

Biological Anthropology

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“In biological (or physical) anthropology,” wrote John Relethford (1990: v) in his textbook, “we seek answers to who we are as a species and where we came from”. As Gabriel Lasker and Robert Tyzzer (1982:7) wrote in theirs, it is: “a branch of anthropology ... [and] also a biological science”.

The School of Archaeology and Anthropology’s 2024 major program description enlarges on those statements: “Biological anthropology is the branch of anthropology that focuses on the evolutionary and biological aspects of humankind: *Homo sapiens* as an evolved species - human populations as varied and dynamically changing sets of biological individuals, adaptable but also vulnerable to ever-changing circumstances. It is also concerned with the non-human primates, and with current debates on the biological bases of human social behaviour. The subject thus encompasses what used to be called physical anthropology, as well as primatology, palaeoanthropology and human population biology, including human genetics and the study of human health, nutrition, growth, demography and ecological adaptation, viewed comparatively and synthetically.”¹

The subject has a long history in and concerning Australia (Kirk 1985); but my concern here is specifically with its representation at the Australian National University, above all in the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology, as it was originally named. Biological anthropology – distinct from but closely allied with its siblings, archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology – was part of the Department right from its origins in 1974. That is to say, Colin Groves joined the Department at that time, with a brief to introduce physical anthropology (the term used at the time) into its range of offerings across the anthropological disciplines.

In this short contribution to our historical overview of ourselves, I aim to sketch the growth and development of biological anthropology within the now School of Archaeology and Anthropology, from that one-person start 50 years ago, to its present position. My approach is broadly, but not strictly, chronological. The Australian National University’s structures, including our Department/School, have changed a great deal over these years, both in substance and in name; as have our undergraduate and graduate coursework offerings. It would be tedious to put ‘then’ in front of any every outdated term. I hope what follows will be clear despite probable inconsistency and anachronism.

I concentrate in what follows on the biological anthropology stream’s academic staff and programs. All of these, and the stream’s students and other researchers, have been supported over the decades by secretarial, general, administrative and technical staff, without whom the academic work would have been impossible. When I arrived in 1981, the Department had no administrators by that title. It had two secretaries (each working,

¹ <https://programsandcourses.anu.edu.au/2024/major/BIAN-MAJ>

equipped with a typewriter, adjacent to a professorial office), a cartographic artist, a photographer and a technician. Particularly remarkable amongst those: our omniscient technician Dave McGregor was in his post for most of the School's 50 years. But it would be beyond my brief to do more than acknowledge here the support of these colleagues.

My focus is on characterizing the biological anthropology academic stream as a collectivity. Consequently I will have most to say about our joint work to teach our discipline, and the collaboration required by that. We have all been research-active, but our research projects have mostly been either solo efforts or collaborations beyond the biological anthropology stream or beyond the Department. Nonetheless, the life of our stream has been unquestionably and vitally enlivened by the presence over the decades of numerous research fellows and research students (see Chapter 8, PhDs completed). Research fellows have included: Debbie Argue, Dave Bulbeck, Dave Cameron, Judith Caton, Damien Huffer, Judith Littleton. Others too, such as Celia Westwood, joined the stream informally. As well as many academic publications, the productivity of the wider group has included, for example, general-reader books by Debbie Argue and by Peter Dowling². For many years, colleagues, research fellows, research students, sometimes undergraduates and others used to gather at Colin Groves's office door on Fridays for a sociable visit to the Union or another lunch location.

Overview, sources and data

In setting out below a narrative of biological anthropology's first 50 years in our School, I take an approach that is largely descriptive and necessarily selective. I draw mostly on my own memory and records, corrected and supplemented by those of kind colleagues whom I acknowledge below. To counterbalance this qualitative account, I include more systematic data of two sorts. Table 1 lists the salaried staffing of the stream from its beginning to the present. Table 2 presents an overview of the undergraduate teaching program from its beginning to the present; for simplicity, the table groups courses into a number of themes whose teachers and first and latest dates of offering are listed. A corresponding summary of the graduate teaching program is not presented but would be approximately parallel. Yet other overview tables could also be envisaged. There are, however, limitations imposed by the data available. Faculty of Arts Annual Reports with useful detail run only up to 1991. The School's digital 'Year in Review' began only in 2018. Informative as these and similar sources are, their very partial chronological coverage limits their value for my purpose. I chose the Faculty Handbooks and Undergraduate Handbooks for overview purposes as the only data sources I could locate that provide even coverage across our 50 years. I leave Tables 1 and 2 to speak to readers for themselves; I make no further comment on them.

