

silent objects of admiration behind glass. Today this problem is far easier to solve than it was in Balfour's time. Thanks to his groundwork and Penniman's continuation of his policies, we do have some recordings which can be used to illustrate the collection. These will be supplemented with modern performances on instruments similar to those shown. Recordings can then be used in listening posts or as a background to slides.

Instruments that can be played by school parties or student groups will illustrate a well-documented display of this type. Obviously only the sturdiest of instruments would be suitable. One example of a complete scheme centres round the West Indian steel band. This is now familiar to everyone and is being used in schools. A steel band could be shown together with carnival costumes, making use of audio-visual equipment through which to illustrate the history of carnival. In the collection we have many costumes and masks which have never been shown together, and one or more of these could be used to illustrate the African roots of the West Indian custom.

It is vital that we bring this collection of musical instruments alive. If possible, in addition to the recordings in the galleries, we hope to be able to present lecture-recitals and public concerts and make the collection a real centre of the study of musical instruments. It would be tempting to allow the Museum's reputation to rest on the work of the past but we must also look forward to the next hundred years. A museum of ethnology is particularly relevant to our modern world. Today when the multi-cultural character of British society is most often seen as a problem we have the ability to show and make enjoyable its richness and diversity. Music and dance are international languages and through the enjoyment of them we may learn to take pleasure in other cultural traditions. England now, like Balfour's cases, incorporates all traditions, the Cotswold morris, the gaiety of West Indian carnival and the colour of the Chinese new year.

NOTES

1. Col. Lane Fox, *Catalogue of the Anthropological Collection Lent by Colonel Lane Fox for Exhibition in the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum, June 1874*, 1877, p.xi.

2. *Ibid.*, p.xii.

3. Henry Balfour, 'A Primitive Musical Instrument', *Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist*, Volume XI (1896), pp.221-224 at p.221.

4. Henry Balfour, *The Natural History of the Musical Bow*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1899, pp.1-2.

5. *Ibid.*, p.87.

6. *Notes and Queries*, 1929, p.2.

7. A.Baines, *Bagpipes*, Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum, Occasional Papers on Technology 9 (edited by T.K.Penniman and B.M.Blackwood) 1960.

DEBORAH B. WAITE

THE H.B.T.SOMERVILLE COLLECTION OF ARTEFACTS FROM THE SOLOMON ISLANDS IN THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM

I have a passion for curios. My collection... has now achieved [its] heaven in a museum. That is the true destiny of curios, but the realization of this fact does not immediately dawn on the young collector. When his cabin has become so choked with clubs that he is obliged to sleep on the deck, and when the spaces between the beams in the wardroom have become so crammed with long spears that meals are no longer endurable... the natural impulse is to pack them all up and send them home. If so, when the young collector follows his collection at the end of the commission, he must be prepared for disappointment. The precious and difficultly obtained spears, clubs, poisoned arrows, carved idols, and painted skulls, at first objects of horrified interest to his untravelled relatives, will now be found to have become... exiled to lofts or cellars and covered with dust.... The young collector will, therefore, find it more satisfactory to send his treasure, properly labelled, straight to a museum. There [the artefacts] will be perennially appreciated and displayed. There they may be hideous, and it will be gladly endured. They may be poisoned... the curator will cherish them.¹

So wrote Vice-Admiral Henry B.T.Somerville, a naval officer with a lifelong interest in collecting 'curios'. Somerville was born at Castletownshend, County Cork, on 7 September 1863. He spent the greater part of his life in the British Royal Navy with major tours of duty in the Pacific (e.g. Hydrographic Surveying Service in Australia and the Western Pacific, 1889-96, H.M.S. *Egeria*, 1897-1900), Persian Gulf (1902), and Indian Ocean

(Percy Sladen Research Expedition, 1904-7). Between his retirement from the navy in 1919 and his death in 1936, he wrote several books and papers on nautical subjects.²

