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THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM:—  
FRAGMENTS OF ITS EARLY HISTORY.

By R. ETHERIDGE, JUNR., Curator.

(Plates xviii.-xx.)

I.—INCEPTION AND TITLE.

It is currently believed and officially stated that the Australian Museum was inaugurated in 1836, and under that name was consolidated by the Hon. Alexander Macleay<sup>1</sup>, Colonial Secretary (Pl. xviii.) Certain it is, however, the Museum was a "going-concern," a small one certainly, but still in existence, some years before 1836.

With whom the idea of establishing a Museum originated it is very difficult to say, for the only person known to us by name was Mr. A. M. Baxter,<sup>2</sup> Attorney General in 1828, with an anonymous writer "U," in the "Australian Quarterly Journal of Theology, Literature and Science," in the same year.

Through the courtesy of Mr. H. Wright, Librarian, Mitchell Library, my attention was drawn to the following paragraph in the "Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser" of June 28th, 1828:—

"The Attorney-General (A. M. Baxter, Esqr.) is resolving on ways and means to start a Museum in the Colony. Nothing could be more easy, if the learned gentleman would only follow up his laudable scheme with that patriotic spirit of which we all know he is so liberally possessed. In such a quarter of the globe as ours, it is a disgrace that we have not long since had a Museum formed. We trust Mr. Baxter will not be contented, until his purpose in this, as well as in every other praiseworthy enterprise, is happily effected."

<sup>1</sup> Macleay, Alexander—Born 24th June, 1767, Co. Ross, Scotland. In 1795 became Chief Clerk, Prisoners-of War Office; in 1797 head of Department of Correspondence of the Transport Board, and its Secretary, 1806-18. In 1825 arrived in Australia as Colonial Secretary, and resigned office in 1836. From 1843 to 1846 was the first elected Speaker of the Legislative Council under the Constitution Act; died in Sydney, 19th July, 1848, in his 81st year—(Fletcher, Macleay Mem. Vol., 1893, p. vii.)—In all early official documents the family name is spelt M'Leay, not "Macleay" as in general use. It is so written in one of the earliest Museum publications—"Catalogue of the Specimens of Natural History, etc., in the Australian Museum," 8vo., 1837, being the first name on the list of those forming the Committee.

<sup>2</sup> Information is required regarding this gentleman.

From the next quotation to be made one is led to believe that Mr. Baxter's "laudable scheme" must have been under official consideration some time before. In the Mitchell Library is a document:—

"Schedule of Fixed Contingent Charges payable from the Colonial Revenue of New South Wales to be substituted for the Schedule of the said Charges of the 1st April, 1827."

This document formed portion of:—

"Despatch No. 89, dated at Government House, Sydney, 10th September, 1832,"

from Governor Sir Richard Bourke (who in the meantime had succeeded Governor Darling), to the Right Honorable Lord Viscount Goderich. Under *Colonial Museum*, in this Schedule appears the following:—

"Specimens of Birds and other Subjects of Natural History, originally granted 30th March, 1827."

A Museum, therefore, was evidently resolved on as early as 1827, the dates speak for themselves, and furthermore, it was referred to as the "Colonial Museum."

In the "Australian Quarterly Journal of Theology, Literature and Science," No. 1, for January, 1828, edited by the Rev. C. P. N. Wilton,<sup>3</sup> appeared a very flowery worded article:—

"Suggestions for the Establishment of an Australian Museum" (p. 58.)

