

Sesqui-centenary to Bicentenary: Reflections on a Museologist

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ABSTRACT. F.D. McCarthy's long career began in the Australian Museum at a time when museum anthropology in Australia was at a low ebb. Despite the lack of staff and funds, McCarthy developed interests in the popularisation of museum collections, struggled for better museum conditions, engaged in a wide range of archaeological pursuits both within NSW and other States in Australia, as well as in south-east Asia, and undertook pioneering ethnographic research in Arnhem Land and Cape York. As the first Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, he provided leadership and encouragement across a broad range of fields in Aboriginal studies. His contribution to scholarship was acknowledged in 1980 by the award of an honorary Doctor of Science degree by the Australian National University.

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Two museologists toured Australia in 1933 to report upon the state of museums for the Carnegie Corporation. They found overcrowded and unsuitable buildings, deteriorating collections, meagre staff salaries and minuscule research funding (Markham & Richards, 1933). In 1975, the Pigott Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, 1975) reported conditions in many of these institutions which had not greatly improved.

Fred McCarthy's museum career spanned those lacklustre decades of Depression, War and succeeding cultural mindlessness. The significance of his extensive and many faceted research output and public advocacy is magnified when set within the context of those sterile years.

Museology

F.D. McCarthy joined the Australian Museum staff at a time when distance, low budgets and inherited bureaucratic colonial rules preserved state institutions as cultural isolates. Markham & Richards (1933:7) observed that, until well after 1900, 'there was not only no co-operation among museums, but rather a state of complete and utter indifference between them'. As late as 1958, when urging the need for positive field collecting, McCarthy (1958a:265) deplored the 'too State-minded and parochial' policies of museum administrations. In the same year, Aldo Massola, the National Museum of Victoria's curator of anthropology, had to take leave under the regulations in order to cross into South Australia to participate in my Fromm's Landing

excavation.

Markham & Richards (1933:62) sagely advocated 'particularly...the need for funds for the investigation of fossil beds in Queensland and Tasmania, and for ethnological work over the Continent'. As for museum ethnology at that time, however, only the State museums in Sydney and Adelaide employed relevant curatorial staff through the 1930s and 1940s. Following Baldwin Spencer's departure in 1927, the National Museum of Victoria's priceless heritage of Aboriginal culture suffered decades of neglect. In the late fifties, I wrote to the State minister responsible, drawing attention to the deplorable storage of Tiwi grave posts that were deteriorating in an open shed. They may be the world's oldest specimens, because Spencer collected them in 1912. Around the same time as my letter, the recently appointed curator found some of Spencer's Oenpelli bark paintings used as table tops in cluttered corridors.

The Queensland Museum was condemned by the visiting experts as 'possibly the most unsuitable museum building in the Commonwealth...a positive fire trap' (Markham & Richards, 1933:27). Because storage space was unavailable there in 1944, a valuable Mornington Island raft was exchanged interstate for two less bulky plaster casts. The historians of that institution admit that, prior to 1960, 'the position of the [curatorless] anthropological collections was bleak' (Quinnell *in* Mather, 1986:212-213).

For over 40 years the South Australian Museum was fortunate in that its entomologist, Norman B. Tindale, doubled as its anthropologist. He was schooled in ethnology by harsh and unrivalled field experience around the continent. Only the Australian Museum's two anthropologists were trained in academic anthropology. Elsie Bramell gained a Master's degree in social anthropology and, in 1935, Fred McCarthy was awarded a Diploma by the University of Sydney. Unlike Adelaide, however, funds for fieldwork were virtually unavailable, so these two enthusiasts were restricted largely to museum research activities. Lost opportunities were compounded when they married in 1940 and regulations forced Elsie Bramell's resignation (Strahan, 1979:70,147).

Rockefeller Foundation grants were available for anthropological research during the thirties, but they largely were administered by A.P. Elkin to support Sydney University fieldwork. As the South Australian Museum also received little funding during Elkin's effective control of these research funds, the failure to support McCarthy or Bramell may reflect Elkin's priorities (Mulvaney, 1988:211-212). As late as 1958, McCarthy reflected upon this double standard between university and museum staff status. He wistfully remarked (McCarthy, 1958a:266) that 'anthropologists on museum staffs will have to be given equal field opportunities to gain higher degrees, and similar salary ranges to those of the universities before the museums can hope to recruit and to hold suitable graduates on their staffs'. A quarter of a century had elapsed since Markham & Richards (1933:63) vainly emphasised Australia's debt to 'its curators...a debt hitherto unacknowledged either in

terms of adequate remuneration or reasonable facilities for travel, investigation or mutual co-operation'.

