Chapter 2

*Museum history and development*

**Introduction**

Overall this chapter outlines the ‘industry’ sector in which this study is set. That is, the position is taken that the museum sector is such that definitions, history and development all need elaboration in order to place the study in context. Therefore, this chapter first clarifies the definitions of a museum that will be used. There are a number of potentially conflicting definitions used throughout the literature, particularly in relation to the distinction between art galleries and natural history museums. The definition used here relates to the concept of a museum and not to the type of collection.

The second section provides a brief history of the development of the museum concept. It was deemed appropriate to take a chronological structure, beginning with the classical era. The next section combines the history of the Australian museum sector with further discussion of the development of the museum concept. It also follows a chronological structure as a way of comparing the Australian experience with that found in other parts of the Western world.

The changing role of the public is central to this study. As Weil has observed:

> The relationship between the museum and the public must be understood as a revolution in process. … At the museum’s birth… its position vis-a-vis the public was one of superiority. … In their emerging new relationship it will be the public… that occupies the superior position (2002: 195).

The role of the public relates to the changing relationship between the museum as a social institution and the people who visit that institution, as well as the part the public as a market has played in the development of the museum concept. This section concludes the chapter.
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2005a), at June 2004 there were 1,329 museum establishments operating in Australia, comprised of “160 art museums/galleries, 381 historic properties/sites, 673 social history museums and 116 other types of museums” (2005a: 3). However, the ABS’s definition of what constitutes a museum is problematic. For their surveys, museums are establishments that display, store and preserve artefacts, artworks and museum objects and which are open to the general public (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005a). This does not provide enough detail to be useful in defining a museum for the purposes of this study. One major study into the heritage sector, whilst using ABS definitions for Libraries and Archives, has instead followed the Museums Australia definition of a museum (Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia & the Pacific, 2002). Museums Australia, the peak professional museums industry body, has itself based its definition on that followed by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) (2001a). Museums Australia’s (2002) definition, though lengthy, is worth setting out here:

A museum helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to interpret the past and present and explore the future. A museum preserves and researches collections, and makes objects and information accessible in actual and virtual environments. Museums are established in the public interest as permanent, not-for-profit organisations that contribute longterm value to communities. Museums Australia recognises that museums of science, history and art may be designated by many other names (including gallery and Keeping Place).

In addition, the following may qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:

(a) natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment;

(b) institutions holding collections of and displaying live specimens of plants and animals, such as botanical and zoological gardens, aquaria and vivaria;

(c) science centres;

(d) cultural centres and other entities that facilitate the preservation, continuation and management of tangible or intangible heritage resources (living heritage and digital creative activity);

(e) such other institutions as the Council considers as having some or all of the
characteristics of a museum.
(2002: 2)

It is evident there is considerable breadth in this definition. The definition includes those entities most would consider as ‘typical’ museums. For example, the major state museums would fit into point (a), as would the larger regional museums and art galleries. Also apparently encompassed, though, are aquaria, botanical gardens, and just about anything collecting and/or displaying live plants and animals (b) (excluded in the ABS (2005a) surveys), as well as science and technological centres (c), all with arguably a predominantly educational and entertainment focus—infotainment, in the media vernacular. In many ways ‘museums’ in the sense of (d) are also problematic. It can be seen that the local history centre will easily fall into this category. Preserving and displaying a local identity’s letters, their family photographs and perhaps their birth and death records, would be acceptable to most commentators. Overall, Museums Australia has adopted an all-inclusive approach to what a museum is in Australia. In some ways, this means that their definition is just as unhelpful as the brief ABS version noted above.

For example, including intangible heritage resources (d) is subject to debate. In McLean’s (1994) opinion, museums are essentially “object-based”, with their existence depending “on their possession of a collection”—heritage centres, and historical homes such as those operated in Australia by the National Trust, are ruled out, as “the material evidence is not documented or interpreted” (1994: 191). However, McLean does appear to have a narrow view of ‘heritage’ which might reflect the poor reputation of the independent museums in the UK, sometimes disparagingly referred to as the ‘heritage industry’ (Merriman, 1991: 3). In contrast, resolutions made at the 2001 ICOM World Congress consider “cultural and natural heritage” as a fundamental facet of modern society (ICOM, 2001b).

In the United States it appears that their definition of a museum, as noted by the American Association of Museums (AAM) (2007), relates less to the nature of a museum’s collection, and more to how the ‘business’ operates and what its purpose is. For example, a museum’s purpose must be “essentially educational in nature”, there
must be a mission statement, and at least “one paid professional staff with museum knowledge and experience” (American Association of Museums, 2007: n.p.). It may be that these criteria are driven more by the funding aspects of museums in the USA than by a desire to define what a museum is, and does. The AAM states that the Institute of Museum and Library Services allocates federal funding according to the Museum and Library Services Act definition of a museum. That Act talks of experienced staff, being not for profit and being open to the public, but does also mention “tangible objects, whether animate or inanimate” (American Association of Museums, 2007: n.p.).

There are, then, many alternative views of what constitutes a museum, and many different applications of the concept. For example, corporate museums, that is, museums with managed collections which are situated within for profit organisations, occupy a difficult position straddling both the cultural and traditional world of the public museum and the profit-motivated and ever-changing business world\(^1\). An issue of concern to museum professionals is the degree to which these corporate museums reflect a commercial perspective (Buchanan, 2000). Their concern is whether the collection’s purpose is less educational than appropriate, and more an explicit tool for self-advertisement (Danilov, 1986).