These "suggestions" it will be noted antedate Mr. Baxter's "laudable scheme" by nearly six months. In the course of the article the author wrote as follows:—

"The foundation of a Museum for the reception and public exhibition of the natural productions and curiosities of Australia, could not but raise her in the estimation of the world at large,

<sup>3</sup> Wilton, Charles Pleydell Neal, M.A. of St. John's College, Cambridge, Member of the Ashmolean Society of Oxford, Chaplain of Newcastle, 1831-33—Was not unknown to science. His principal contributions were:—"An Account of the Burning Mountain in Australasia, called Mount Wingen," etc.; "Geology of the Goulburn and the Hunter"; "Sketch of the Geology of six miles of the South-East Line of the Coast of Newcastle," etc.; "New Species of Encrinite," found by him on the coast. Doubt exists as to what his "Encrinite" really was. Notwithstanding the adverse views of high authority I cannot divest my mind of the opinion that this object was a Comatulid. If so, Wilton has the honour of first noticing the occurrence of this group on the coast of New South Wales, or possibly that of Australia.

while it would excite her to further efforts to maintain and increase that good opinion and respect which such a measure would produce. . . . The materials for furnishing a Museum are so abundant, particularly in Natural History that in much less time than would be necessary to erect a building for their reception a collection could be made equal in number and more interesting from novelty than anyone in existence: and that at a comparatively trifling expense . . . A building should be erected on a plan, which would admit of, and be adopted for future enlargements and additions, as the funds of the Museum would allow, composed of a centre and wings. The centre should be of an elevation that would form a complete edifice in itself, but be so constructed as to admit of wings being hereafter added, which could be connected with the main building by a colonnade. . . . Care should be taken to secure sufficient ground to enable the future supporters of the Museum to increase it from time to time, by forming three other sides of the square, so that the whole when complete would form a regular quadrangular building presenting on every side a uniform elevation, . . . A portion of the building might, with very great propriety, be applied as a public Lecture-room, in which Lectures on any subjects connected with science could be delivered. It would likewise contain room for a Public Library—an institution at present much wanted, and which will be still more so" (pp. 61-64).

Who was the author of this article? I regret to say I have been unable to ascertain and it is signed with the initial letter "U" simply. Two points at once strike one in connection with this very remarkable article:—(1) the general scheme of a quadrangular building was that ultimately adopted in the erection of the Australian Museum; (2) with the exception of "Fixed Contingent Charges" of 1827, already mentioned, for "Specimens of Birds and other Subjects of Natural History," this article would appear to be the earliest public notice of a project to establish a Museum, at any rate it is the earliest I have been able to find.

When the old documents and papers in this Museum's archives were examined and sorted a few years ago, by good luck was found a most valuable one, and of which the following is a verbatim copy, with erasures and corrections as in the original. From this paper, which carries us to 31st Dec., 1837, it is abundantly clear that a Museum of some kind was established between the years 1827-9.

Statement of the Expenditure on account of the Colonial Museum from the 16th June, 1829 to the 31st August, 1835 showing the respective Votes of Credit made by the Legislative Council for that Department.

EXPENDITURE.	AMOUNT.			VOTES OF CREDIT.		AMOUNT.		
16 June 1829 to 31 December 1830—				No Votes for these years	...	200*	—	—
Salaries ... ..	200	6	10					
1 Jany. to 31 December 1831—				No Vote for this year	...	200*	—	—
{ Salaries ... ..	£84	7	7					
{ Contingencies ... ..	£37	10	0					
No Expenditure in 1832—				Voted for the year 1832	...	200	0	0
Fuel & Light ... ..	1	18	1					
No expenditure in 1833	—	—	—	Voted for the year 1833	...	200	0	0
16 Jany. to 31 December 1834—				Voted for the year 1834	...	200	0	0
{ Salaries ... ..	£37	15	11					
{ Contingencies... ..	£52	17	2					
Decr.	72	2	6					
1 Jany. 31 <del>August</del> 1835—Salaries ...	<del>15</del>	<del>12</del>	<del>10</del>	Voted for the year 1835	...	200	0	0
	206	6	7					
1 Jany. to 31 Decm. 1836 ... ..	<del>166</del>	<del>19</del>	<del>5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub></del>	1836	...	200	0	0
1 Jany. to 31 Decm. 1837 ... ..	227	12	3 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	1837	...	200	0	0
	£ 428	10	4			£ 800	0	0

† The Balance £109 6 11 Un-appropriated of this Vote has been cancelled having been deducted from the excess of the General Expenditure for that year.