Governments remained largely deaf to appeals for equity. Credit is due, however, to David Ride in Perth for initiating a regional change. Within four years of his appointment as director of the Western Australian Museum, from 1962 some parity of standing was negotiated between university and museum staff within that state. Also noteworthy was his appointment of an archaeologist as curator in 1961 (Mulvaney, 1982-1983:40).

No Australian curator better used an enforced sojourn within a museum's environs than did McCarthy. From the later thirties he produced a steady flow of papers, loyally placed mainly in his museum's *Records* and *Magazine*. He particularly described items of material culture within that institution. He felt convinced that museums were obliged to make available details of their collections, partly for public education or scientific study, but also to clarify which items or regions were poorly represented. Such knowledge could inform and guide future collections building policy. Few other museums attempted such projects. In the euphoria at the war's end, McCarthy stressed the need to record those areas of Melanesia which had suffered wartime trauma. Optimistically, he urged systematic recording and collecting as a priority in those areas most likely to change rapidly following wartime occupation (McCarthy, 1946). Implicit in his appeal was the concomitant requirement for detailed cataloguing of all museum collections, to highlight gaps. That need was made explicit later, when he vainly appealed for funding of institutions (McCarthy, 1958a:266) 'to publish catalogues of their collections for permanent reference. Specimens will not last for ever, insects destroy many and wars do irreparable damage'.

Typology

An essential component of McCarthy's process of systematisation and documentation involved the typological classification of stone tools, based upon fixed nomenclature, terminologies and procedures for objective cross-reference. Australian museums and private collectors had accumulated vast numbers of artefacts since late last century, but many of them lay unlabelled and unprovenanced. McCarthy deplored the amassing of private collections, most of them plucked selectively out of context, in a sense of rivalry between collectors to produce better and bigger cabinet collections. 'It is surprising how many private collections...have no information about the specimens', he lamented in 1938 (McCarthy, 1938a:122), 'so that their value is completely negated'.

Even when some documentation existed, however, overcrowded storage conditions in museums made the data difficult to utilise. Two relevant examples are cited from the National Museum of Victoria. The first instance

concerns the exhibition of 10,000 stone artefacts arranged for delegates attending the 1914 British Association congress. They were exhibited neatly according to their presumed but often dubious functions. It surely was symbolic that these orderly ranks of subjectively classified Australian stone tools were available for inspection, by British and German visitors, during the opening month of World War I (Mulvaney & Calaby, 1985:252).

Partly motivated by McCarthy's emphasis upon stone tool typology, in 1957 Dermot Casey and I attempted to assess the enormous holdings of stone hatchet heads in the National Museum of Victoria. We hoped to plot the variability in their raw material, form and geographic distribution. Our interest centred upon the (still-unstudied) grooved specimens, many of which are deeply patinated, presumably an indication of their antiquity. To our chagrin we found that a wartime space shortage in the museum had produced drastic action. A truckload of hatchet heads was removed and dumped in a pile in a room in the government office of Weights and Measures. Another dump in that building had been walled up during subsequent office subdivision, so the artefacts lay as dark and secret as pharaoh's tomb. After we scabbled around the visible stone mound locating grooved specimens, we found that they possessed one positive virtue, in the form of their museum registration numbers. As the accessions' book was immovably housed in the museum, a few kilometres distant, we abandoned the project in frustration.

It is relevant to learn that the war years also imposed stresses at Sydney's Australian Museum. Writing his recollections of the 1935-1936 Lapstone Creek excavation, McCarthy (1978:53) regretted, that 'My own notes were lost during the re-arrangement, really upheaval, of the anthropology collection...during World War II'.

In such a difficult milieu, McCarthy produced a classic memoir, with Elsie Bramell's assistance and advice from H.V.V. Noone, a visiting English typologist. *The Stone Implements of Australia* (McCarthy, Bramell & Noone, 1946) remains the most systematic and best documented handbook on implement classification on a continental scale. Despite later glossier editions, scholars need to refer to this first edition, because of its greater detail and documentation.