Before 1974

The ANU offered students no systematic program in physical or biological anthropology before the arrival of Colin Groves in 1974. Nonetheless, there had long been an abundance of relevant seminar series across the campus. And as early as the 1970s, there were individuals in disparate parts of the University who – while mostly not sailing under the subject's banner – had some interest bearing on the evolution and biology of our species

² Argue (2022); Dowling (2021).

and its relatives. At various times these included: Bob Kirk³, Sue Serjeantson and Simon Easteal (Human Biology [now Genome Diversity and Health, and National Centre for Indigenous Genomics], John Curtin School of Medical Research); Frank Fenner (former Director of both the John Curtin School of Medical Research and the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies); Stephen Boyden (Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies); John Gibson (Population Genetics, Research School of Biological Sciences); Derek Freeman (Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies); Tony Barnett (Zoology); Terry Hull (Demography, Research School of Social Sciences); Sue Wilson (Statistics), Tony McMichael (National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, NCEPH); and even beyond the campus (e.g. Peter Sinnett, Woden Valley Hospital and University of New South Wales). Fenner and Boyden used to convene meetings of the Nature and Society Forum at University House (Waterhouse 2004). Closest to sailing under the biological anthropology banner were the Sydney-anatomy-trained palaeoanthropologist Alan Thorne (Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies) and the Toronto-anthropology-trained Colin Pardoe (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), who had previously joined the ANU as a PhD student of Alan's. Amongst these individuals, only Barnett had undergraduate lecturing responsibilities (until his retirement, after which he still occasionally gave guest lectures, including for us, as did many others on this list). As this range illustrates, the wider intellectual environment across the University has long been rich and interactions often fruitful for biological anthropology. Below, however, I concentrate on our Department/School only.

1974-1980

The sub-fields of our wide-ranging discipline that are given emphasis and priority in a given setting tend to flow from the academic context. In our case, the context was archaeology and anthropology. Doubtless this was a more than coincidental echo of the context then prevailing at, for example, Cambridge, Durham, Oxford, University College London (UCL) and the traditional 'four-fields' anthropology of north America. That being the context – as opposed to, say, an anatomy or zoology context – it can be no surprise that an early priority, especially for prehistoric archaeology, was teaching and research on human remains from the deep past and on human evolution. This was all the more timely, given the burgeoning of empirical research in the archaeology of Australia, and the growing realisation, in which John Mulvaney played a key part, of the time depth and complex past of Indigenous people's presence on this continent.

On paper, Colin Groves might not (I speculate) have seemed an obvious appointee to introduce human evolution and skeletal analysis to the Department's offerings. His already numerous publications to 1974 had touched on human evolution; but overwhelmingly he had worked on primate taxonomy and (unconventionally for an anthropologist trained at UCL) other mammalian taxonomy. His UCL PhD thesis had been on cranial variation in gorillas and its evolutionary and taxonomic implications. Nonetheless, he early on joined, briefly, the ANU team then working at Lake Mungo; he introduced skeletal analysis and human evolution to the Department's curriculum; and in short, he was soon an active expert in these fields too, more than bearing out the wisdom of his appointment. Already in 1975, he had applied his taxonomic expertise to human evolution, publishing, with V.

³ After his retirement from the John Curtin School, a much valued Visiting Fellow in our Department.

Mazák, a paper still referred to today for its now widely adopted concept of *Homo ergaster* (Groves & Mazák 1975).

Primatology too had long been an accepted sub-field of physical/biological anthropology. In the 1970s, there was rising public, student and research interest, no doubt stimulated in part by field projects such as those of Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey. Colin had undertaken and published on substantial field as well as museum research in primatology; and he was well placed to introduce this sub-field, too, to the Department's curriculum. His teaching dealt with the ecology, behaviour and conservation of the non-human primates, as well as their evolution and taxonomy.

While Colin was clearly perceived in the Department as a biological anthropologist, his later-year courses were at first taught, not so much as a distinct third program, but rather as contributions, in the case of *Human Evolution*, to Prehistory, and in the case of *Primate Ecology and Behaviour*, to Anthropology. This was reflected in their course codes. His exceptional intellectual breadth, both within biological anthropology and beyond it, would have helped his contributions to take their places in the broader range of the Department's offerings.

Primate Ecology and Behaviour was first taught in 1975, and *Human Evolution* in 1976, setting up a long pattern of biennial alternation. From 1976 too, he contributed practical classes on bone identification (human, non-human primate, other mammals encountered in excavations in Australia) to the Department's preparation courses for honours in Prehistory. In 1978, alongside *Human Evolution*, Colin added a new course, *Human Variation*, to the range, to introduce topics on the biology of living human populations. In 1980, he again taught *Human Evolution* and *Human Variation*, and also – utilizing his expertise in broader mammalian biology – contributed with cross-disciplinary colleagues to a further new biennial course, *The Ethnobiological Origins of Domestication*. In addition, he continued to teach skeletal analysis annually. And he supervised at least three MA theses to that date. An examiner of one of these reported to the effect: at my university [Harvard] we would award a thesis like this a PhD.