~~969 11 9~~  
£920 16 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>

Audit Office, Sydney,

~~2nd November, 1835~~

7 June 1838

\* These two entries in the original are in pencil.—R.E.

There is in existence a curious old incomplete work, published in Sydney in 1835:—"Journey to the Australian Alps," by a learned scientific Pole, Dr. John Lhotsky, termed by Mr. G. B. Barton, in his "Literature of New South Wales," 1866, "an eccentric personage." At p. 57 Lhotsky wrote:—

"It was under the administration of Governor Darling that a Museum was very judiciously founded";

then follow quotations (as under) of Voted Estimates, which are curious to say the least of it, and at the same time supplies us with an early custodian title, that of "Colonial Zoologist."

"COLONIAL ESTIMATES VOTED."

"1831 (for 1832). No detailed expenditure is to be found. But a salary which was voted in 1833 was beyond doubt also voted at an earlier period."

"1832 (for 1833). Colonial Museum, Colonial Zoologist	...	£130
Purchase of specimens, etc."	...	70
		<hr/>
		200

"1833 (for 1834). Colonial Museum, Colonial Zoologist	...	£130
Purchase of specimens, etc."	...	70
		<hr/>
		200

"1834 (for 1835). Towards the support of the Colonial Museum £200. The latter item is a mere shift, in consequence of the voting of a salary to a dead man, having been commented upon at a Public Meeting, etc."

The details of expenditure given by Lhotsky were purely of a second-hand nature on his part. As:—

"Estimate of the probable expenditure of the undermentioned establishments forming a Charge on the Treasury of 'New South Wales'"

for the years 1833-34, amongst the establishments mentioned was the "Colonial Museum." The above "Estimate" may be found in the "New South Wales Calendar and General Post Office Directory" respectively for 1833 (pp. 249, 266) and 1834 (p. 261), and it was from this source that Lhotsky no doubt derived his information.

This 1833 volume of the "Directory" contains the following reference (p. xv.) to the Museum in an article devoted to a "Sketch of the Colony":—

"A great improvement is daily taking place in the outward condition of several ranks of society. . . . For the general reader

there are a Subscription and two Circulating Libraries ; for the Scientific, lectures in Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, etc., and a Museum, which must ere long rise into importance for the innumerable wonders of the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms of this great Southern Land."

The 1835 appropriation for the Colonial Museum given in "Abstract of the Revenue of the Colony of New South Wales, etc., for the year 1835"<sup>4</sup> was only £72 Os. 0d. which coincides with the expenditure given in the old document here printed *in extenso*, although the Credit Vote was set out £200 Os. 0d.

Just how long the title of "Colonial Museum," and just when the official change took place to that now borne by the Institution, we do not at present know for there is a slight discrepancy in the records. For instance in the "New South Wales Calendar," already referred to for 1835 (p. 371) occurs the expression :—

"Miscellaneous Services--Towards the support of the Australian (!) Museum—£200."

yet in the same publication for 1836 (p. 313), the name "Colonial Museum" is again reverted to.

The first volume of the old Minute Books of the Museum, under date of "June 7th, 1836," opens with this heading :—

"Minutes of the General Committee of the Australian Museum and Botanical Gardens."

There is also in existence a letter from the then Colonial Secretary (Alexander Macleay), dated "Colonial Secretary's Office, 5th April, 1836," relative to past financial matters of the Colonial Museum, of which more anon. It is, therefore, possible that the change of title took place between 5th April and 7th June, 1836.

But here enters the discrepancy previously referred to, for it was on 8th June, 1836, at a meeting of the Museum Sub-Committee that the first definite official proposal to change the appellation of the Institution was made, so far as I have been able to ascertain. At the meeting in question it was resolved :—

"That the Museum should be named the Australian Museum."

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<sup>4</sup> Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council during the Session 1836.

this resolution to be submitted to the "General Committee" for approval, but just when it was approved the old minutes are silent. Henceforth however, throughout all the minute books, the expression used is that of "Australian Museum." As bearing on this there is in existence a letter from the Honbl. E. Deas Thomson (who succeeded the Honbl. Alexander Macleay as Colonial Secretary), dated "2nd May, 1842" re claims against the "Colonial Museum," but addressed to "The Committee of the Australian Museum." From the appearance of the term "Australian Museum," in the "New South Wales Calendar and Post Office Directory" for 1835 (p. 371), previously referred to, it would seem to indicate that the change of title had been in contemplation before the meeting of 8th June, 1836.