'It is our aim', the authors stated (1946:3-4), 'to establish an Australian terminology', which eschewed 'capricious' new nomenclature and vague definitions. They urged the zoological principle of priority in naming new implement types. All collectors were urged to label specimens and to keep detailed records of localities; type definitions, illustrations and bibliographical references, listed in chronological order for each type, were provided in economical wartime austerity printing format. This memoir brought Australia into line with British assumptions and methodology. Their schema followed conventional European typological practice, in taking into account the raw material, fabrication technique, cultural and technological traditions. It also attempted to relate function to observed ethnographic use, but this was not based upon personal field observation or

experimentation. 'Much valuable information can still be obtained from the living aborigines in remote areas', McCarthy admitted, approving current South Australian efforts to record them (McCarthy, Bramell & Noone, 1946:7).

Despite rigid definitions, however, human processes such as tool manufacture are not subject to the natural genetic and environmental controls which condition biological organisms; neither are they like fossils, precisely and bounteously replicated across vast regions. Another human factor also operated in the form of competing typologists and their classificatory schemes. In South Australia Norman B. Tindale (1957, 1968) refused to conform to the dictates of Sydney regulation. An artefact buff since the 1920s, he also claimed naming rights, appealing to the criteria of current Aboriginal terminology and technology, both of tool manufacture and use. In his advocacy, Tindale overlooked the possibility that there is danger in treating the generalised observation of tool function in one area as an invariable rule for form and function across the entire continent and back through time. In Victoria, S.R. Mitchell published his *Stone-Age Craftsmen* in 1949. Mitchell was the last of a succession of influential Victorian artefact collectors, imbued with some different concepts than McCarthy, particularly in relation to the form and function of stone tools. In a passing paragraph, he commended McCarthy's monograph (Mitchell, 1949:21-22), but then virtually ignored it. Probably, however, his manuscript was written years previously, and this was a later insertion.

It is a credit to McCarthy's system that despite these and other competing frames of reference, it is his memoir which most subsequent researches consult. His definitions were not faultless, but they attempted precision. Four decades later, the criteria for typological and functional diagnosis have been enlarged and refined. Microscopic study of use-polish and edge fracture; replication of artefacts and functional experimentation; the properties controlling stone cleavage; residue analysis; geochemistry – all these techniques have added stimulating dimensions.

So, also, has the largely Tindale-inspired study of living Aboriginal ethnography. In 1965, Tindale (1965:162) issued a timely exhortation (presumably it was also an implicit criticism of McCarthy and myself). 'Indeed', he proclaimed, 'it is high time that at least a few archaeologists should take note of Australian and New Guinea stone knappers and temporarily at least emerge from their cave holes to study at first hand the data provided by living peoples'. His appeal was heeded by many young enthusiasts. Americans Richard Gould and Brian Hayden, were in the vanguard, but Australians also took the field.

Despite all these diverse research approaches, however, McCarthy's 1946 manual retains value as a reference base. At that time it pointed Australian studies towards the mainstream of current world prehistory. Tindale's contribution was that he anticipated those aspects of 'new' archaeology flowing from the *Man the Hunter* conference, which redirected that mainstream.

Archaeology

McCarthy, Bramell & Noone (1946:2) acknowledged that their schema lacked time dimension, because it was then virtually impossible to distinguish between prehistoric artefacts and ones made or used recently. 'Above all', they cautioned (1946:7), 'excavations on scientific lines must be carried out throughout the continent before we can hope to elucidate the history of our stone implements'.

McCarthy's concern possibly was heightened during his concurrent preparation for publication of the late C.C. Towle's excavations at Lapstone Creek. Although not published until 1948 (McCarthy, 1948), the fieldwork belonged to 1935-1936. A number of other rock shelters in the Sydney region had been excavated around that period, under uncontrolled and largely unrecorded conditions. To judge from McCarthy's (1978) later reflections on the Lapstone Creek project, he considered that, although Towle's methodology was superior to those destructive forays, more could have been achieved. It was in this context, therefore, that he offered further timely warning (McCarthy, Bramell & Noone, 1946:7):

...the attention of the over-zealous amateur investigator should be drawn to the fact that invaluable evidence will be destroyed if deposits are dug out merely for the sake of collecting implements.

