



National Museums Scotland Society Islands Collection



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Esmée
Fairbairn
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COLLECTIONS LEVEL DESCRIPTION

Data Entry form

Title of the Collection	Society Islands collection, National Museums Scotland
Author(s)	Eve Haddow
Curator responsible for collection (if different from author)	Principal Curator, Oceania, Americas and Africa
Date Completed	21 February 2014
<p>There are 105 artefacts from the Society Islands.</p> <p>The majority of the collection dates from the 19th century or earlier. Sixty two artefacts were transferred from the University of Edinburgh collection in 1854 and half of this transfer was barkcloth. Five items are associated with Captain James Cook's voyages. These are: three pieces of barkcloth (A.UC.516; A.UC.753; A.UC.412), a poncho or <i>tiputa</i> (A.UC.469), and a ceremonial gorget composed of a woven cane frame covered with plaited coconut fibre and adorned with shark's teeth, black feathers and pearl shell (A.1956.1025). Another gorget not associated with Cook was acquired in 1899.</p> <p>Five objects were purchased from George Darsie, a wealthy trader and the second Scottish husband of Tahitian Princess Titaua. Mrs Darsie donated 4 items. Other notable sources include: Sir Thomas Brisbane (1 item), Harry G Beasley (1 item), and Captain Cumming Dewar of Vogrie House, who travelled on the yacht <i>Nyanza</i> to the Pacific in 1887-1890 (2 items). A piece of yellow barkcloth decorated with red geometric and fern patterns was acquired from Reverend James Peddie, apparently collected by an early missionary in Tahiti. Additionally the museum houses three of Alexander Shaw's books of Polynesian barkcloth collected by Captain Cook, which include samples from the Society Islands.</p> <p>The collection includes two 19th century fly whisk handles of wood each decorated with two carved figures back to back. One is ornamented with red feathers. There is another complete example of a fly whisk, also featuring two back to back figures with a plume of coconut fibre. There are 18 fishhooks in a range of styles and materials, including a squid lure in the form of a water rat. There are also a number of adzes and stone adze heads.</p>	
<p>Have any aspects of the collection been published? Please provide bibliographic references if available.</p>	
<p>Published collections:</p> <p>Idiens, D (1982), <i>Pacific Art in the Royal Scottish Museum</i>. Edinburgh: Royal Scottish Museum (A.UC.403; A.1899.55; A.1907.168; A.1924.340; A.1956.1025)</p> <p>Richards, R (2012), <i>The Austral Islands: History, Art and Art History</i>. New Zealand: Paremata Press (A.UC.403)</p> <p>Gathercole, P & A. Clarke (1979), <i>Survey of the Oceanian Collections in Museums in the United Kingdom and Ireland</i>. UNESCO.</p> <p>Kwasnik, Elizabeth (ed.) (1994), <i>A Wider World: Collections of Foreign Ethnography in Scotland</i>. National Museums of Scotland</p>	

Produced as part of *Pacific Collections in Scottish Museums: Unlocking their knowledge and potential* project 2013-2014. For full information and resources visit www.nms.ac.uk/pacific

Related publications:

Mackintosh, FJ (2011), *From the South Seas to the North Sea: the story of Princess Titaua of Tahiti*. Anstruther: Kilrenny and Anstruther Burgh Collection