Another issue has been noted in relation to the Australian museum sector. Pigott et al. (1975) have pointed out that institutions calling themselves an ‘art gallery’ typically carry out the functions of a museum. Their collection is art, and indeed in Europe they would call themselves an ‘art museum’. Therefore, an art gallery is considered here to be a museum, providing it is not involved in the sale of art works to the public (though deaccession programs sometimes involve museums selling items from their collection). Similarly, Scienceworks in Melbourne, which was quite early in its life described as “Museum Victoria’s science and technology campus” (Museum Board of Victoria, 2001: 2), has a strong education focus, but is not a natural history collection-based museum of the past. Clearly, it is now considered to be a museum. Interestingly, Tasmania’s two major museums both combine art and natural history, but do separate

\(^1\) See Lehman and Byrom (2006) for further research on corporate museums.
the fields in their names—the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

In conclusion, for the purposes of this thesis, the nature of a museum’s collection—whether it is mainly related to natural history, or technology, or art, or, indeed a combination thereof—is not defined or discussed, except where it directly impinges on the debate in relation to one of the case study museums. (For example, Chapter 3 poses the question of there being a relationship between the type of collection (art, natural history, science, etc), the perceived role of marketing and a museum’s marketing management orientation.) The point is that the issue of the nature of the collection should not cloud any discussion of the development of the museum concept itself.

A brief history of museums

The word ‘museum’ comes from the Greek mouseion, meaning a place for the Muses; a place of study and/or a library. Until only recently this has been a fitting description of the shape and form of museums generally. That is, until perhaps the latter half of the twentieth century museums were open only to an elite, either by literally restricting access, or later, by making museums such imposing edifices that the general population were too intimidated to attend (McLean, 1997). At the start of the twenty-first century museums are quite different from this, and from their very beginnings.

Though they do not follow the definitions already cited above, Plato’s Academy in the fourth century BC and Aristotle’s Lyceum are considered as forerunners to modern museums (Ripley, 1970). Both were places of higher learning, where scholars conducted and published research, held lectures and taught students. The Library of Alexandria established by Ptolemy the First in 332 BC also met many of the same criteria, and has in the past been termed “by far the most important museum of antiquity” (Murray, 1904: 1). Apart from their considerable document and book archives, however, these early institutions did not have at their core a collection in the sense of McLean’s (1994) definition cited previously.
During the same period collections were being established. But these were frequently temples or other buildings used to house treasures amassed during territorial conquests. For example, in 189 BC the Roman General Fulvius returned to Rome with thousands of statues and gold and silver objects (Kotler & Kotler, 1998). Fulvius went on to built a temple in Rome dedicated to Hercules of the Muses for the purpose of displaying his treasure (Ripley, 1970).

In the Middle Ages the development of the museum concept is inextricably linked to the Christian Church, which dominated intellectual life in Europe. Monasteries housed sometimes considerable libraries, and were renowned for their scholarly pursuits. The Church was also accumulating collections of manuscripts, holy relics, and treasures, most being gifts from travellers (Murray, 1904). They were also the arbiters of taste and influenced the behaviour of the royal families of Italy and neighbouring countries. Further, by the end of the fifteenth century there was a significant art collection in Rome, overseen by Pope Sixtus IV (Ripley, 1970).

By this time Renaissance poets, artists, philosophers and the like were shaping societal mores. Western thought was moving more towards a humanist and secular philosophy. This social change resulted in:

the objects of animated nature and the phenomena of the material world…
beginning to be regarded with scientific interest (Murray, 1904: 19).

Consequently, the sixteenth century saw the royal houses in Italy that rose at the time controlling quite large collections of art. There were also, though, collections of botanical and zoological specimens, historical artefacts and curios. These early precursors to the modern museum did not have a narrow view of what should constitute a collection. Still, the Renaissance collections certainly progressed the museum concept. The scholarly pursuits (not just collecting to accumulate ‘a collection’), and even the notion of preserving the past in a modern heritage sense, were evident. However, these ‘museums’ were not for the masses. As Hudson (1977) remarked:
Museums were a product of the Renaissance, a product of an aristocratic and hierarchical society which believed that art and scholarship were for a closed circle (1977: 7).

Collections were assembled by persons whose only concern was to show them to other persons of similar breeding and education, or to savants and scholars. It would have appeared ludicrous to the nobility that they had any duty to communicate their collections to any one else (Hudson, 1977). In a modern marketing sense museums were tailoring their product to a specific market, albeit a very narrow one.

So, while there were a considerable number of significant collections in Europe by the seventeenth century, only distinguished travellers and scholars were allowed entry. Change was slowly occurring, however. By 1700 the general public was allowed limited entry to the Imperial Gallery in Vienna, the Quirinal Palace in Rome, and the Escorial in Madrid. The gallery at Dresden was allowing public entry in 1746. Similarly, at around this time the wealthy private individual collectors in England were opening their collections. One individual’s collection was the basis for the establishment of the British Museum.

Sir Hans Sloane was a president of the Royal College of Physicians and of the Royal Society. He had collected throughout his life, with over 69,000 items in his collection by 1733. His library was said to have over 40,000 volumes and 4,000 manuscripts (Murray, 1904). In his will he requested Parliament reimburse his heirs £20,000, so that his collection:

Tending many ways to the manifestation of the glory of God, the improvement of the arts and sciences, and the benefit of mankind, may remain together... and that chiefly in and about the city of London, where they may, by the great confluence of people, be of most use (Cited in Ripley, 1970: 35).

Parliament agreed, and in 1759 the British Museum opened. However, it was to be a further fifty years before access was open to anyone other than “learned gentlemen” (Schubert, 2000: 17).
In 1774 Sir Ashton Lever, a country gentleman from Manchester, moved his collection of fossils, stuffed birds, savage costumes and weapons and curiosities to London to open a public museum. There was an admission charge to recover running costs. The museum eventually failed. Lever petitioned Parliament to buy it for the nation, as had Sir Hans Sloane, but was refused.