In the sesqui-centennial year, McCarthy (1938b) published the first of his many surveys of Australian prehistory. In a brief and tentative note, he admitted that 'it is not clear what is the earliest known culture in Australia'. In an evident criticism of Tindale's reconstruction of the cultural sequence on the Murray River and his inferred late Pleistocene occupation on Kangaroo Island (Tindale, 1937), McCarthy concluded that such generalisations were premature. These South Australian assemblages, McCarthy (1938b:40) urged, needed to be 'correlated and their true sequence established by accurate, scientific excavations'.

In retrospect, this initiated an unfortunate tension and divergence between these two scholars, who both led their generation in diverse innovative research into the past. In a sense, both were correct in their unfortunate difference. McCarthy's moderation in calling for stratigraphic archaeological substantiation was justified. Tindale's intuition was proved correct twenty years later, but that did not excuse the case for closer documentation at that time. Tindale (1941:145) certainly was circumspect in his next relevant publication, when he admitted that 'there is no dateable evidence for man's presence on the Australian mainland' before post-glacial times. In subsequent publications, however, he assumed a late Pleistocene antiquity and identified and dated his postulated South Australian cultural sequence on a continental scale (Tindale, 1957).

In my own first survey of the evidence for Australian prehistory, I criticised Tindale's methodology and synthesis at length (Mulvaney, 1961:65-86). While later discoveries and techniques confirmed the correctness of Tindale's claims for Pleistocene occupation and the value

of ethnoarchaeology, I stand by those comments. They were based upon the evidence then available and upon Tindale's wide-ranging generalisations derived from that meagre data. My paper paid less attention to McCarthy's work (1961:84-93) and thereby undervalued his contribution, as my own fieldwork had been in South Australia and my reading of Tindale had been closer.

McCarthy published two major papers evaluating aspects of the prehistoric data years before Tindale's own extended synthesis (Tindale, 1957). McCarthy's first paper (1940a) assessed Australian evidence in the light of his 1937-1938 visit to South-east Asia. His next important synthesis was read at the 1947 ANZAAS congress (McCarthy, 1949). It was a comprehensive and documented historical critique, which incorporated much of Tindale's pre-war work. In incorporating Tindale's data, however, McCarthy (1949:312) correctly observed that three of the cultures named within Tindale's chronological sequence were based upon typology alone, 'yet to be established in a stratified deposit'. He repeated and elaborated his misgivings in a critique of Tindale's classic 1957 statement, in which he called for 'a more cautious approach' to the use of limited evidence (McCarthy, 1958b). Caution also was the burden of my 1961 strictures. For example, I questioned whether too much stress has been placed on the presence of single items in a cultural assemblage, while other less obvious components have been neglected. Is it correct to define a culture by the presence of a single trait? (Mulvaney, 1961:84).

The conclusion to McCarthy's 1949 paper merits consideration. He stressed (1949:318-319) the importance of what today is termed geomorphological research, accepting the claims by Tindale and others that sea level fluctuations and terrace formation offered opportunities for chronological and environmental studies. Referring to former inland lake and river systems, he anticipated the Willandra lakes discoveries of the late sixties. 'Is it possible', he asked of such Pleistocene landscapes, 'to trace the terraces or courses of some of these ancient rivers, or the shorelines of these almost vanished lakes, by plotting the localities of camp-sites then in existence, and so establish a chronology from the earliest to the latest occupation?' At the time his paper was published in 1949, radiocarbon 14 dating was poised to revolutionise world prehistoric chronology, particularly that of Australia. By 1974 Australian prehistory extended for about 40,000 years.

McCarthy concluded that paper with an appeal for funds to enable major excavations within this continent and in Tasmania and New Guinea. Nobody heeded him, although Australian archaeologists were being financed to dig in Cyprus and Biblical lands. It was not until the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies was founded, with Fred McCarthy as its Principal, that major systematic fieldwork became a possibility.

As late as 1959, however, such funding was in the future. McCarthy received funds from the Wenner-Gren Foundation which took him to the Pilbara; and the Nuffield Foundation was soon to take me to Kenniff cave

and Ingaladdi. In 1959, I was the only university archaeologist teaching Pacific region courses and working within Australia. Any students who came on my digs paid ten shillings a day to defray costs; transport was provided largely by Dermot Casey. McCarthy still appealed for funds, while cautioning amateur diggers. His paper on 'methods and scope of Australian archaeology' (McCarthy, 1959) ranks as the first Australian exposition of field methodology and ethics. 'To ransack prehistoric sites for specimens is a crime against science and history', he warned (1959:297-298); but in despair at the unavailability of funding and that nobody was being trained for fieldwork, he deplored the situation in which 'archaeology is a non-career course'.