During the latter parts of 1893 and 1894, the then Lieutenant Somerville spent eight months on the island of New Georgia in the Solomon Islands as an officer on H.M.S. *Penguin*, one of several Royal Navy ships involved in making hydrographic surveys in the Pacific. He collected over three hundred artefacts from New Georgia and neighbouring islands in the Solomon chain, which he later donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum (1895). Another corpus of artefacts from the Solomons which had been acquired by Admiral Munro of the *Penguin* were given by him to the Pitt Rivers in 1926, thus creating a substantial collection from this region. Somerville later presented the Museum with one hundred and sixteen artefacts from Vanuatu (New Hebrides Islands) (d.1893-1912).

This article focuses on Somerville's collection from the Solomon Islands for two reasons. Firstly, it surpasses, both in quantity and quality, his collection from the New Hebrides. Secondly, much of the material was documented as coming from specific regions of New Georgia, in particular, the Nggerasi, Marovo, and Roviana lagoons, thus increasing considerably our knowledge of the regional sources of artefacts from New Georgia. Aspects of New Georgia ethno-history are illuminated with surprising specificity in Somerville's unpublished notes and one published article on New Georgia.

The New Georgia group of islands, located in the Western District of the Solomon Islands, comprises one major island, New Georgia, and numerous other islands and islets (see map overleaf). The larger islands are volcanic in origin and two, Vangunu and Kolombangara, are extinct volcanic craters; other islands are coral atolls (e.g. Vona Vona). Chains of barrier reefs, small islands and islets enclose certain parts of the island group. One chain off the south coast of the main island of New Georgia shelters the Roviana Lagoon, one of the largest settlement areas in the islands. Another extends along the northwestern part of the main island (Nggerasi Lagoon) as well as the north and eastern coasts of Vangunu Island (Marovo Lagoon). Vangunu is situated directly east of New Georgia.

The island of Marovo in the Marovo Lagoon was headquarters for officers and crew of the *Penguin*. This small, hilly island

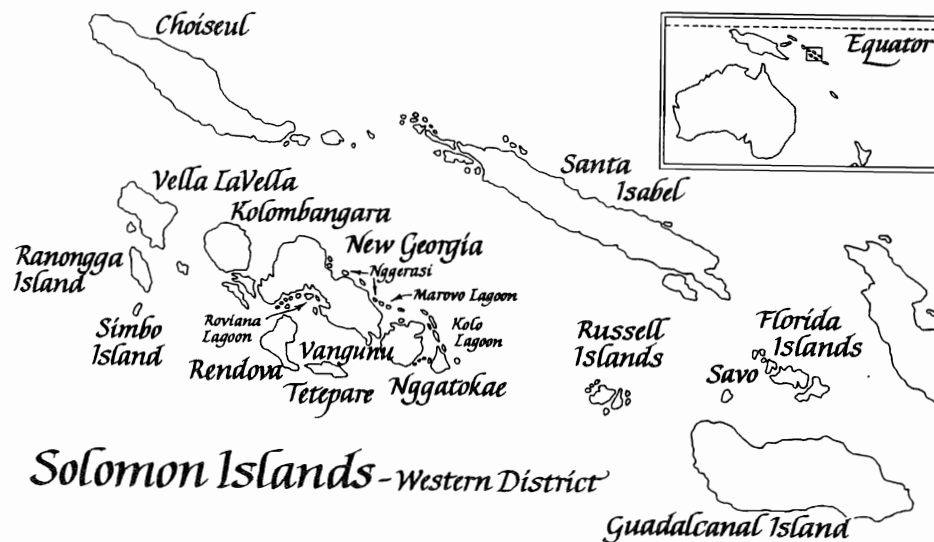
only slightly detached from the coast in the eastern lagoon... was in old times the most populous and agreeable to trade at of any of the places nearby, [and] was a good deal visited by traders and others. From this early communication it has given its name to all New Georgia on the older charts. It was in the vicinity of this part of the [island] group that I was encamped during three months of 1893 and five months of 1894, shifting from island to island in the lagoon, as I worked westward.³

'Westward' refers to the Nggerasi and Roviana Lagoons. Place names

mentioned in Somerville's notes and article indicate that the *Penguin* also sailed south along the islands and islets in the reef chain that parallels the west coast of Vangunu, extending from the Marovo Lagoon south into the Kolo Lagoon. Collection data for some of the artefacts indicates that the ship also stopped in the Florida Islands and at Uki Island in the southeastern Solomons.