The General Committee referred to exercised control both of the Museum and Botanical Gardens, and was divided into two Sub-Committees, one for each. Although Mr. J. J. Fletcher<sup>5</sup> has furnished a list of the Museum body, it may not be out of place to reproduce here the names of the gentlemen, who, no doubt at considerable sacrifice of their leisure, and purely in an honorary capacity, controlled the early destinies of the two budding establishments, as follows:—

GENERAL COMMITTEE.	SUB-COMMITTEES.	
	Museum	Gardens
Honbl. Alexander Macleay ... ..	X	X
Sir John Jamieson ... ..	—	X
Capt. [Adml.] P. P. King, R.N. ... ..	X	—
William Macarthur ... ..	—	X
John Vaughn Thompson ... ..	X	X
George Porter... ..	—	X
Honbl. Edward Deas Thomson ... ..	X	—
R. A. Wauch ... ..	—	X
[Sir] George Macleay ... ..	X	—
Capt. C. Sturt... ..	X	—

<sup>5</sup> Fletcher—Macleay Mem, Vol., 1893, p. ix.

In the "notification" in the "N.S. Wales Government Gazette" of June 15th, 1836,<sup>5a</sup> of the establishment of this governing body, it is termed:—

"A Committee of Superintendence of the Australian Museum and Botanical Gardens."

with the personnel as above.

Whatever connection the Honbl. Alexander Macleay (Pl. xviii.) had with the inception of the Australian Museum, there can be no doubt of his long and lasting interest in the establishment; the old minutes prove this.

From a remark of the venerable Dr. G. Bennett it would appear that the Honbl. Alexander was the originator.—He said:—

"The commencement of the public Museum is excellent; and Science, I believe is indebted for it to the Honourable Alexander Macleay, Colonial Secretary."<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Fowles, in his book "Sydney in 1848," etc. (4to 1878), referring to the Museum, speaks of Macleay as the first "President," in 1836 (p. 83).

## 2—EARLY CUSTODIANS.

It has always been another article of faith that the first Curator was Mr. William Sheridan Wall, but such was not the case. The first occupant of that post was Dr. George Bennett; the second, the Rev. William Branwhite Clarke, the "Father of Australian Geology" (Pl. xx.)

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<sup>5a</sup> Vol. vii., No. 226, 1836, p. 451.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett—Wanderings of a Naturalist, etc., 1834.

It is, however, necessary to retrace our steps a little. In the first place who was the custodian of the "Colonial Museum" the institution to contain the "Specimens of Birds," etc., provided for in Sir Richard Bourke's despatch already referred to; and who was the "Colonial Zoologist"? Lhotsky answers these questions:—

"It was under the administration of Governor Darling, that a Museum was very judiciously founded in Sydney, and the situation of Colonial Zoologist was given to Mr. W. Holmes, who died at Morton Bay in August, 1830. However, the salary continued to be voted, as appears by the following account of Colonial Estimates Voted" (see details p. 71).

Evidently, therefore, the first custodian was known as the "Colonial Zoologist" in the person of Mr. W. Holmes, certainly until 1830. I have quite failed, I regret to say, to obtain confirmation of Lhotsky's statement, or any further information regarding this gentleman. What happened during the period, August, 1830 to April, 1836, is not very clear, but in a letter dated 5th April, 1836, the Colonial Secretary (Alex. Macleay) wrote to the "Superintendent" on a matter of salary—now the gentleman in question was that eminent naturalist, Dr. George Bennett<sup>7</sup> (Pl. xix.)

Dr. Bennett seems to have had several titles, for Fowles, in the work already quoted (pp. 83-4) says that when the collections were housed in a small room of the Legislative Council, at the commencement of the Institution's career, Bennett was known as the "Director."

