

M E M O I R S

ALFRED STEPHEN KENYON

M.I.E. Aust.

Mr. Alfred Stephen Kenyon, whose death occurred at Heidelberg, on 14th May, 1943, was born at Homebush, Victoria, on 7th December, 1867, and was educated at St. Stephen's Grammar School, Richmond, and later at Ormond College and the University of Melbourne.

In 1887 he was appointed to the Public Works Department and as a junior was associated with the design of Queen's Bridge. The following year he became attached to the newly formed Victorian Water Supply Department and carried out a considerable amount of work in connection with the gauging of the rivers and streams of Victoria.

In 1901 he was appointed Engineer in Charge of Town Water Supplies and for several years supervised all developmental work in connection with water supplies to country towns throughout the State.

From 1906 to 1911 Mr. Kenyon was Engineer for Agriculture and while in this position was in charge of experimental reclamation and drainage works where he used mechanical plant for clearing and cultivation on a large scale. He was also in charge of developmental work in the Mallee country in which he undertook a great deal of exploratory work.

In 1911 Mr. Kenyon returned to water supply activities when he was appointed to the staff of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission as Engineer in Charge of Water Supply to the North West Mallee. His work included the provision of water supplies by means of catchment tanks or bores and the opening up of roads over an area of several millions of acres of Mallee country. In this area, some hundreds of bores and tanks were provided and more than 8000 miles of roads were cleared to provide access to farm holdings. During this period he also supervised large flood reclamation works at Kooweerup and Cardinia and stream improvements in all parts of the State.

After the 1914-1918 war, the lands which now comprise the very successful Red Cliffs Irrigation District were purchased for the repatriation of returned soldiers on the recommendation of Mr. Kenyon who then supervised their development as an irrigation settlement.

Mr. Kenyon represented Victoria on the Interstate Committee dealing with Murray River Levees and was also a Member of the Sludge Abatement Board.

In July, 1932, Mr. Kenyon was appointed Acting Commissioner of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission and on 1st November, 1932, he became Commissioner, a position he retained until his retirement on 31st January, 1935.

Mr. Kenyon not only held an important position as an engineer in the service of the State, but was well known as a scientist, as an explorer, as an historian and as a writer.

He made a close study of the Australian aboriginals and his work on stone implements was known throughout the world. He was also an authority on the history of this State particularly on the pastoral period of Port Phillip District from 1834 to 1851. His knowledge of the history and development of the Mallee was perhaps greater than that of any other person.

For many years he acted as Numismatist to the Public Library and after his retirement from the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission he made it a full-time occupation. He was appointed Keeper of Antiquities when that Department was created in 1938.

He was a member of many scientific and professional societies in most of which he held office as President, Secretary, Treasurer, Librarian or Committeeman. These organizations include the Institution of Engineers of Australia, the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, the Historical Society of Victoria, the Field Naturalists' Club, the Royal Society of Victoria, the Anthropological Society of Victoria, the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science and the Society of Genealogists, Australia. He was also a member of a number of Scientific Societies overseas.

Mr. Kenyon/

Alfred Stephen Kenyon, second son of Alfred Henderson Kenyon and Agnes Fleming Agnew, was born in 1867 at Homebush, Victoria, then a flourishing alluvial gold mining town. Passing his very early years at Ararat, a more important gold mining town until 1875, he afterwards was with his father on the land at the heads of Concongella and Doctors Creeks, tributaries of the Wimmera. Up till then his education was mainly the concern of his parents, but the family shifting to Melbourne in 1881, he completed his education at the St. Stephen's Grammar School, Richmond, and the University, at which he matriculated in 1883, taking the oath on his sixteenth birthday. In 1887 he joined the Public Works Department as a pupil engineer, and in the following year transferred from there to the newly formed Victorian Water Supply Department as a Professional Draftsman. In 1898 at the recovery from the collapse of the boom, he was appointed assistant Engineer in charge of River Gaugings and Water Distribution. Three years later he was promoted to the position of Engineer in Charge of Town Supplies and New Proposals. In 1906 the new position of Engineer of Agriculture was created for him. In 1911 on the re-organization of the Department of Agriculture, he transferred to the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission as Senior Engineer, and in 1932 was appointed Acting Commissioner, and a little later Commissioner, retiring on superannuation in February, 1935. In 1898, with Mr. David L. Stirling, he began an intensive search of the southern littoral for aboriginal remains, with a view of proving an Austral-Tasmanic connexion. Quickly convinced such did not exist, he concentrated on investigation of the Australian aboriginal stone implements, on which subject he has written a number of papers for various scientific societies. This work is still continued.

Foundation Member and Past Chairman, Melbourne Division, Institution of Engineers, Australia; Councillor, Treasurer and Past President, Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, Committeeman and Past President, Field Naturalists Club of Victoria; Councillor and Past President of the Historical Society of Victoria; Editor of the Victorian Historical Magazine; President, Anthropological Society

of Victoria; Honorary Ethnologist, National Museum, Melbourne; President, Victorian Aboriginal Group; Secretary and Past President, Numismatic Society of Victoria; Numismatist, Public Library, Melbourne; President, Section F, Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, 1937; member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Anthropological Association, and the American Numismatic Association.