Similar developments, albeit with different motivations, were occurring in France, and in the New World. In 1773 a museum was formed by the Library Society of Charleston, South Carolina, being the first museum in the modern sense established in the New World. This was followed by the Peale Museum in Philadelphia opening in 1782 and the Salem museum in 1799. The difference in motivation relates, firstly, to a particular United States perspective on the museum concept, which can be illustrated by the words of an American museologist writing in the early part of the twentieth century:

The American Museum is... neither an abandoned European palace nor a solution for storing... national wealth.... It is an American phenomenon developed by the people, for the people, and of the people (Coleman, 1927; cited in Wittlin, 1949: 162).

The second difference relates to the fact that in the United States public museums ‘for the public good’ existed well before significant private collections belonging to the upper classes came into existence (Hudson, 1975). As Kotler and Kotler (1998) have stated:

The great majority of U.S. museums... were created by individuals, families, and communities to celebrate and commemorate local regional traditions and practices and to enlighten and entertain people in local communities (1998: 12).

By contrast, in Europe “private collections came first and public museums developed from them” (Hudson, 1977: 8). Further, these were private collections of the nobility. For example, the Louvre was originally built as a Royal palace, and by the mid-1700s held extensive, and clearly private, collections. Though discussion had taken place on the idea of converting it to a public museum prior to the French Revolution (Schubert, 2000), it was the Revolutionary Council that decreed that it be so, with the Louvre opening as a public museum on the first anniversary of the new Republic, 10 August.
1793. Public museums in continental Europe are said to have been established “in fear of violent eruptions of a discontented population” (Stapp, 1990: 5) rather than from a desire to open the collection up to the public.

Arguably the next step in the development of the museum concept was the most crucial so far, in that it brought about the popularising of the idea of visiting a museum; a significant change in the relationship between museums and the average person (Sweet, 2007). In the latter part of the nineteenth century there was a series of world fairs, commencing with the Great Exhibition of 1851 held in London. (The Great Exhibition was modelled, however, on the successful French Industrial Exposition of 1844, one of many held in France beginning in 1798.) Coinciding with the development of mass railway travel, the Great Exhibition was accessible to a greater proportion of the average population than any event was before it (Hudson, 1975). In addition, according to McLean (1997), nations used the Great Exhibition to portray their wares with considerable national pride. Governments realised that the success of these trade fairs was evidence that museums could be used for social utility and social control, to promote national pride and to ensure that the population used their spare time to educate themselves for the public good—in the nineteenth century education of the masses had an almost “religious fervour” (McLean, 1997: 12). There was also a belief in this period that the state and its institutions could shape the morals and behaviours of the working classes for both their own, and society’s, good (Ross, 2004). Museums such as the British Museum, the Louvre and the Smithsonian (established by bequest in 1846) were now joined by mechanics institutes and literary and philosophical societies as places of education and learning, though not of entertainment or even perhaps enjoyment. Still, in a modern marketing sense the market available to museums had expanded considerably. Formerly, the segments available were limited to the upper classes. Now, class was less of a restriction on attendance at museums, allowing for example, the middle classes and those with a technical education, to be included in the potential audience.

As was the case with other spheres of human activity, museums changed considerably throughout the twentieth century. The early part of the century saw many technological and social changes not necessarily swiftly reflected in large institutions such as
museums. There were new museums established that broadened the museum concept, notably the Museum of Modern Art in New York (in 1929). The two World Wars certainly saw many works of art and museum pieces removed from their rightful owners, in the same way as the Roman General Fluvius had accumulated his treasures in 189 BC, and many items and buildings destroyed. While post-war reconstruction was more focussed on infrastructure and social fabric, there was money left over for museums. Schubert (2000) considers that this fact, along with the arrival of mass transit and the leisure culture of the 1970s, provided part of the impetus for massive change in the museum sector in Europe in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Also significant in this period was the fact that during the 1970s there was a “remarkable surge of interest” (McShane, 1998: 83) in the rebuilding or establishment of national museums around the world. So much so that in the following twenty years new national museums opened in Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Japan and the United States.

Now, as the twenty-first century opens, some of the issues that have arisen because of that massive change include: the place of museums in society; their purpose; how they see their purpose; how their visitors see them; the rise of science and technological museums; museums as entertainment. At the centre of all these issues is the role of the public in museums; a topic that will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. First, the development of the museum concept will be placed in an Australian context.

The Australian setting

The development of museums in Australia is inextricably linked to its colonial, and later federal, structure. Each colony, and then state, had its own government and its own concerns, and each had its own museum, which had to go through the various trials and tribulations of the state to which it belonged. Such tribulations could be regional, such as the economic recessions that affected all states at one time or another. But on many occasions the problems faced by the embryonic museums were localised, such as
frequently changing directors/curators and the difficulties in acquiring trained staff. A perennial issue was simply attracting funding.

In the early days of colonial Australia, attempting to attract funding to such intellectual and cultural pursuits as museums was difficult. Government and business interests, those sectors of society most likely to have the funds, were concentrating on tasks associated with commercial development and nation building (Anderson & Reeves, 1994). The sentiment of the time can be summed up in the words of the Proprietor of the Sydney Monitor, William Charles Wentworth, who said in his paper on 20 July 1833 in respect to expenditure on the Botanical Gardens:

> We have the same objection to this Establishment as to that of Zoology. Zoology and Mineralogy, and Astronomy, and Botany, and the other sciences, are all very good things, but we have no great opinion of an infantile people being taxed to promote them…. We might as well give salaries to painters, sculptors and chemists, as to botanists, astronomers, and Museum collectors (Cited in Strahan, 1979: 13).

It was not as if museums in the Australian colonies were slow to be set up. (See Table 2.1 for details on the establishment dates of Australian Museums.) The Queensland Museum was founded on 20 January 1862, only two years after the colony had been proclaimed (Mather, 1986). In some Australian colonial quarters, mainly the scientific and scholarly, there certainly was support. Indeed, interest in scientific exploration and classification was at a peak as the nineteenth century began (Anderson & Reeves, 1994). Kohlstedt (1983) has also noted that what financial support museums did receive was given in part because of the promise of “practical results in mining and agriculture” (1983: 11). Nonetheless, the colonies were only newly established and it was more a matter of competing interests winning out.

