

Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory Foundation Dinner,
Address by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC
Administrator of the Northern Territory
Darwin Convention Centre -12 August 2009

There is an overworked cliché, often trotted out, that so and so was “larger than life”. It is no exaggeration to apply the tag to Colin Jack-Hinton who did not occupy space as much as dominate it; whose persona was huge and whose disdain for the bureaucracy which tried to rein him in knew no bounds.

Colin achieved amazing things of enduring value for the Northern Territory, indeed for the Australian community. Bark paintings assembled when Colin was putting together a collection of these indigenous works were dismissed as ethnographic curiosities and not serious art. They form an important part of his grand legacy and I will discuss them in more detail in a moment. Before I do, let us look at Colin’s past and how it came to inform his career.

Colin was born on New Year’s Day 1933 in the English village of Newchurch, Lancashire, near the border with Yorkshire. His mother, however, was a fervently independent Highland Scot and that spirit imbued Colin, despite a fairly ordinary and conventional education in Church schools. He read widely of Africa and the exotic East and he claimed that by the age of fifteen he was a dedicated communist, but he never joined any party. (Let me rephrase that – any political party, as he could never resist any other type of party.)

Colin said that he developed *like most Highland Scots, a theological mind ... not so much religion but the reality of what life is all about*. To avoid the professional careers expected of him, he joined the British Army at eighteen and served with the Gordon Highlanders, including the Malayan Emergency. It was a life changing experience, as he noted: *I was so fascinated by the east, that it was a complete changing part in my life*.

After taking second class honours in history and politics at Kings College, Aberdeen, Colin joined the Overseas Civil Service and was posted to Malaita Province in the Solomon Islands. His commitment to communism and his growing fascination and engagement with the peoples of the Pacific made him an unusual Colonial Officer. He published PhD research on the Solomons and between 1959 and 1962 joined

the Department of Pacific History at the Australian National University where he achieved possibly his finest academic work on Hispanic and Lusitanian maritime voyages.

Colin was incredibly detailed in his learning and knowledge of Lusitanian, or Portuguese, maritime adventures as I know personally from late night monologues over a reasonable Scotch whisky. In his book *The Search for the Islands of Solomon 1567-1838*, published by Oxford University Press in 1969, Colin writes:

It was during his voyage to Santa Cruz as Mendaña's Chief Pilot that Quirós became obsessed with the idea which was to dominate the remainder of his life; the discovery of the antipodean continent, or Nuevo Mundo as he was later to call it, which he believed must occupy a quarter of the globe, and to the supposed inhabitants of which he wished to offer the means for the salvation of their immortal souls. Of Quirós it surely can be said, with little reservation or qualification, that his motives were religious, his interests those of a curious, enquiring, Renaissance cosmographer and explorer.

Colin's work on shipwrecks for the Western Australian Maritime Museum included the recovery on Long Island, in the Abrolhos Islands, of a remnant of a stoneware jug from the *Batavia*. Colin was subsequently listed on Western Australia's register of discoverers of ancient shipwrecks with the notation: *The work of each has been of incalculable benefit to the State.*

The obituary for Colin published by The Australian stated: *... his character seemed best suited to unchecked horizons. The Northern Territory, still a largely unsurveyed intellectual landscape, appealed to Jack-Hinton. It was the backdrop for the great project of his life, the creation of a new type of museum. Cyclone Tracy, which devastated the museum's first site at Darwin Old Town Hall, proved a strange blessing; approval was gained for the new building at Bullocky Point and there Jack-Hinton could encode his synoptic thinking into the structure.*

As an aside, I came across a letter written to the 5/7 RAR Battalion in the aftermath of Tracy. It reads: *When you come to write the chapter in your Regimental history of the very considerable and magnificent role which you played in the reconstruction of*

Darwin, I hope that you will not fail to add at least one qualification, perhaps to be known as the Jack-Hinton Chook-house Stuff-up.

*My chook-house, erected at considerable pain by my wife, survived the cyclone, bar its roof. Fourteen of my 15 chooks also survived. Immediately after the cyclone the roof was replaced by one of my staff. I did not seek assistance of the military ... their presence was unnecessary. However, they did visit my next-door neighbour to tidy her garden. In the process, one of your drivers who may perhaps not have been au fait with his machine, succeeded in demolishing my chook-house ... My chooks are now homeless, a matter of considerable tragedy to me and them, and subject to depredations of the local vermin – canine, feline and human. Yours very sincerely
Dr Colin Jack Hinton.*

There was no mention of the museum artefacts but it was at the Old Town Hall site, a stone structure dating back to 1883, that the first part of the collection had been put together on a shoe string budget. After Colin's appointment in 1970 as the inaugural Director of the Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences, he had been given an initial operational and collections budget of only \$3,000. So frustrated was Colin that in order to do some work at the front of the Museum he took up a jack hammer himself. The NT News featured him on the front page and for months afterwards he was referred to as Colin Jack-Hammer!

Tonight's dinner marks the launch of an important project to fully document, research and to conserve a hundred of the Museum's early holdings of bark paintings, some of which were damaged thirty-five years ago during Cyclone Tracy. The Collection comprises works from Arnhem Land, the Tiwi Islands and Port Keats area. These early works from the 1960s and early 1970s are by important artists such as Wandjuk Marika, Narritjin Mayumuru from East Arnhem land and Wally Mandarrk, Yirawala, Mick Kubarrku and Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek from Western Arnhem Land – all of whom have played a key role in the development of the bark painting movement. I had the great privilege of knowing Wandjuk and Lofty. Some bark paintings are by unknown artists, but it is anticipated that research and documentation will enable the Museum to attribute some of these barks to artists and communities.

This is an excellent opportunity to contribute to current knowledge and understanding of this unique collection and I am sure that you will join me in applauding this initiative of the Foundation of the Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory. The work of members of the Committee, together with the support of all those who contribute to this fund-raising endeavour, will make it possible to conserve and prepare these works for eventual public display. A fantastic perpetual tribute to the sorely missed Dr Colin Jack-Hinton.