Apparently throughout 1832-35 the position of "Colonial Zoologist" was unfilled, for in the "Estimates of the probable

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<sup>7</sup> Bennett, George, M.D., M.R.C.S.E.—For a brief notice of this keen Naturalist see "Proceedings of the Linnean Society, Nov., 1893-June, 1894," p. 27. It appears to be very little known that in addition to his well-known works "The Gatherings" and "The Wanderings," Dr. Bennett wrote an important "Report on the Epidemic Catarrh, or Influenza prevailing among the sheep in the Colony" (*N.S. Wales Calendar, etc. for 1836*, pp. 224-254; repeated in *Ibid.*, 1837, pp. 224-254).

expenses," given in the "New South Wales Calendar" for those years, no mention of anyone by name is made, simply the title "Zoologist" is used; in the 1836 volume (p. 313), however, occurs the following:—

"Colonial Museum—Zoologist, George Bennett, Esq., Surgeon, F.L.S. and Z.S."

When the title of "Curator" first came into existence, there is at present no definite evidence to show, but by inference it was previous to 1841. I base this opinion on an important entry in the Minutes of 4th Aug., 1841, and which indicate that Dr. Bennett did enjoy that title, if only for a brief period. The entry in question is as follows:—

"A letter was read from the Colonial Secretary approving in the name of H.E. the Governor of the appointment of the Rev. William Branwhite Clarke, M.A.<sup>8</sup> to be Secretary *and* Curator in the *room* of G. Bennett, Esq., resigned, from 1st July, 1841." (The italics are mine).

Now the position that Bennett resigned was that of Curator, for Clarke was already then Secretary, as proved by another Minute-book entry of 2nd Jan., 1839:—

"The Rev. W. B. Clarke, Secretary."

in his own handwriting, and furthermore, he was paid a salary, details of which are given on more than one occasion. But the title of "Secretary" was in use before this, there being a letter before me from the Colonial Secretary, dated 29th June, 1838, addressed to "The Secretary, Australian Museum." This dual position of Clarke's is confirmed by a statement to that effect in Tegg's "N.S. Wales Pocket Almanac and Remembrancer" (p. 153).

From these extracts I think we may conclude that the first actual Curator was Dr. Bennett, the second, the Rev. Mr.

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<sup>8</sup> Clarke, William Branwhite, M.A.—For notices of this eminent gentleman's career see Barton "Literature in New South Wales," 1866, p. 165; Heaton—"Australian Dictionary of Dates," 1879, p. 39; Etheridge—Geol. Mag., v. (2), 1878, p. 379. Heaton gave as Mr. Clarke's second name "Branthwaite," but the correct rendering is as above.

Clarke, relegating Mr. W. S. Wall<sup>9</sup> to the third place in succession. I have been unable to ascertain when Mr. Clarke relinquished the position and Mr. Wall assumed the title. In the Minutes of 8th June, 1842 there is a Sub-Committee record of:—

“Mr. Wall the Preserver.”

doing some collecting.

At the meeting on September 12th, 1845, the retirement of Mr. Clarke from the position of paid Secretary was announced. The entry reads:—

“It being observed to the Meeting that by the retirement from that office of the Rev. W. B. Clarke, the Committee were without the assistance of a Secretary, Mr. Lynd<sup>10</sup> at the general desire of the Meeting expressed his readiness to act as Honorary Secretary.”

The entry following the above is of equal interest because it definitely indicates Wall as the Curator at this date (12th Sept., 1845). It reads:—

“The Curator laid before the Meeting a large collection of prepared specimens recently made by his brother, Mr. T. Wall, in the interior of the Colony” etc.

After the 1st Nov., 1843, there is a hiatus in the Minutes, and no entries between that date and 12th Sept., 1845, when regular meetings were resumed.