Still, the 1933 *A report on the museums & art galleries of Australia to the Carnegie Corporation of New York*, stated that one distinctly ‘Australian’ feature of the Australian museum movement was that, “an overwhelming proportion of the museums are directly or indirectly under government control” (Markham & Richards, 1933: 55).
Table 2.1

Establishment dates for selected Australian and international museums

(Australian state museums in bold)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Museum (UK)</td>
<td>1759</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louvre (France)</td>
<td>1793</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rijksmuseum (Holland)</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Then known as the Nationale Kunst-Gallerij (National Art Gallery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australian Museum</strong></td>
<td>1827</td>
<td>First known as the Colonial Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gemaeldegalerie (Germany)</td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>(The Picture Gallery) First known as the Royal Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithsonian Institution (USA)</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery</strong></td>
<td>1852</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Hermitage Museum (Russia)</td>
<td>1852</td>
<td>First started in the 18th century as a private collection of the Empress Catherine II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Melbourne Museum</strong></td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>First known as the National Museum of Victoria, later as the Museum of Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Portrait Gallery (UK)</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Gallery of Victoria</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Australian Museum</strong></td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>First known as the South Australian Institute Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland Museum</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Museum of Victoria</td>
<td>1869</td>
<td>First known as the Industrial and Technological Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo National Museum (Japan)</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Gallery of NSW</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Australian Museum</strong></td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>First known as the Perth Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Modern Art (USA)</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Gallery of Art (USA)</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Part of the Smithsonian Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerhouse Museum</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Museum of Australia</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>The Museum was established in 1980 but did not have a permanent home until 2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To place this in an international context however, and as has been noted above, by this time European museums had had a long tradition of government support (for whatever motivation). So, by the first half of the nineteenth century European museums were firmly established as social institutions. Consequently, though there have always been constraints, spending public monies has had support. By comparison, in the United States private benefactors have tended to be the financiers of museums (Pigott, 1975) and the public support of museums has been less of an issue.

At this time, then, the European, and to an extent the USA, museum sectors could be said to have been ‘developed’, now being part of the established social and economic order, with the Australian colonies’ ‘less-developed’. It is worthwhile noting as a comparison, that while the Queensland Museum had been established soon after the colony was founded, by that same date the British Museum had been open to the public for over 100 years.

Also significant, at least in the early days of Australia’s developing museums, was the slow rise of a national consciousness. It may be argued that in some quarters the phenomenon continues to this day, but certainly in the early days of colonial Australia loyalties tended to lie with the ‘mother country’. For Australian museums in the nineteenth century, that meant that their “reference point” (Kohlstedt, 1983: 17) was the British Museum. As Anderson and Reeves (1994) have noted:

For at least the first 60 years of settlement, Australian scientists cheerfully and uncritically dispatched the most interesting specimens to the country most of them still called home (1994: 83).

More than this, though, was that even when the states were dynamic societies in their own right, loyalties were not gelling into a ‘national’ sentiment. As will be seen below, each state was quite self contained.

Nonetheless, the latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed a substantial change in the shape of the museum sector in Australia with the establishment of art museums and science and technology museums (Anderson & Reeves, 1994). Victoria’s Industrial and Technological Museum (later to become the Science Museum of Victoria) was
established on 29 December 1869. The Museum had a strong education focus and was essentially the first attempt at a technical school for young people (Rasmussen, 2001). It had been recommended by a newly established Technological Commission—set up in the post-Great Exhibition enthusiasm for promoting industry—as it was considered time “to offer the working classes the opportunity for instruction taken for granted by other groups in society” (Rasmussen, 2001: 81). This idea of educating the masses, evident at about the same time in the development of museums in the United Kingdom, signals a significant change in the conception of the museum itself (Casey & Wehner, 2001). The museum now had a recognised role as public educator.

During this same period a considerable number of art galleries were being established: the National Gallery of Victoria (1861); the National Art Gallery of New South Wales (1874); the National Gallery of South Australia (1879); and the National Art Gallery of Queensland (1895). Art museums were considered an indicator of a certain standard of civilisation and groups of like minded individuals gathered and formed societies to promote their cause, just as had happened with natural history museums. The Art Gallery of New South Wales considers that it owes its “genesis” to the New South Wales Academy of Art whose first “artistic soiree” was held eight years before the Gallery was officially opened (Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2005).

The plethora of ‘national’ galleries is indicative of the intercolonial/state rivalries that were, and still are, a continuing theme in the development of the museum sector in Australia (Anderson & Reeves, 1994; Bennett, 1988). One review of Australian museums even went so far as to state that from 1830 to the early 1900s:

There was not only no co-operation among museums, but rather a state of complete and utter indifference between them, part of which was undoubtedly due to the local jealousies of the period (Markham & Richards, 1933: 7).

It could be said that this matches the rivalries, and lack of co-operation, in other areas of public policy—the issue of railway gauges, for example. For the museum sector this meant that by the beginning of the twentieth century each of the six Australian colonies had its own museum system. Even within states there seems to be the same type of
rivalry, with the development in Tasmania of two major museums both combining art and natural history, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. Certainly, though, the very names of the various museums is indicative of the interstate rivalries. Victoria’s museum was called the National Museum of Victoria (writer’s emphasis) until its amalgamation with the Science Museum of Victoria in 1983 (to form the Museum of Victoria). Five years after its establishment in 1829 the Sydney Colonial Museum, Australia’s oldest state museum, changed its name to the Australian Museum, a name it still retains. The various ‘national’ art galleries retained their names until well after Federation (McCulloch, 1984).

