon Spencer and Gillen, and the impact that they in turn had upon metropolitan anthropologists like Tylor, Frazer and Durkheim, would come to shape the future of social anthropology.

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<sup>40</sup> A full list of the surviving global resources relating to Fison and Howitt's work that are known about is available at <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/articles/article-index/415-fison-howitt-resources>. This includes their letters and other manuscripts held in a variety of Australian archives as well as the PRM, a small number of photographs (at the PRM) and objects (PRM, Museum Victoria).

<sup>41</sup> Both men were very conscious of the importance of direct fieldwork. Fison, for example, in a letter to Lewis Morgan dated 10 April 1879, said, 'I do not mean, of course, to maintain that travellers' statements are of no value whatsoever. The statements of fact which come under their notice are of very great value; but when they attempt to account for the facts and to draw conclusions from them, then they are almost sure to fall into error unless their knowledge of the tribes be sufficient to enable them to look at the facts from the native's standpoint. This knowledge is very rarely possessed by the passing traveler. I have indeed known not a few instances of men who had passed 20 or 30 years amongst savages without acquiring it' (quoted in Stern 1930: 420). Later he added on the same theme: 'After my fifteen years in Fiji, where I have been living among the natives and talking with them every day of my life, I find more and more cause to believe that I know comparatively little about them. It takes a civilized man 10 years to get out of his own mind world into that of the savage' (Letter to Morgan dated 14 September 1879, quoted in Stern, 1930: 424).

<sup>42</sup> 'Classes' today might be termed 'sections' and 'sub-sections'. The term 'classes' was used by Fison and Howitt, and later by Spencer and Gillen as well.

It can be argued that Howitt's awareness, in particular, of the insights that were afforded by personal, in-depth, in-field investigation can be said to have set the paths of anthropology firmly towards its future methodological destiny. As Morphy argued (1997: 23-50), Spencer and Gillen's work can be seen as prefiguring and setting the agenda for much twentieth century anthropological concerns, both in Australia and globally. It can therefore be argued that Fison's and Howitt's letters tell a story of the way in which anthropology grew out of a daily engaged encounter between interested observers and the surrounding population.

Howitt was certainly one of the first to engage in prolonged periods of anthropological fieldwork in Australia. Not only did he encourage others to conduct such fieldwork through the use of questionnaires (where he directed his informants' attention to ethnographic matters that needed attention), he also carried out such anthropological fieldwork himself. As Spencer and Gillen were later to do, he also promoted and supported specific ceremonial activities in order to record and analyse them. Like them, Howitt is also said to have claimed that he was regarded as a 'fully initiated member of the Kurnai tribe', though like Spencer and Gillen it is clear that he had not undertaken the full initiation rites (Stocking 1995: 20).

A lack of fluency in local language has been one of the things for which anthropologists like Fison and Howitt (and later Spencer and Gillen) have been criticized.<sup>43</sup> Fison definitely understood the importance of being able to speak Fijian during his early years there: 'I even accustomed myself to think in Fijian in order more fully to acquire the language' (Fison 8, 1 March 1881). Howitt also maintained vocabulary lists and had a sound knowledge of several Aboriginal languages (see, for example, his vocabulary lists held in several Australian archives, and also Stanner's ADB entry on him).

As Spencer and others were later to do, Howitt felt towards the end of his life that he was engaged in a form of 'salvage' ethnography, as he explained to Andrew Lang:

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<sup>43</sup> See Strehlow 1971: xxv-xxxiii.

I think that it is now quite too late to get any reliable information from Victoria, New South Wales, South Queensland and South Australia south of Lake Eyre. I speak with feelings of certainty because I know Victoria and I have lately written to a number of correspondents in the other colonies who all agree that it is now too late. During the last ten years the blacks especially the old ones have died off rapidly. The younger people who are now alive know nothing. (Howitt 36, Tylor papers, 10 August 1899)

Howitt, of course, was privileged to be able to consider his own much earlier anthropological fieldwork from the 1860s. Interested and involved people like Howitt, who were prepared to make records about the history of the encounter between European settlers and the Aboriginal groups in south-eastern Australia and of their traditional culture as they found it, provide an invaluable historical record for today.

Tylor, for his part, rewarded Fison and Howitt by promoting their work back in the metropolitan centre of London, for example, using his Presidential address to the Anthropological Institute in 1881 to exalt *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, when he remarked:

Though this is Mr Fison's first systematic work on the subject, he has long been engaged in its study. [...] Mr Howitt, is the well-known Australian explorer. [...] No man knows a savage's mind better than Fison does ... I have spoken at some length of this volume, regarding it as a new move in a discussion of early society which will lead us far before we have done with it. (Tylor 1881: 451-2)

It is interesting that Tylor appears to privilege his earliest informant (Fison) over Howitt, who was in fact the more closely involved fieldworker and appears to have contributed equally to the theorising. This may foreshadow the similar emphasis placed on Spencer as the lead partner over Gillen in the next generation of Australian anthropological double acts (Morphy 1997).

*Acknowledgement:* We would like to thank Madeleine Ding and Chris Morton of the Pitt Rivers Museum and Bronwyn Foott of Monash University for their help with the illustrations for this article.

*Note on figures:* Higher quality images are available in the online appendix.

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## APPENDIX 1.

### OVERVIEW OF ALL THE FISON AND HOWITT HOLDINGS AT THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

#### *Correspondence*

Between Fison and Tylor: 49 letters and miscellaneous manuscripts between 1879 and 1895 [Tylor papers, Box 11a]

Between Fison and Spencer: 26 letters dated between 1899 and 1902 [Spencer papers, Box 1C]

Between Howitt and Tylor: 38 letters and miscellaneous manuscripts dated between 1881 and 1890 [Box 12]

Between Howitt and Spencer: 35 letters dated between 1895 and 1903 [Spencer papers, Box 1B]

*Objects*

a. Fison

1884.111.35 Nose flute, Fiji.

1885.8.1-4 Bamboo lime-box and stick, Solomon Islands; three fish hooks from San Cristoval Captain Martin, Mission Ship "John Hunt" through Rev Lorimer Fison, Fiji.

(A total of 7 objects).

b. Howitt, mostly via Tylor either in 1911 (when he retired) or bequest after his death:

1893.30.1 A ceremonial shoe, Arrernte

1911.1.66-68 3 fire-drill sets of different woods, Queensland.

1911.1.70 Fire drill set, Victoria.

1911.32.10-12 'Bullroarers', Kurnai, Gippsland, Victoria.

1917.53.461 'Bull-roarer', Queensland.

1917.53.462 'Bull-roarer', South Australia.

1917.53.463 'Bull-roarer', Diyari.

1917.53.464 'Bull-roarer', New South Wales

1917.53.567-572: 6 engraved sticks. Victoria.

1989.46.1-11 'Message sticks' (A total of 33 objects in all).

*Photographs*

3 Victorian landscape photographs taken by Howitt or his daughter [2013.38.1-3]; 1 spirit photograph of William and Mary Howitt and spirit [2009.148.3]; 1 portrait of Fison (shown in this paper) [2000.15.7].

There are substantial holdings (mss and objects) from Howitt and Fison in Australia are listed at <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/articles/article-index/415-fison-howitt-resources> together with other resources.