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<sup>9</sup> Wall, William Sheridan— Was eighteen years in the Public Service of New South Wales; his connection with the Museum was severed in December, 1888, when he retired on a small pension. His “History and Description of the skeleton of a New Sperm Whale, lately set up in the Australian Museum” (8vo., 1851) proves Wall to have been an Osteologist of no mean order. Mr. — Wall, son of the former Curator, etc. informs me his father was born in Dublin in 1814, and died in Sydney, 5th Oct., 1876, aged 62. He arrived in Sydney with his brother, Mr. Thomas Wall, about the year 1840, and whilst in his native city studied anatomy at Trinity College, under Prof. Robert Harrison. The brother (T. Wall) is often referred to in old Museum documents; he was a member of the ill-fated Kennedy Expedition to Cape York Peninsula in 1848.

<sup>10</sup> Lt. Robert Lynd, R.N.

It seems probable that the Curatorships of Clarke and Wall to some extent overlapped one another, for on 18th Nov., 1845,

“The attention of the Meeting was called to the circumstance of a balance amounting to the sum of £32 3s. 4d. still remaining due to the Curator in liquidation of the full amount of his salary for the Year 1842.”

The Museum Estimates, in what may be termed this transitional year, were<sup>11</sup>.—

“COLONIAL MUSEUM”

“Keeper of the rooms	...	...	...	...	10	0	0
Collector and Preserver of specimens at 1s. 9d. per diem					32	0	6
Providing Specimens, and incidental expenses”				...	157	19	6
					<hr/>		
					£200	0	0

Mr. Wall continued to act as Curator until 31st Dec., 1858, when he left the service, and was succeeded in the Curatorship by Mr. Simon Rood Pittard, M.R.C.S.E., appointed 17th Oct., 1859. An account of this gentleman and his work will appear subsequently.

(In an article to follow later, the migrations of the Collections will be related previous to the erection of the present building, with an account of later Curators and Secretaries.)

<sup>11</sup> New South Wales Calendar, etc. for 1836, p. 290.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XVIII.

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The Honbl. Alexander Macleay—Colonial Secretary, 1825-1836 ; Speaker, Legislative Council, 1843-1846 ; Committeeman, 1836-1848.

*(From an engraving by Charles Fox of the three-quarter length portrait in the Australian Museum.)*



EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIX.