Somerville described the people of Marovo in 1893 as having been sharply reduced in numbers as a result of head-hunting raids from the Roviana Lagoon. Between *circa* 1885 and 1893, he estimated, the number of Marovo inhabitants dropped from five hundred to 'considerably less than one hundred'.⁴ Wars undertaken for the sole purpose of securing heads had ravaged the New Georgia Islands, Choiseul, and Santa Isabel Islands for an undetermined period of time, and, by 1893 were in the process of being quelled by the British who, in that year, had established a Protectorate in the Solomons. Somerville apparently supported the suppression of head-hunting, fearing that the Marovo people, in particular, would otherwise be completely wiped out.⁵ Somewhat ironically, the production of many of the artefacts seen and collected by Somerville, i.e. the large head-hunting canoes, canoe carvings, war shields, and weapons, was directly stimulated by the institution that was being eradicated.

The large assortment of artefacts which Somerville acquired in his eight-month stay on New Georgia includes wooden figures, canoe carvings, fish-net floats, personal ornaments, apparel, musical instruments, shields, weapons, a large 'miscellaneous' category that contains artefacts in the process of manufacture and tools used in artefact production, as well as samples of



materials and dyes. Most of the items are from New Georgia, but there are exceptions, notably three shields from Guadalcanal, a canoe prow figurehead and approximately twenty other objects from Florida, five wooden bowls, a wooden mortar, and two canoe house-posts from Uki Island. Many of the items are documented as to provenance, with the information carefully inscribed on the objects themselves in some cases.

Fish-net floats and canoe carvings constitute one of the more remarkable categories of objects obtained by Somerville. Their significance is partly aesthetic but partly due also to their collector's documentation which includes provenance, use, and in several instances indications as to the nature of the images represented. Somerville obtained his information through personal inquiries in the field, for the most part. He was not a trained anthropologist, but he learned the Marovo dialect or, at least, that was the dialect that he best understood and evidently used in obtaining information about the artefacts.⁶

Eight wooden net-floats, all from the Mungeri District, Marovo Island, Marovo Lagoon, belong to the Somerville Collection. Originally, they were attached to nets used in turtle-fishing and were described by Somerville as 'lumps of wood with a *debbleum* (spirit) kneeling or squatting on them. Occasionally they assume a conventional form which is called *pepele* or "butterfly".⁷ As a group, the floats comprise a representative sample of traditional imagery that recurs on net-floats in other collections which lack specific provenances, e.g. two floats acquired on the 1865 voyage of the ship *Curacoa*.⁸ These include: a standing anthropomorphic figure with prognathic face, seated anthropomorph with bird head, paired anthropomorphic half-figures represented back-to-back, birds with anthropomorphic heads, and butterflies. Somerville collected names for each type except for the standing anthropomorph: the butterfly is *Papele*; the figure with bird-head is *Kesoko*; paired addorsed half-figures are referred to as *Kopala*; and the birds with anthropomorphic heads are called *Palao* and *Chingga*. Detailed information is available only for *Kesoko* (cf. canoe carvings); the other names are not explained. The butterfly is the only image that does not appear on floats in other collections. It occurs in two different forms on the Somerville floats: one is a fairly detailed and specific representation; two others are abstract conceptualizations of paired butterfly wings (Plate 1). 'This is, I am aware, an extremely conventional butterfly, yet that is without question, for I have asked at several times at several places what it is intended for.' [Museum Label]