The issue of marketing each ‘national’ entity is more of a problem now than it was as the various museums where being set up. Certainly there were intercolonial/state rivalries, but in a political sense and not in the sense the museums were competing for market share. However, it has been noted that the context in which these institutions were set up is significant. To a modern reader the word ‘national’ clearly means ‘of the nation’. However, at the time the term ‘national’ was used interchangeably with ‘colonial’, and could also denote an institution’s public status (McShane, 1998). In recent times the issue was clearer for the National Museum of Australia—it was set up in the nation’s capital to be ‘of the nation’.

Significantly, the development of the colonial art galleries predominately took place in the capital cities. Except for Victoria, regional museums and art galleries are quite a recent phenomenon. In Victoria the gold rush brought into existence a large number of towns and cities: the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery was established in 1884. Compare this to the situation in NSW, with the first similar institution being the Newcastle City Art Gallery set up in 1957 (McCulloch, 1984).

As has been previously noted, the colonies largely developed as independent entities, with loyalties resting locally first, and perhaps to England second. However, as the Federation movement gained momentum there was an increasing interest in a ‘national’ identity. For museums this resulted in a number of proposals for a national museum.
(Casey & Wehner, 2001; McShane, 1998). However, the motivation for the construction of a national museum was not to illustrate the human history of the Australian continent, as you might expect to be part of a modern national museum’s strategic plan. Rather, it was to assert “the success of Australian society” (Casey & Wehner, 2001: 538). As McShane (1988) has noted, the proposals for a national museum put forward by supporters of colonial federation were “placing history in the service of the state and arguing that a museum should form part of the new nation’s civic apparatus” (1988: 78).

It is a significant factor in the development of Australian museums that there has been a lack of interest in Australian social history (McShane, 2007). It is only in recent years that Australian museums have incorporated ‘history’ into the corpus of information and exhibits held. While it is not a concern of this thesis, it should be noted that a number of writers have critically reviewed this fact, not only in relation to the development of museums, but in relation to the development of an Australian national identity (Anderson & Reeves, 1994; Bennett, 1988; Casey & Wehner, 2001).

As it happened, the pre-Federation proposals for a national museum were not acted upon. Indeed, the various proposals throughout the first seventy years or so of Federation were not acted upon (see Anderson & Reeves, 1994; Casey & Wehner, 2001; and McShane, 1998 for detail on the proposals.) Australia’s first truly ‘national’ museum turned out to be the Australian War Memorial, first proposed in 1918 but not officially opened until 1941. Conceived in the post World War 1 period it has been claimed, in relation to the history debate noted above, that the War Memorial considered history to be ‘war history’ and that it was part of the constructing of an “Australian manhood” (Anderson & Reeves, 1994: 100), ignoring the contribution of women and indigenous peoples. Again, these debates are outside the purview of this thesis. More significant here is Casey and Wehner’s (2001) comment that the War Memorial:

was the first major museum in Australia to explicitly imagine its audience as a national community, rather than an imperial or a racial one (2001: 539).
Prior to the opening of the Australian War Memorial, 1933 saw the release of the report, *A report on the museums & art galleries of Australia to the Carnegie Corporation of New York*, published by the British Museums Association, and written by a British museologist, S. F. Markham, and Professor H. C. Richards of the University of Queensland. While seemingly careful not to be insulting, the report clearly noted the many failings of the Australian museum sector at the time. Amongst other issues it pointed out the development of the sector had been hamstrung by inter-state rivalries, and that it was poorly funded in comparison to the European and the USA museum sectors—it was noted that, despite its relatively smaller size, Scotland alone provided more funding to museums than the whole of Australia (Rasmussen, 2000). Not surprisingly, it also stated that there was a lack of interest in historical exhibits, either post or pre-settlement (Bennett, 1988). As has been illustrated above, these issues have been consistent problems throughout the development of Australian museums.

However, while Markham and Richards’s (1933) report was critical of Australian museums it did result in significant funding being directed by the Carnegie Corporation to the museum sector in Australia. The Carnegie Corporation of New York was an American philanthropic organisation, “concerned to extend some of its largesse to Commonwealth countries”, which subsequently provided a total of US$50,000 “to experiment with methods which would make their museums and art galleries of greater educational value to the public” (Rasmussen, 2000: 205). The activities allowed within this brief appear to have been broadly defined, as funding was provided to establish the Association of Art Galleries and Museums, the antecedent to the present Museums Association of Australia. However, such an association was encouraged in the report: it was noted that as there was little co-operation between Australian museums—due to the implied inter-state rivalries—a conference of museums curators, directors and staff should be convened as soon as possible. Such a conference might then encourage the development of regional federations, or even of an all-Australian museums’ association (Markham & Richards, 1933). Notably, the inaugural Chair of the Association was also one of the report’s authors, Professor H. C. Richards.

It has been said that Australian cultural life underwent “something of a renaissance” (Anderson & Reeves, 1994: 103) in the period following World War II, with the federal
government accepting a limited role in the funding of the arts. Very little, though, changed in the museum sector, particularly in the way museums viewed their role in society (Casey & Wehner, 2001). In contrast, the 1960s saw a rapid growth in historical museums, predominately in the regional areas of Australia. This has been attributed to both a renewed interest in Australian history and the constraints placed on the major state museums by cautious trustees and reduced budgets (Pigott et al., 1975). There was a concurrent increase in membership of historical and conservation societies that continued into the 1970s (Bennett, 1988). The 1960s were also a time when the increasing profile of the marketing profession was impacting on the way museums viewed visitors (Casey & Wehner, 2001). Visitor surveys were becoming increasingly significant in providing data for policy and strategy making.

