

ABORIGINAL RELICS

Need for Legislation

ANTHROPOLOGISTS' PLEA

The need for legislation to protect the aboriginal anthropological relics of Australia, so that science might some day link the prehistoric history of the continent with that of the old world, was emphasised by other speakers, in addressing the Anthropological Society. The chairman was Dr. F. W. D. Collier.

The society, it was stated, had several members in Newcastle, Maitland, and Singleton, and for that reason it was intended to hold meetings of the society in the North occasionally. Among Northern members present were Messrs. P. D. Riddell (Newcastle), and W. J. Enright (a Past President, of West Maitland).

The Secretary (Mr. F. D. McCarthy) said that the society was formed in 1928, and now had about 120 members. Negotiations were proceeding for the formation of an Australasian Anthropological Association by the affiliation of societies in South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales. By this means it was hoped to encourage the study of anthropology in Australia, and to impress on the Government the need of legislation to protect the country's aboriginal relics. His Society had encountered many wilful acts of vandalism, particularly with rock carvings and paintings.

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Professor J. L. Shellshear, until recently Professor of Anatomy in the University of Hongkong, who spoke on the gradual evolution of the brain, said that during the past 20 years or so the vast amount of information on the subject that they had learned had come from the direct result of the teachings of Professor Elliot Smith. At the age of 23 Professor Elliot Smith had published his first paper on the brain, and had changed the whole attitude of thought, although the material he had used had been available for 100 years.

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Having illustrated changes in the senses of hearing, vision and smell in the brains of animals, Professor Shellshear said that the human brain presented a more difficult proposition. It had been found that the sense of smelling, hearing and vision were among the first to develop in the embryo brain, while the areas to develop last were those concerned with the highest expression of human intelligence, such as failure of composition and defective speech. Much valuable knowledge of this had been gained by a study of brains affected by wounds during the Great War.

POSITION IN AUSTRALIA.

"If there is anything more valuable in Australia than its history, I do not know what it is," Professor Shellshear said. He had examined many cave-shelters in this country, he added, and, unfortunately, there were only two which had not been interfered with. It was the duty of anyone who found prehistoric relics to refrain from disturbing any part of them unless competent specialists were present to recognise other evidence that might be available. A prominent scientist several years ago had announced that he was going to Java to find the "missing link." People thought he was mad, but he had a theory, and eventually found the "missing link." The trouble was that he was too highly specialised and tried to do the whole of the work himself, without full success.

The skull of the Australian aboriginal was more refined than other relics taken from Europe. The areas apparently responsible for concentration and attention and for highly skilled movements had developed further in his skull than in that of lower types. The Australian aboriginal, as a race, had been said to be related in some way to the Neanderthal type.

He declared that only one piece of work had been done so far in Australia to give them an idea of the wanderings of the Australian aboriginal and his culture, and that was in South Australia. Yet if they were going to write about the Australian aboriginal without first making the painstaking investigation that had been carried on in other countries, all their "discoveries" about him would be pure novelism. He thought they would have to look somewhere in the north-west, in the Kimberley district, to find authentic traces of the aboriginal's ancestry. The big difficulty in finding the race's origin was the lack of finance.

Professor Shellshear added, in reply to a question, that they should be very cautious before they made dogmatic statements about "missing links." The term should never be used if they had not really filled the gap.