Canoe ornaments in the collection belong to five different types. The first comprises four flat openwork carvings, 54-78cm. tall, that constituted extensions of the canoe prow peak.⁹ Each features a seated profile anthropomorphic figure whose head is replaced by the image of a frigate bird (Plate 2). Surfaces are adorned with low relief designs including the *barava*, a triangle with serrated base edge that appears also on net-floats and other carvings (e.g. Plate 1 and Type 2 below). Red, blue, yellow, black, and white paint are used on these carvings - a variegated colour scheme that contrasts

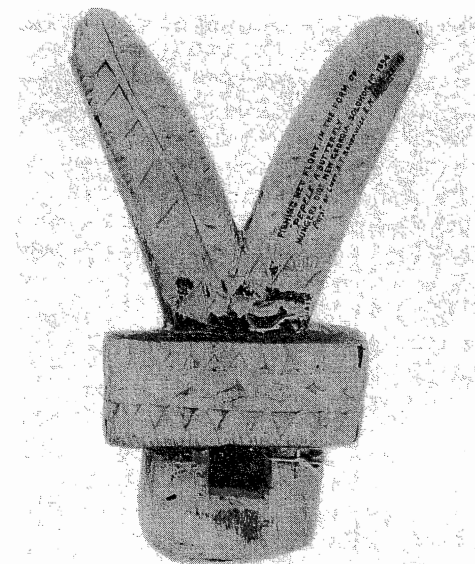


Plate 1. Fish-net float, Mungeri District, Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia. H. 18 cm.

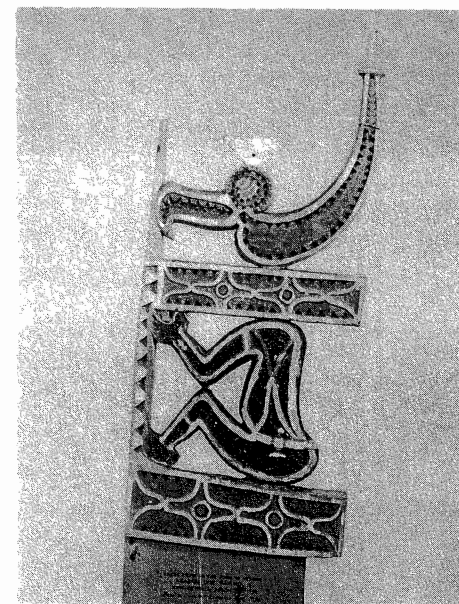


Plate 2. Kesoko canoe ornament, Ramada Island, Nggerasi District, New Georgia. H. 78.7 cm.

sharply with the more customary black and white tones of art from the New Georgia area.

Somerville obtained canoe ornaments of Type 1 from a small island, Ramada, in the Nggerasi Lagoon. Three more examples of this type now found in the Pitt Rivers Museum were collected on the *Penguin* voyage by Admiral Munro. Labels for the carvings and Somerville's article on New Georgia identify the anthropomorph with bird replacing head as *Kesoko*, described in myths as a bird-like creature who fished, had the capacity to command the waves and cause storms, and was also a headhunter.¹⁰ The representation of *Kesoko* on canoes apparently served an apotropaic function.

Three canoe carvings, also rendered in flat low relief (Type 2), consist primarily of a large spiral into which anthropomorphs or crocodiles have been incorporated. Like the first type, these canoe carvings (20-40cm. l.) appear to have constituted extensions of the flat upraised canoe prows; they were also painted with the same colours. Two of the carvings bear the label 'Munggeri District' (Marovo Island); a third is attributed to Simbo Island located to the southwest in the New Georgia group.¹¹ Another carving in the group was donated to the Pitt Rivers by Admiral Munro.