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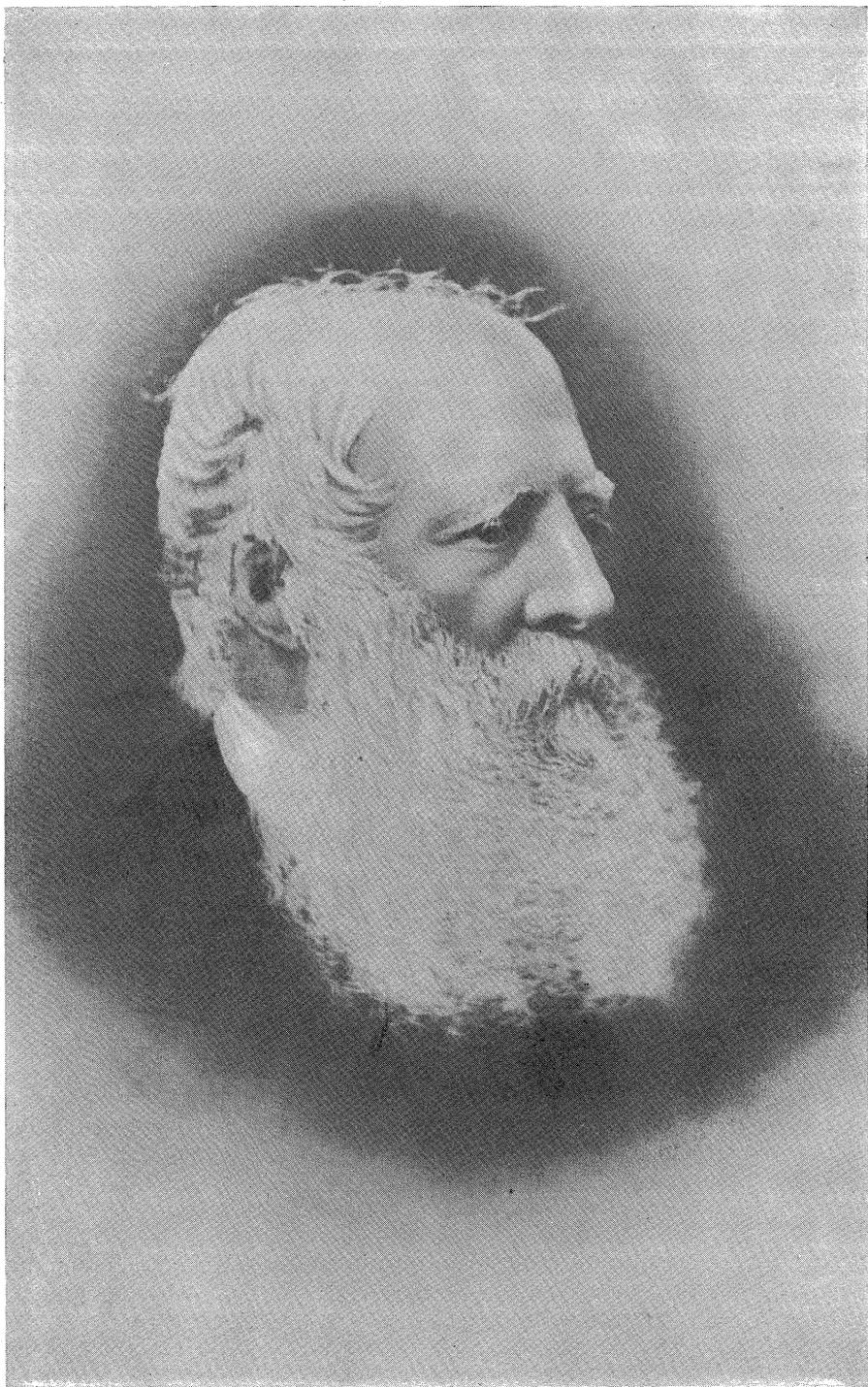
George Bennett, M.D., M.R.C.S.E.—“ Director ”—“ Superintendent ”—“ Zoologist ”; Curator, previous to 1841; Hon. Secretary (1836 ?), July, 1838-1841; Committeeman (1836 ?) 1838-1853; Elective Trustee, 1853-1874.



EXPLANATION OF PLATE XX.

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William Branwhite Clarke—"Father of Australian Geology";  
Rector of Willoughby, 1846-1870; Secretary (1836?),  
1839-1841; Secretary and Curator, July, 1841-1842;  
Committeeman, 1838-1853; Elective Trustee, 1853-1874.



[This correction was printed on page 399 of Volume 12 No.12  
and is here inserted.—Sub-Editor, September, 2009.]

specimens of Natural History are to be procured, I do myself the honour to acquaint you that although I feel a difficulty in authorizing the commencement of any Building for that purpose until an Estimate of the expense shall have been first submitted to my consideration, yet I am disposed, in the meantime, to allow a sum, not exceeding £200 per annum, to be disbursed for the purpose of assisting in the accomplishment of this object; and as one of the first steps towards ensuring its success seems to be the sending out some proper person to assist in collecting and arranging such specimens as it may be possible to procure in that quarter, I have been further induced to consent to the appointment of a young man to that particular duty who has been recommended to me as peculiarly fitted for it, and who will, therefore, be immediately sent out to the Colony in the capacity of Zoologist with the same rate of Salary and allowances as appear to have been given to Mr. Fisher, the present intendant of the Botanic Garden at Sydney.

I have, etc.,

Bathurst.

In the preparation of these "Fragments" I have received most cordial assistance from Mr. W. H. Ifould, Principal Librarian, Public Library of New South Wales, Mr. Hugh Wright, Librarian, Mitchell Library, Mr. W. A. Rainbow, Librarian, Australian Museum, and my Assistant, Mr. W. W. Thorpe, whose ever ready help has enabled me to surmount many difficulties.

CORRIGENDA.

Part 1, p. 77, footnote 9, line 3, for 1888, read 1858.