The post World War II interest in Australian cultural life was further encouraged in the 1970s with the election of the federal Labor government led by Prime Minister Whitlam. The Whitlam government was committed to increasing access and participation in the arts generally—it was a time of increased funding, which was the impetus for a boom time in the arts community. The government did, however, initiate several inquiries to ensure that public funds were spent “effectively and creatively” (Rasmussen, 2000: 288). One such inquiry was the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, headed by P.H. Pigott, which ran from April 1974 to November 1975. The resulting report, widely known as the Pigott Report, was in many ways just as critical of Australia’s museum sector as the Carnegie Corporation’s report 40 years before had been. It pointed to the funding issue, describing the lack of funds for conservation in particular as a “crisis on a massive scale” (Pigott et al., 1975: 9). It also considered, and supported, the role of museums as educators, noting that “the advantages of museums are formidable in education but at present those advantages are used erratically” (1975: 12), as well as promoting the importance of ‘history’ as a discipline in a museum (Rasmussen, 2000).

However, the Pigott Report is primarily known for its support and recommendations for a national museum for Australia. In its brief it was asked to give “particular attention to the establishment of a national museum of history” (Pigott et al., 1975: 70) and it did so
in great detail. The Report included recommendations on content, describing the case for including a major display of Aboriginal history as “overwhelming” (1975: 71). It even made recommendations relating to the proposed site, the physical plan and the nature of the building (1975).

The Pigott Report (1975) was also significant for its support of the concept of marketing in relation to museum management and development. It proposed that the new national museum of history conduct market research on what would be the most appropriate display techniques. But it also recommended that a grant be made to conduct wider market research across the major state museums, the findings of which would be useful in relation to appropriate techniques of display, as well as estimating the “educational effectiveness of museums” (1975: 15).

The National Museum of Australia was established in 1980, only a few years after the Pigott Report, but it would take over twenty years for it to have a permanent home. However, according to McShane (1988), the “post-colonial reshaping of museums around the globe” (1998: 84) resulted in many of the major museums in Australia occupying the same thematic areas as the new national museum, namely, social history, indigenous history and environmental studies. It was forced to differentiate itself from these other major museums, which were now rightly identified as competitors, even before it opened. As well, there was criticism regarding its interpretive approaches before and after its opening (McIntyre, 2006). Nonetheless, the National Museum of Australia opened in March 2001 as part of Australia’s celebrations of its centenary of Federation. It had taken over one hundred years as a collection of colonies, and one hundred years as a nation for Australia to have its own national museum.

It was not only the National Museum of Australia that needed to differentiate itself. A number of specialist museums were established in the latter part of the twentieth century that effectively broadened the range of subject matter covered by museums in Australia and increased the need for museums to view themselves as competing for a market. Sydney’s Powerhouse Museum opened in 1988 and is now an established and well-respected institution catering for a different market than the more traditional
museums. Other institutions, such as the Stockman’s Hall of Fame in Longreach, Queensland and the National Maritime Museum in Sydney, are also indicative of the modern face of Australia’s museum sector.

The case study museums considered in this study, the state museums in Australia, are a significant part of the Australian museum sector. The museums are all quite different, in that some now have multiple campuses, and others have diversified their collections. (Full details of each museum are given in Chapter 6.) They have in common the fact that they are all the current iteration of the original colonial museums. Further, they all also derive the bulk of their funding from public monies (see Chapter 3) and have a significant cultural, education, scientific and tourism role within each state. Nonetheless, they too have had to recognise, and develop strategies for, the changing environment in which they now operate.

The changing role of the general public

There is no doubt that Schubert (2000) is correct when he says that the visitor has moved from the periphery to the centre of museum practice throughout the history of the museum. This is a significant shift in focus, which occurred as museums have evolved from elitist institutions available only to the nobility to broader-based public institutions (Kotler & Kotler, 1998). The very first modern museums may not have excluded the public, but the public was rather narrowly defined, and the occasions when those other than a cultural elite were allowed entry were limited (Hudson, 1975). Sir Ashton Lever’s public museum, opened in 1774 and noted previously, soon placed exclusions on visitor character, as evidenced by this newspaper advertisement of the time:

This is to inform the Publick that being tired out with the insolence of the common People… I am now come to the resolution of refusing admittance to the lower class except they come provided with a ticket from some Gentleman or Lady of my acquaintance (cited in Ripley, 1970: 32).
That said, the society at the time was changing and whatever the ruling elite may have thought, those in the perceived lower classes were becoming more influential. The establishment of the British Museum in 1759 came at a time when the non-aristocratic elite were emerging in the wake of the Industrial Revolution (Schubert, 2000). The Museum provided a focus for their aspirations. Similarly, the Louvre (established in 1793) provided the newly ‘liberated’ masses a similar focus in France. Schubert has noted that both the institutions:

came into existence as a result of changing social circumstances and to satisfy the cultural needs of an emerging bourgeois class (2000: 22).

What perhaps was not obvious to the ruling elite was that a ‘public’ was developing—a public that was now able to influence the shape of public institutions. Previously, the ‘market’ for museums was limited to individuals of similar status as the owners of the institutions. In the sense we know it today there was segmentation of the market. But it was not until a broader cross section of society began attending museums that the concept that there were audiences other than the ruling elite became apparent.

Nonetheless, the concept of noblesse oblige is evident in these early museum’s attitudes towards the visitor. The masses were to be guided, to be educated, and perhaps then they could aspire to a higher learning as demonstrated by their betters. Such attitudes were evident despite the fact that museums, in Europe at least, had moved from being owned by private individuals to being owned by the state. The market had broadened, but the ruling elite still ruled, and allowed only certain classes entry. As Hudson (1977) has stated:

Visitors were admitted as a privilege, not as a right, and consequently gratitude and admiration, not criticism, were required of them (1977: 7).

As has been previously stated, a significant change came about in the relationship between museums and the average person in the latter part of the nineteenth century, with a series of world fairs (Hudson, 1975). During this period the notion of visiting a museum for leisure became more popular. The period also coincided with the development of mass railway travel which meant the trade fairs and exhibitions were
accessible to the general public. In addition, McLean (1997) has noted that the exhibitions were commercial ventures used by nations to exhibit their national productivity. The success of these trade fairs and exhibitions was considered by governments to be evidence that museums could be used for social good, to promote national pride and to ensure that the population used their leisure time to educate themselves. Museums now had “a social importance and a political power” (Hudson, 1977: 8) they had not previously enjoyed.