Although we then were unaware that dramatic changes were imminent, the exciting and rewarding 'sixties surely became the golden age of Australian archaeology. Consider the following archaeological places, amongst others, first excavated during that decade, but also consider the extent to which the analyses of many results were conditioned by the McCarthy model. His Lapstone Creek formulation (1948) of a two-phase sequence of Eloueran and Bondaian cultures was a paramount consideration. Excavated places included Anuru Bay, Burrill Lake, Crown Lagoon, Curracurrang, Currarong, Durras North, Fromm's Landing 6, Glen Aire, Gynea Bay, Ingaladdi, Graman, Keilor, Kenniff, Koonalda, Kow Swamp, Lake Mungo, Laura, Malakunanja, Malangangerr, Mount Burr, Murrumurang, Nawamoyrn, Port Essington, Puntutjarpa, Rocky Cape, Seelands, Tyimede, Weipa, Westpoint, Wilson's Promontory, and ANU fieldwork in New Guinea, Portuguese Timor and Sulawesi.

Conservation

In the history of the conservation of Australia's Aboriginal heritage, F.D. McCarthy ranks as a significant figure. In the wilderness of apathy and cultural crassness characteristic of half a century ago, his voice was raised for the preservation of heritage records. During the smug, self-congratulatory sesquicentennial year, McCarthy published on the forgotten theme of 'Aboriginal relics and their preservation'. His *Mankind* plea (1938a) established his awareness of various conservation issues. These aspects included the necessity for legislation in New South Wales regulating sites and relics, particularly to prevent mindless public vandalism and to control misguided 'scientific' activities. He emphasised (1938a:126) the importance of recording and protecting rock art; action was essential to prevent 'the wilful destruction of aboriginal skeletal remains'; the export of ethnographic items needed strict controls, while archaeological finds should be retained within Australia.

Greatly daring for those muted times, McCarthy (1938a:123-124) named several collections which had been taken overseas, including material excavated by Lloyd Warner and D.S. Davidson. Both these Americans were Rockefeller or Carnegie Corporation grantees

working under the aegis of Elkin's Anthropology department, so these were brave criticisms. In an expression of national sentiment appropriate to the sesquicentenary, but unfortunately years ahead of contemporary values, McCarthy (1938a:124) voiced his exasperation:

The point is that such type collections should be deposited in one of the Australian museums, so localising these important documents in the history of our former inhabitants and giving students access to the specimens in Australia itself.

Despite his curatorial status in a State museum, but in harmony with this expression of national sentiment, McCarthy (1946:31) later strongly urged the case for a National Museum of Anthropology in Canberra.

In order to document the various types of sites within New South Wales which required legislative protection, between 1942 and 1945 McCarthy (1942-1945) published a catalogue of sites and related bibliographies. He had been encouraged by an announcement by the Premier in 1939, that the government was considering legislation to protect Aboriginal relics (Wright, 1941:13). When these moves were reactivated unavailingly after the war, McCarthy (1982:33) regretted that legislation 'was strenuously opposed by a group of stone implement collectors'. These self-interested men included C.C. Towle and S.R. Mitchell. Evidently their views proved effective, because another quarter century of free enterprise followed. Forced to concentrate upon a more regional approach, in 1961 McCarthy (1982:33) was instrumental in urging the case for the successful declaration of the Dharug National Park. This included a major complex of engraved sites.

McCarthy published so many contributions in *Mankind* during his years at the Australian Museum, that few numbers did not bear his imprint. He worked enthusiastically for the Anthropological Society of New South Wales, serving as an office-bearer and on *Mankind's* editorial committee. It served to publish both his detailed ethnographic papers and his public exhortations concerning the urgency of site recording and the necessity of legislation to protect those places.

It must have proved immensely rewarding for McCarthy when he convened a national conference in Canberra during 1968, on the nature and preservation of Aboriginal antiquities. By this time he was Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, which published the proceedings (McCarthy, 1970). Since 1965, South Australia and Queensland had passed protective legislation and an act was being drafted in New South Wales. That enduring battle won, McCarthy (1970:XII) realised that the next struggle was to ensure the effective implementation and staffing of State Acts. It still continues in most states.