In his official capacity was chairman of the Mallee Relief and Seed Wheat Advances Board, 1914-15, controlling advances of three quarters of a million pounds, all of which was repaid; member Interstate Murray Levees Committee; member Sludge Abatement Board; Victorian representative, Interstate Artesian Waters Conference, 1912-1927; member River and Streams Fund Committee; and occupied numerous other official positions. Has published The Story of the Mallee, 1915; The Overlanders, 1924; The Story of Melbourne, 1934; The Story of Australia, 1935; and jointly with Charles Barrett, The Blackfellows of Australia, 1934; and with R. V. Billis, Pastures New, 1930, and Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip, 1932; and with A. W. Greig, C. Daley and C. R. Long, Victoria: The First Century, 1934.

Married in 1895 Alexandrine Leontine, daughter of J. Delépine, of St. Heliers, C.I., daughter, Justine, is the authoress of the aboriginal Word Book.

Has travelled extensively throughout the whole of Australia, and particularly in Central Australia.

Contributes articles to all the Melbourne dailies and weeklies, and with R. V. Billis has a series of articles in the Argus and Australasian now at no.130, the record length of any series in Victoria.

Was in the team of the first baseball club, the Melbourne, later the Metropolitan, of the East Melbourne Cricket Club, and of the East Melbourne Junior Football Club.

PHELPS, S

9.10.74.

B.26. CRIPPS BUILDING  
 ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE  
 CAMBRIDGE CB2 1TP.  
 ENGLAND.

Dear Sir,

I have in my possession a returning boomerang engraved with hunting scenes which has "Kenyon Collection, 1860" written upon it.

I have noticed in your guide to the Australian Ethnological Collections by Sir B. Spencer, 1922 (3rd ed.) several references to ~~the~~ Kenyon and objects which he collected. Could you please let me have some information about him, when he was collecting and in what regions, because I am very keen to obtain documentation for the objects in my grandfather's ethnographical collection, of which I am making a catalogue.

It is a fine piece and I believe from north Western Australia but I have no idea how it arrived in this country. I would be

very grateful for any help you could give  
me as I hope to finish the catalogue within  
a month.

yours sincerely

Steven Phelps

P.S. You may be interested to know a little about  
my grandfathers collection (James Hooper). It contains  
some 1300 Oceanic pieces, mostly Polynesian - of high  
quality - and about 50 Australian. It is the last  
of the great English private collections (Oldman, Beasley,  
Fuller) to remain in private hands and the  
fully illustrated catalogue with descriptive text will be  
published by Hutchinsons next year, around September,  
I hope - if I can tie up all these loose ends in  
the near future!!

Alison,

In regard to the letter from Steven Phelps, Cambridge, undated.

The entry about A.S. Kenyon in the Australian Encyclopaedia, Sydney 1965, gives a good summary of his life and career.

His ethnological collection consisted mainly of items from south eastern Australia, but it contained also many from other parts of Australia and from New Guinea and the Pacific Islands. The collection was dispersed some time after his death in 1943.

The fact that the boomerang is engraved with hunting scenes indicates that it is of post European origin and fairly recent. It is usually considered that illustrative engraving, or painting, on wooden artifacts was only done in recent times and with the object of selling the artifacts to Europeans. It is most unlikely that such engraving should have been done, in Western Australia, as early as 1860, and this figure is most probably a registration number in Kenyon's collection and does not represent the year 1860.

There are however, in this Museum a few wooden artifacts, from Victoria, with illustrative engravings which have been done under European influence, but these from their evident signs of use and wear, seem to have been made, not for sale, but purely for the satisfaction of the maker. They are extremely rare.

If you could send to us a photograph of the boomerang, or even a drawing of it, we could perhaps give a better opinion about it.

We will be interested to see the catalogue of your collection when it is published.

D.A.T.

Make smott, reply goes by airmail

It would be most unusual for a date of origin, or of acquisition, to be marked on an Australian artifact

within

you

21 October, 1974.

Mr. Steven Phelps,  
B26, Cripps Building,  
St. John's College,  
Cambridge CB2 1TP,  
ENGLAND.

Dear Mr. Phelps,

Thank you for your letter of 9th October.  
Enclosed is a summary of Kenyon's life and career photocopied  
from the 'Australian Encyclopaedia', Sydney, 1962.

His ethnological collection consisted mainly  
of items from south-eastern Australia, but it contained also many  
from other parts of Australia and from New Guinea and the Pacific  
Islands. The collection was dispersed some time after his death  
in 1943.

The fact that the boomerang is engraved with  
hunting scenes does not necessarily indicate its early origin. Many  
illustrative engraved and painted wooden artefacts have been done in  
recent times with the object of selling the artefacts to Europeans.  
However, we do have several engraved boomerangs from Western Australia  
dating around the late 1800's.

The figure '1860' engraved on the boomerang most  
likely refers to a registration number in Kenyon's collection and  
does not represent the year 1860. It would be most unusual for a  
date of origin, or of acquisition to be marked on an Australian artefact.  
Also, Kenyon was not born until 1867 and his father was not a collector.

If you could send to us a photograph of the  
boomerang, or even a drawing of it, we could perhaps give a better  
opinion about it.

We will be interested to see the catalogue of  
your collection when it is published.

Yours sincerely,

*A. Schmidt*

Alison Schmidt,  
Assistant Curator in Anthropology.

Enc.