In Anderson and Reeves’s (1994) opinion Australian museums were “born Modern” (1994: 82); inasmuch as they began their lives open to the public. Australian colonial governments contributed monies to establish the precursors to the major state museums—they were, therefore, created as public institutions (Casey & Wehner, 2001). They did not go through any transition period when only the scholars and savants were allowed entry. In a modern marketing sense museums in Australia were not tailoring their product to the same specific market that their counterparts had in Europe. However, while museums in Australia were free to all, and open to the public, until the beginning of the twentieth century they were clearly reflecting the attitudes and cultural backgrounds of their creators. For instance, they were only open during weekdays when most of the general population were at work (Anderson & Reeves, 1994).

Another significant social change in the nineteenth century that impacted on museums was the role of education (Mather, 1986). Educating the working class was seen as having substantial social value throughout the nineteenth century (McLean, 1997). Museums were joined by mechanics institutes and literary and philosophical societies as places of education and learning. The perception that museums were institutions of “private fellowship” had shifted to one of their being “for public instruction” (McShane, 1998: 77). This idea of educating the masses being promoted in the United Kingdom was also taken up in Australia at about the same time, and signalled a change in the way Australian society viewed museums (Casey & Wehner, 2001). The museums here took on the education function as they had in the United Kingdom.
That new role did, however, result in tensions that reverberate through museums even now. Australia’s colonial museums essentially needed to position themselves between two audiences (Casey & Wehner, 2001). They had their original role, related to their British antecedents and their place in colonial society, of being a repository of scholarly knowledge and a place of scholarly pursuits. Their new role, as educator of the masses, was a concern to those with a vested interest in the status quo. For example, the process of allocating resources to education programs by necessity forced a questioning of the amount of resources allocated to research. The fact that Australian museums were essentially not for profit state-funded organisations (as will be discussed in Chapter 3) meant that much of the debate on resources took place in the public arena and had a distinctly political flavour.

These tensions relate to the perceived purpose of museums—as social institutions, should their main focus be to inform, to educate, to entertain, to preserve, to research, or perhaps to conserve? Or, as is most likely the case, a combination of all of these? Nonetheless, all of these roles have been changed by the ‘new’ public. Further, the tensions between these perceived roles has changed the shape of museums generally. Clearly then, ‘the role of the public’ does not just relate to the changing engagement between the museum as a social institution and the people who visit that institution. It also encompasses the part the very existence the public has played in the development of the museum concept. As Kotler and Kotler (1998) have noted:

The evolution of central museum concepts—from collections to information and education and from learning to experiences—has reflected a gradual shift from control by experts (curators, educators, scholars) to control by audiences (1998: 15).

That is, because ‘the collection’ (the museum’s product) was the dominant focus for much of the early history of museums, museum programs and the museum experience were controlled by curators and experts up until 1900, despite the increasing concern within museums of the role of the public. At the turn of the twentieth century Murray (1904) could still write that museums held “monuments of antiquity or other objects interesting to the scholar and the man of science” (1904: 1)—no mention of the general public. However, by the early twentieth century the focus of museums had clearly
shifted toward informational and educational resources, programs and purposes (Kotler & Kotler, 1998). The scholar and the savant had ceased to be the only market segments of concern to museums.

Now that the general public was a factor to be considered, issues of how to attract audiences needed to be considered. Again, one of the tensions mentioned above became increasingly significant. It was a tension set to be a continuing theme in museum management, namely that between education and entertainment. Writing on the Victorian museum sector in the 1920s, Rasmussen (2001) has noted that museum management needed to attract the general public, but avoid being so ‘popular’ that the serious purpose of educating the masses was lost in the desire for ‘entertainment’. New York’s Museum of Modern Art, established in 1929, did not suffer from any confusion as to its place in society. It set up an education department that was integral to the way the museum operated (Schubert, 2000). It also began its life with a strong emphasis on marketing its product, and consequently paid attention to attracting audiences. It developed a strong corporate identity, what would be called today its ‘brand’, the first time an institution such as this had done so, and it hired a publicist in 1930 to “polish its image” (Schubert, 2000: 46), again the first time this had been done by a museum.

In the post World War II period little attention was paid to museums—governments and industry were concentrating on rebuilding infrastructure, housing, welfare and education. Not only were museums under-resourced, they were largely irrelevant, playing only a minor role in the reordering of the post-war society compared to their past roles (Schubert, 2000). The shape of museums had changed from the nineteenth century institution but they were beginning to be left behind. In the 1950s Australian museums were still presenting exhibits and displays informed by ideas developed in the previous century (Casey & Wehner, 2001). Museums were not taking note of the changing tastes of the museum visitors market. To exacerbate matters, by the 1960s museums and art galleries were in competition with many other activities. (See Table 2.2 for an overview of the museum sector’s competitors in the leisure market.) This clearly raised the expectations of visitors in relation to what they experienced from a visit to the museum (Rasmussen, 2001).
Table 2.2
The museum sector’s competitors from different types of leisure activities
(Adapted from Kotler & Kotler, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitor area</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stay at home behaviours</td>
<td>Watching television, Listening to music, Reading, Computers and the Internet, Hobbies (e.g., gardening), Social activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment activities</td>
<td>Attending sporting event, Attending the cinema, Visiting theme parks, Visiting National Parks, Shopping and dining out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and education activities</td>
<td>Visiting libraries, Attending concerts, Undertaking education courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting other museums</td>
<td>Heritage parks, Major museums in another location, Small local museums</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As has been noted, the 1970s were a period of significant social upheaval, which brought about a period of considerable change within museums. Many of these changes were a result of the changing ‘public’, with museums having many new considerations to attend to when analysing their market. As Hudson (1977) observed:

future historians of museums may well decide that 1971 was the year in which it became obvious beyond all reasonable doubt that there would have to be
fundamental changes in the philosophy and aims of museums, and that traditional attitudes were leading to disaster (1977: 15).