In 1979 the Department agreed, and secured permission, to advertise a second lecturing position in biological anthropology. The Department's Annual Report for 1980 opened with these words: "The department's commitment to the integration of the two major disciplines of Prehistory and Anthropology was strengthened by [this appointment]"⁴. In consequence, the Report anticipated being able "to offer a full training in Biological Anthropology at both under-graduate and post-graduate levels" and "to put forward proposals for an honours school in Biological Anthropology". No other university in Australia offered this.

1981-2003

In 1981 the second appointee in biological anthropology arrived: myself. I had never visited Canberra or anywhere in Australia before. One of my new colleagues felt sure that it was her 13-year-old daughter's enthusiastic description of Canberra's bus network that had tipped the balance in favour of my wife's and my decision to accept the offer and move to

⁴ <https://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/faculty-handbook-1980>

Australia. I also knew that, at 29 years old, I was lucky to find myself in any tenurable job, let alone this one – not to mention that I was lucky in other ways as yet unforeseen.

The advertisement to which I had responded listed several topics in the comparative biology of living human populations. The perspective I brought to human population biology, whether environmental or genetic, was one I would call Harrisonian⁵: a broad interest in variation, adaptation, ecology and health, within an evolutionary framework as relevant. This we considered to represent roughly half of the discipline. The other half was represented by Colin's scope: human evolution and skeletal analysis, and the non-human primates, with a side interest in animal domestication. A side interest for me, though an absorbing one, was an interest in biological approaches to human behaviour that I would call Reynoldsian⁶.

The advertisement and my (as I perceived it) Harrisonian perspective were and remained the basis of the complementarity between Colin's teaching and mine for the next many years. Not only were we complementary in our teaching interests; we were also – no coincidence, as Anthony Forge later confirmed to me – both particularly broad in our ranges of interests. We had to be. For many years to come, we had prime responsibility, between the two of us, for representing our discipline to students.

At the top of my own research agenda at the time was recent Himalayan fieldwork in a human ecology vein, conducted with John Crook⁷ and others. But returning there from a Canberra base seemed impractical. Within a few years I was launched on a New Guinea field interest instead, encouraged and enabled in the first instance by Don Gardner. Two funded research projects and two co-edited volumes later, New Guinea remains my main regional focus – though with a fair diversity of topics. The first project was a cross-stream collaboration with socio-cultural anthropologist Don; the second, a cross-campus collaboration with the human geneticist Simon Easteal (John Curtin School of Medical Research, see above). The books were, respectively, co-edited with Michael Alpers, of the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research, and with Andy Pawley, Jack Golson and Robin Hide, all of the ANU Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. I came to think that the ANU was a more favourable place than most for facilitating cross-disciplinary collaborations.

My arrival permitted some re-organization and expansion of the stream's teaching. *Human Variation* became my responsibility in 1981, and I narrowed its scope to focus more on anthropological genetics. To cover topics originally included in *Human Variation* but

⁵ Geoffrey Ainsworth Harrison, then professor and head of biological anthropology at the University of Oxford and a key leader of the discipline in Britain and internationally. His perspective is well conveyed in, for example, his Festschrift (Boyce and Reynolds 1995) and his own history of the discipline at Oxford (Harrison 2007).

⁶ Vernon Reynolds, also then a professor of biological anthropology at the University of Oxford, is best known for field studies of chimpanzee behaviour and ecology, both before and after the period discussed here; but during this period he turned his attention – serious but not uncritical engagement – to human ethology and sociobiology, as illustrated by his main book of this period (Reynolds 1980).

⁷ John Hurrell Crook, then at the Department of Psychology, University of Bristol (see e.g. Crook 1980).

excluded by this narrowing of focus – essentially, environmental rather than genetic aspects of human population biology – I introduced a new course in 1982, *Human Physiology and the Environment*.

Behaviour was not amongst the topics sought by the advertisement I had responded to; but when I suggested a new course in this area also, that proposal was encouraged. So, also in 1982, I introduced a second new course, initially titled *Biological Perspectives on Human Social Behaviour*. At that time it was both newly topical and controversial to view human society through the lens of zoological approaches to animal behaviour study (ethology and sociobiology). Interestingly, the first syllabus for *Introduction to Anthropology* from 1974 on had included ethology amongst anthropology's cognate disciplines; so a link was already made there. My course was noticed in the media as the first course on its topic at any Australian university.