Four carvings from the Marovo Lagoon (35-47cm. h.) constitute a third stylistically homogeneous group (Type 3). They, too, are flat open-work carvings and depict the anthropomorphic head (two examples) or full figure. Heads of the figures are outsize in proportion and are distinguished by inverted U-shaped skull extensions with central perforation as well as long dangling ear lobes (Plate 3). One of the full figures stands and the other sits with outspread legs; both have laterally-raised arms. Black paint and white pearl-shell inlay decorate these carvings. The two full figures are described by Somerville as '*Hope Ta Ponda*':

I could never get an actual name for this figure, and he is best expressed as I have done, signifying 'sacred thing belonging to Ponda', Ponda being the presiding good spirit over all. [Museum Label, Plate 3]

Canoes in the New Georgia Islands, as well as the neighbouring islands of Choiseul, Santa Isabel, and Florida, shared one carved ornament in common: a small (10-22cm.) prognathic anthropomorphic head fastened to the canoe bow just above the water line (Type 4, Plate 4). The images usually comprise the head, shoulders, and upraised arms of an anthropomorph with lower face extended forward (prognathism) and a skull that may be extended in height - pointed in some examples, rounded in others. Somerville acquired four figureheads: two from the Munggeri District, Marovo Island, one from the Nggerasi District, and one from Halavo on the south coast of Florida Island. Somerville provides the first detailed documented reference describing the function of canoe prow figureheads, namely to

keep off the *Kesoko* or water fiends which might otherwise cause the winds and waves to upset the canoe, so that they



Plate 3. Canoe ornament, Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia. H. 39.4 cm.



Plate 4. Canoe figure-head, Ramada Island, Nggerasi District, New Georgia. H. 16.2 cm.

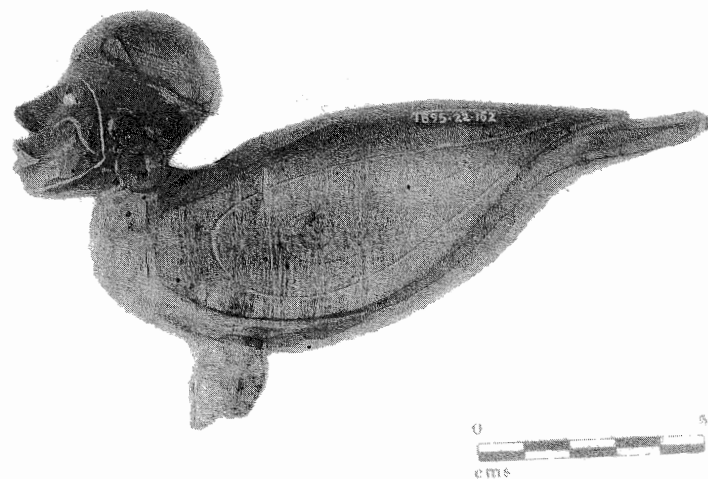


Plate 5. Canoe ornament, Mungeri District, Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia.
H. 42.7 cm.



Plate 6. Canoe prow carving, Nggerasi District, New Georgia. L. 15.7 cm.

might fall on and devour its crew.¹²

The fifth group of canoe carvings constitutes a group only in that they are three-dimensional carvings which, according to Somerville, were attached to or set in the bows of canoes. One consists of a butterfly, 12.5cm. in height; another small carving (15.7cm. h.) depicts a bird with anthropomorphic head (Plate 5). The former is labelled New Georgia and the latter Munggeri District, Marovo Island. A drawing in Somerville's article identifies one bird with anthropomorphic head as a spirit named *Kiriri*, but the same image represented on fish-net floats is differently titled.¹³

A third free-standing image that was 'placed in the bow of a canoe' has significance because of what Somerville recorded regarding its manufacture. The figure, an anthropomorph holding a turtle (Plate 6), was obtained in the Nggerasi District but was 'carved by bush-men of Kusake [Kusage], west mountain district of New Georgia and sold to Huava men of Ngarasi [Nggerasi] District [Museum Label].' This bit of information may indicate that the production of at least some wooden images may have been a speciality of certain peoples who sold them to others in exchange for special products of the latter. Somerville refers to several villages or regions that were centres of production for shields, bark-cloth, baskets and shell ornaments.¹⁴