Rock Art

One project which McCarthy has prosecuted with

energy and dedication across half a century is the recording and publication of the multitude of rock engravings on the Sydney-Hawkesbury region sandstone. Chiefly reported in *Mankind* and in his museum's *Records*, these results constitute the final evidence for many places. Urban sprawl and its related consequences have destroyed or damaged up to ten per cent of sites since his fieldwork (McCarthy, 1982:31).

This task was a labour both of love and duty. It was undertaken in his own leisure and unpaid time, working with equipment and under conditions which few contemporary workers would accept. Later analysts of rock art may question the completeness of his record at any site, his identification of motifs or attribution of meaning. They should acknowledge, however, that when assessed from the vantage points of more sophisticated theory, less time-consuming apparatus and an adequately paid labour force, McCarthy's published corpus remains a data base of great value, particularly for future Aboriginal people. The same merit applies to his later expeditions to the Pilbara, Groote Eylandt area and western New South Wales, all projects described and illustrated in detail and published with a rapidity emulated by few scholars today.

Contemporary Australian society accepts Aboriginal art as a popular and purchasable art form, while rock art galleries are tourist meccas. Related glossy publications prove bonanzas today, but this was not formerly the case. Fred McCarthy led the field in advocating the merits of Aboriginal art and the need to preserve decorative ethnographic objects and galleries of paintings or engravings. Statistics suggest that nobody has surpassed his record as a popular exponent. His *Australian Aboriginal Rock Art*, first published in 1958 as an Australian Museum handbook, now is in its fourth edition.

His matching handbook on *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art* has an equally remarkable history. Published first in 1938, this durable memoir remained on sale into the eighties in its eighth edition. Its coverage is such that it still supplies the need for descriptions reflecting the regional variety of Aboriginal material culture. As these important publications, together with *The Stone Implements of Australia*, must have provided the Australian Museum with welcome income during half a century, it is regretted that *Rare and Curious Specimens* (Strahan, 1979), its official history, ignored their existence. Sales of these handbooks surpassed an astonishing 100,000 copies (F.D. McCarthy, personal communication).

Material Culture

McCarthy deserves credit as author of virtually the first general and well-illustrated account of the complexity of Aboriginal societies around the continent. *Australia's Aborigines Their Life and Culture* was published in 1957, a coffee-table quality production which appeared too early to capture a mass market. Published with numerous striking colour photographs by Axel Poignant and

excellent historic black and white prints, its illustrations and text were more comprehensive than any book then available (McCarthy, 1957). It seems to have escaped the bibliographical attention of most modern authors, an undeserved fate for such coverage. Exceptional for its time, it emphasised Aboriginal economy, technology and the varied facets of artistic life.

It was as a curator that McCarthy made his outstanding contribution to a critical appreciation of Aboriginal material culture. His diligent and responsible attitude to the custodianship of his collections, and his knowledge of other museums, resulted in their truly academic evaluation. His encyclopedic approach becomes apparent when his publications between 1938 and 1946 are considered together. The important paper (1940a) in which he correlated data between Australia and southeast Asia, following his visit there, has been referred to; numerous papers were produced on stone tool assemblages and their classification, all background to the classic typology memoir (1946); a spate of papers recording rock art continued through this period; a catalogue of Aboriginal sites (McCarthy, 1942-1945) was made available.

During those busy years he also published his ambitious pioneering survey of ceremonial exchange systems in Australia and across Torres Strait (McCarthy, 1938-1939), emphasising the opportunities for diffusing ideas and objects and so introducing innovations. Integral to this important study was his exhaustive assessment of the nature and composition of Aboriginal material culture. His annotated catalogue of ethnographic items across the continent was published in *Mankind*, complete with bibliographical references, providing a valuable data base (McCarthy, 1940b). His analysis also isolated and clumped traits into what he termed eleven 'areas of local variation'.