There had been much debate at the ICOM conference of that year on the notion that museums were still, in their own way, elitist and had little to do with the majority of people. There was no suggestion that museums should cease to exist but rather they needed to change with society. There was, then, an impetus for museums at this time to become “agents in promoting international understanding” (Rasmussen, 2001: 287), for them to be placed to encourage social change and to be part of the institutional mechanisms for strengthening cultural and national identities.

In Australia the Whitlam Labor government of the early 1970s initiated a number of social and political changes. As has been stated previously, the government was committed to increasing participation in the arts generally. There was an increase in arts funding, which was the impetus for a growth in the Australian cultural scene. In addition, the Whitlam government was also interested in other social reforms, such as the Family Law Court. In the Australian museum sector there were the beginnings of a significant change in the way exhibitions and collections were managed, due to a new understanding of the relationship between museums and the general public (Casey & Wehner, 2001).

Coinciding with this was an increase in leisure time. The implications of increasing leisure time to the museum sector has been the subject of study in Australia. Lynch et al. (2000) found that museums need to take account of the pressures on modern consumers—lack of time and the multitude of competing activities—and market their product to take advantage of the changing leisure patterns. The increase in leisure time and the advent of mass tourism has been identified by Schubert (2000) as one of the developments that heralded significant changes to the museum sector at this time in Europe. He also cited the availability of funds as another development, but interestingly the development that “affected the fate of museums so profoundly” (Schubert, 2000: 56) was the social changes that began in the 1960s and resulted in museums that were a great deal more democratic.
The view evident at the end of the twentieth century is that a museum’s overall social purpose is to provide appealing and satisfying museum experiences. There has been a transition from the museum being a source of information and learning toward it providing an experience in a distinctive environment. This parallels the move towards giving museum ‘consumers’ a much greater role in defining museum quality and service (Kotler & Kotler, 1998). Much of the information museums know about their market segments—how they can be more inclusive of their consumers—is derived from visitor research. While research into visitors has been conducted in one form or another since the 1930s, many of the early studies undertaken were either not effective in gauging visitor’s true feelings or were poorly conducted (Hudson, 1975). In later years, methods became much more professional. Furthermore, as Casey and Wehner (2001) have observed, the 1960s were a time when the increasing profile of the marketing profession was impacting on the way museums viewed visitors; the result being that visitor surveys were seen as useful tools for providing data for policy and strategy making. More significantly for the state of the museum sector today is the fact that:

The advent and increasing use of visitor studies and evaluations is an important step toward developing a client orientation in that it signals a shift from a functionalist, “object-centered” ideology toward a humanist, “people-centered” one (Neilson, 2003: 23).

However, there is now the realisation that visitors to museums are not one large mass of people. There are different segments that may seek different products and experiences, and consequently need a different marketing approach (Rentschler, 2004). In relation to Australia’s National Museum, Casey and Wehner (2001) note that it now investigates its actual and potential audiences, assesses visitor experiences and explores how the Museum can be more relevant, exciting and interesting—“consciousness of the ‘visitor’ sits at the heart of the National Museum” (2001: 545). The transition apparent in the museum sector as a whole has surely been a move towards the idea that knowing a museum’s audience and marketing to them is a vital facet of strategic planning.
Conclusion

This chapter has clarified the definitions of a museum that will be used in this study. The definition of a museum is based on the premise that the nature of the museum’s collection is irrelevant unless, for the purposes of the thesis, it directly impinges on a particular marketing issue. That is, a museum is a museum whether its collection is mainly related to natural history, or technology, or art, or, indeed a combination thereof. For example, an art gallery is considered here to be a museum providing it is not involved in the sale of art works to the public. The definition used here, then, is based on the concept of what a museum is and the objects that form the collection should not confuse the nature of that concept.

The second section has provided a brief history of the development of museums. It has been shown that originally collections were assembled by private persons with a view to showing them to savants and scholars. Nonetheless, in a marketing sense these embryonic museums were aiming their product at a specific market. In the latter part of the nineteenth century there was a series of world fairs, commencing with the Great Exhibition of 1851 held in London popularised for the average person visiting a museum for leisure. That period also saw museums perceived as places of education, both by government and the public. The potential audience available to museums was now considerably larger.

The Australian museum sector developed quite differently from that in either Europe or the USA. European museums predominately started life as private collections, later moving to be state owned and funded institutions. Museums in the USA have developed with funding from private endowments and, in many cases, with a local or regional focus. Australian museums also had a regional focus that largely reflected their original place in colonial and later federal life. They were public institutions—predominately government funded and not for profit—from the outset. In the early days the Australian museum sector faced issues such as under funding and interstate rivalries. There does also seem to be agreement that there has been a neglect of social history which has hindered museum’s development until quite recently. That said, while the Australian
experience *does* differ from that found in other parts of the Western world, there are considerable similarities. Australia has been equally affected by the social changes that are global in nature. For example, Australian museums have had many issues to address from the 1960s to the present, such as the increase in leisure and recreation time, when analysing their market.

The global nature of these changes is illustrated in the final section on the changing role of the public. There has been a significant shift in focus across the world as museums have evolved from institutions available only to the ruling elite to broader-based public institutions. The museum sector now reflects the fact that museums need to place the visitor, their customer in effect, at the centre of their activities. Museums still have multiple roles in society—education, entertainment, research, conservation, amongst others—but where formerly the collection was the ruling force, with policy and strategy devised by curators, educators and scholars, now the experience of the visitor is paramount—control by audiences. Furthermore, Australian museums now realise that museum visitors are not homogenous, and are consequently customising their marketing strategies with the aim of offering a value museum experience to each of their different market segments.