One was 'Bili' (Mbili), a village on the small island of Minjanga located north of Nggatokae Island in the Kolo Lagoon. When the *Penguin* crew came to camp at Mbili, they found that the village had been deserted after the death of its 'chief'. It had evidently been a centre for the manufacture of *Tridacna* clam-shell armbands (*hokata*). Somerville obtained samples from each stage of the production process for *hokata* from Mbili, which he donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum. He recorded seeing fish-net floats at Mbili as well as an architectural housepost but he did not remove them.¹⁵

Seventy-eight personal clam-shell, pearl-shell, and woven fibre were collected by Somerville from the Marovo Lagoon, Nggatokae Island, and other unspecified areas of the New Georgia Island group, as well as Santa Isabel, Florida, Malaita, and Uki. In addition to clam-shell armbands for both adults and children, the collection includes two types of clam-shell pendants: one is the ring-shaped *eringi* and the other the triangular *barava* (both from New Georgia). The *barava* is represented as an ornamental design carved in low relief on the surfaces of canoe ornaments and fish-net floats. Pearl-shell pendants are among the most aesthetically outstanding pieces in the collection (Plate 7). Basically crescent-shaped, they may incorporate paired spirals or frigate bird heads.

Space does not permit detailed consideration of other categories of ethnographica in the Somerville collection: weapons, shields, containers, musical instruments, baskets, and objects such as fire-tongs and tweezers. Two final examples should be mentioned, their significance lying in the combined features of aesthetic merit and relevant recorded documentation. One is the wicker battle-shield. Five elliptically-shaped wicker shields made of concentric coils of cane are included in the collection. They represent two distinct types: one, from Guadalcanal Island, is elliptical in shape, rounded at



Plate 7. Pearl shell pendant, Savo Island. W. 11.6 cm.

both ends, and only slightly wider at the bottom than the top. Three shields belong to this type. The other (two examples) is elliptical but pointed at the top and was produced in New Georgia. Both are ornamented with black linear designs, those rendered at the bottom of the shields resembling stylized frigate bird wings.¹⁶ One of the shields from Guadalcanal bears short lengths of red, white, and black beads attached along the painted areas; a special palm leaf case exists for this shield. The shield was

made by bush natives of Guadalcanal. These were chiefly valued as 'possessions' and are used for the purchase of wives, etc.... This is a brand new shield just as it came from the native manufacturers in the bush of Guadalcanal. [Museum Label]

Two bamboo water scoops are among the most elaborately ornamented examples of material culture in the collection. Each consists of a cylinder of bamboo (19-22.7cm. h.) from which a U-shaped area approximately two-thirds of the total length has been removed on one side. Remaining surfaces are carved in very shallow relief with images of frigate birds, displayed anthropomorphic figures, and *barava*.

A man goes into the water knee deep with this instrument

and by scooping the water with it in a peculiar manner it makes an odd sound said to attract fish to the spot... others often stand ready with rod and line to catch the fish thus attracted on the spot. [Museum Label]

This article has placed an obvious emphasis on artefacts that have considerable aesthetic value. One factor in determining this choice was the desire to stress Somerville's own interest in these matters, so unusual for his day. Nineteenth-century explorers in the Pacific rarely recognized the artistic merit of artefacts or the existence of artists. Somerville was exceptional, especially for a young Navy officer with, as he admitted, no training in anthropology or art. He wrote:

Although there is no system of drawing which in any degree exhibits an idea of 'writing', the arts of drawing, sculpture, and ornamentation are wonderfully common in New Georgia. In any village one man at least can always be found skilled as a carver; but the majority seems to be possessed of this faculty in a moderate degree.¹⁷

He still referred to the islanders as savages and deplored the 'poverty' of iconography, absence of perspective and 'no idea of drawing from nature.' His standards were clearly European, and he seemed pleased to record that the islanders enjoyed looking at his European drawings. Prejudice and ambivalence notwithstanding, Somerville's recognition of local artistic merit was, for the period, highly unusual and constitutes one of the more remarkable features of the man. The collection reflects his interests in art as well as many particulars of ethnographica, and therein lies its value.