In the negative ambient opinion of those times, Aboriginal culture was dismissed as unchanging and uncreative. McCarthy found otherwise. Despite severe environmental problems, McCarthy (1940b:242) concluded, 'The material culture...has not remained static ...The aborigines have experimented with many aspects of their culture, and in the adaptation to their environment have brought into play a great deal of ingenuity, resource and skill'. Without the resources for travel to traditional communities and experience conditions, McCarthy had discerned the essential individuality and human resourcefulness of Aboriginal society in the face of climatic and environmental challenge. He stated the case many years later (McCarthy, 1974:211), and many young archaeologists who impose models of economic or ecological determinism on their evidence, should ponder his conclusion:

In Australia there existed a basically uniform Aboriginal culture, modified locally in the differing habitats...for this reason I believe the Aborigines imposed their culture on the Australian environment.

By that time, however, McCarthy was familiar with vibrant traditional society. As a member of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition, he visited Arnhem Land in 1948. It must have proved an exhilarating experience,

forty years ago, for a person so fully versed in Aboriginal culture to visit Arnhem Land. One important consequence of McCarthy's earlier Indonesian experience was his recognition of Macassan trepanning sites on the beaches (McCarthy & Setzler, 1960:287-294). It increased his awareness of the active inter-relationship between that coast and eastern Indonesia, already emphasised in his 'trade' paper as a source of innovation.

The most memorable development, in hindsight, was his co-operative venture with Margaret McArthur on time factors in Aboriginal food gathering economy, particularly the role of women (McCarthy & McArthur, 1960). Following the upsurge of interest in the dynamics of hunter-gatherer societies which followed the 1966 Man the Hunter Conference, it is easy to overlook this trail-breaking enterprise in 1948. It produced a significant model for the annals of economic anthropology.

Although a brief and rather artificial study situation, it was designed as a quantitative exercise in evaluating food procurement and the expenditure of labour. Possibly it was the world's first attempt to objectively evaluate the processes of production and consumption in any hunter-gatherer society. Their investigation into 'ethnoarchaeology' occurred two decades before that term was coined. It is also worth recalling that they emphasised the economic and social role of women. At a period when opinion held that Aboriginal society was so male dominated that woman's lot was unenviable, McCarthy & McArthur (1960:194) found that a 'perfect co-operation' existed between the sexes in their economic and subsistence lives. 'There was certainly no attitude of master and slave', they concluded, and they recommended that a group should be studied along similar lines throughout a year. Such research 'would throw a great deal of light on the economic life of the men and the women, and upon the theoretical problems involved in the two patterns and their relationships'. Such a project was many years into the future, but Betty Meehan's study of Anbara people demonstrated the correctness of the claim (Meehan, 1982).

Across a 'Broad Field'

Although this personal perspective of Fred McCarthy's career has touched upon many facets, others have been overlooked. The extent of his art recording at so many sites in almost every state was a feat of persistence and dedication. At Capertee (McCarthy, 1964a), his major excavations uncovered a stone tool sequence which took eastern New South Wales prehistory into pre-Bondaian times (the Bondaian was soon to be termed the Small Stone Tool Tradition). Its importance became submerged immediately beneath the flood of excavated and dated sites during the 1960s. The role of D.S. Davidson, who published over 20 insightful papers on Australian themes, is a subject meriting research. Working before the radiocarbon dating breakthrough, but seeking some chronological time scale, Davidson's

influence on McCarthy's mildly diffusionist principles requires consideration. After Davidson's untimely death, McCarthy's hand is evident in their important memoir on Western Australian artefacts (Davidson & McCarthy, 1957).

Another significant episode was McCarthy's participation at Aurukun in 1964, when the Commonwealth Film Unit recorded 43 Cape York dances. McCarthy documented the ethnographic objects involved and, years later, he analysed the filmed dances (McCarthy 1964b, 1984:79). By his personal involvement, McCarthy further demonstrated his wide-ranging interests.

Fred McCarthy is a humble and modest man. In his own retrospective (1984:81) he described himself simply as 'a descriptive writer in a broad field of ethnography, prehistory and art, inspired by men like W.E. Roth and R. Etheridge'. In 1980 Jack Golson and myself were proud to nominate both Fred McCarthy and Norman Tindale for the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, the highest degree offered by the Australian National University. It is appropriate to end with the citation which sets these two scholars into their historical context (Mulvaney, 1980:96):

We are honouring scholars who were museum curators during a depressed period of Australia's cultural history, when museums were the cinderella of research institutions, chronically understaffed, overcrowded and commanding little support from either the public or the private sector. Significantly, they served their institutions for some years even before Australia's first anthropology department was established.

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