NOTES

1. H.B.T. Somerville, *The Chart-Makers*, Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons 1928, p. 155.
2. The published works of Somerville include: 'Ethnographical Notes on New Georgia, Solomon Islands', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. XXVI (1897), pp. 357-413; *Ocean Passages for the World. Winds and Currents*, London: The Hydrographic Department 1923; *The Chart-Makers*, Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons 1928; *Commodore Anson's Voyage into the South Seas and around the World*, London and Toronto: William Heinemann 1930; and *Will Mariner: The True Record of an Adventurer... by Vice Admiral Boyle Townhend Somerville*, London: Faber and Faber 1936. His unpublished notes are on deposit in a notebook labelled 'Anthropological' in the Royal Anthropological Institute, London.
3. Somerville, 'Ethnographical Notes', p. 360.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 399.

5. R. Poignant, *Observers of Man: Photographs from the Royal Anthropological Institute*, London: Royal Anthropological Institute 1980, p.16.
6. Somerville, 'Ethnographical Notes', p.360.
7. *Ibid.*, p.374.
8. See D. Waite, 'Art and Ethnographica from the Solomon Islands in the Museum of Mankind', *British Museum Yearbook 3: Captain Cook and the South Pacific*, London: British Museum Publications 1979, pp. 199-239; at p.230, figure 139.
9. See E. W. Elkington, *Savage South Seas: Painted by N.H. Hardy*, London: Black 1907, p.98.
10. Somerville, 'Ethnographical Notes', p.384; G. Beti, 'Kesoko Pature', *Journal of the Cultural Association of the Solomon Islands*, Volume V, 1977, pp.40-46.
11. P. Gathercole, A. Kaeppler and D. Newton, *The Art of the Pacific Islands*, Washington: National Gallery of Art 1979, p.231:15.12.
12. Somerville, 'Ethnographical Notes', p.371.
13. *Ibid.*, p.380; see also above.
14. Somerville, 'Ethnographical Notes', pp. 361, 364, 373-374.
15. *Ibid.*, pp.364,389; *Unpublished Notes*, p.14.
16. *Ibid.*, p.374.
17. Somerville, 'Ethnographical Notes', p.377.

MICHAEL J. HITCHCOCK

THESIS RESEARCH AND COLLECTING: A FIELDWORKER'S VIEW

Sir Edward B. Tylor took particular interest and delight in the ethnological collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum,¹ but he perceived the study of material culture as merely one of many departments in the wider subject of anthropology.² During the first two decades of the twentieth century British scholars interested in material culture, who were known as ethnologists, '... tended to be more preoccupied with things than with people'; nevertheless, behind the study of objects there remained an interest in the people who made them.³ It was clear that while ethnological specimens might be objects of intrinsic interest worthy of study in their own right, they might also reveal much about the societies whence they came. Sturtevant was later to emphasize the role of ethnological specimens as an important primary source and indeed argued that '... artefacts also have advantages over written records of behaviour and belief in being concrete, objective, difficult to distort, and little subject to personal or ethnocentric bias'.⁴

If ethnological specimens are to be worthy of scholarly attention above the level of mere curiosities and possibly, as was suggested by Sturtevant, as an undistorted source of information, then their manner of acquisition must be open to investigation. If they are to be used as a source, then the scholar needs to know in what way the specimen records the ethnography and whether it is representative; and, since it is impossible to accept Sturtevant's claims of objectivity for the material record, whether personal prejudice on the part of the collector influenced the selection of specimens.

Field collecting is one of the methods by which anthropological museums and departments acquire ethnological specimens, and yet it is a subject that has been sparsely mentioned in the specialized literature. In his *Guide to Field Collecting of Ethnographic Specimens*, Sturtevant argued that the best collections were usually those made during the course of fieldwork by anthropologists interested in both artefacts and the local ethnography;⁵ but he did not give