These three courses – *Human Variation*, *Human Physiology and the Environment* and *Biological Perspectives on Human Social Behaviour* – joined Colin's *Primate Ecology and Behaviour* and *Human Evolution* as courses offered on a long-running biennial rotation. This was intended to permit students to take the courses of their choice, notionally in their second or third year if full-time, while permitting Colin and myself scope to keep these courses going along with our other duties.

A little later, I added a fourth lecture course to my repertoire. *Population in Anthropology* had been introduced by Graham Harrison and team-taught since his departure from the Department. At Anthony's suggestion, I re-introduced it as co-ordinator, retaining its character as an exploration of population and demography seen through the lenses of the three anthropological disciplines, and its team-taught staffing across the Department; to this were added substantial contributions from Terry Hull and other Research School demographers.

The Department's 1980 Annual Report had additionally foreshadowed the assistance of Alan Thorne to contribute to our ability to offer our students a full training. As a Research School staff member, Alan (like Terry) was under no obligation to undertake undergraduate lecturing; nonetheless, he did so. In 1981 he offered our only ever population-specific course, *Biological Anthropology of Australian Aborigines*; and he did so again in 1983 with his PhD student Steve Webb, and in 1991. Steve offered it in 1985. Colin offered it in 1987, with assistance from Bob Kirk; and again in 1993 and 1995. In later years, Alan and Colin sometimes put on the 'Groves and Thorne show', debating their divergent views on human evolution, including on ABC radio, at the Canberra Archaeological Society, and within the Department.

Also foreshadowed in the 1980 Annual Report was the development of an Honours School in Biological Anthropology. This was indeed developed and approved in 1981 and implemented from 1982 onwards. This involved honours preparation courses, notionally in a full-time student's second and third years alongside the student's other coursework, followed by a fourth year focusing entirely on biological anthropology: a supervised short thesis as the centrepiece, accompanied by assessable seminar work and individually tailored work such as practical projects and reading courses. Colin and I undertook a significant

amount of the second- and third-year honours work (including Colin's skeletal analysis classes), as well as thesis supervision, other fourth-year work and overall co-ordination. But importantly, the honours program was also supported by other staff within and beyond the Department, both synergistically and altruistically. For some years, for example, all honours students in the Department participated in a combined seminar on the epistemology of the anthropological disciplines, run by Don Gardner, Wilfred Shawcross and myself.

Three honours students actually working on biological topics had earlier graduated through another honours program such as Prehistory; but from 1982 students could enrol in Biological Anthropology Honours and in 1985 the Department recorded its first graduate from this honours school. Honours enrolments and graduations continued steadily, with some fluctuation, reaching a peak in 1998 with a cohort of seven, including two University Medallists. One of these is now Director of NCEPH. The examination copy of her Honours thesis still bears the squished mosquito that had presumably distracted an examiner momentarily from his work.

An academic staffing of two was and remained a slender foundation for an Honours program, on top of lecturing and tutoring duties, not to mention research, PhD supervision, administration and study leave. We were very grateful for the support of colleagues.

At this stage in the stream's development, we did not offer a dedicated first-year course in biological anthropology. This was for a number of reasons including sheer staff shortage. But we did contribute to *Introduction to Prehistory* (Colin), *Introduction to Anthropology* (both) and David Happold's *Human Biology* course in the Department of Zoology (both). These served as alternative entry points to our later-year courses.

A sample biennium illustrates our pattern. The years 1989 and 1990 saw us teaching and co-ordinating the following biennial lecture courses: *The Primates* (enrolment 37); *'Race' and Human Genetic Variation* (enrolment 45); *Human Society as Animal Society: Sex, Conflict, Cooperation and Human Uniqueness* (enrolment 22); *Human Evolution* (enrolment 44); *Nutrition, Disease and the Human Environment* (enrolment 40); *Culture, Biology and Population Dynamics* (enrolment 20)⁸. This list gives the modified course titles that we eventually came to think best; but the scope of each is much as already indicated, with content details reconsidered at every offering. In addition, we taught honours courses and honours preparation courses annually (including Colin's *Skeletal Analysis*, which served archaeology as well as biological anthropology), and supervised honours and graduate students.

There was not much formal administration to do at that stage, beyond development and management of the honours program. In large measure, Heads at that time held up a kind of umbrella over the rest of us, protecting us from overmuch imposition from the wider faculty and university administration. Faculty of Arts meetings were open to all, but optional except for Heads and others with key Faculty roles. Colin hardly ever went; I did sometimes go; which was thought a bit strange, but I felt I should inform myself as to the wider

⁸ <https://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/faculty-handbook-1989>
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academic environment. In addition to teaching (for which there was no pedagogical preparation at the time) and research, I did find myself, on arrival, faced with some other miscellaneous duties and requests. It seemed my new lecturer status brought an expectation that I might have something sensible to say about the plans for the then Museum of Australia, for example, and the repatriation of Aboriginal remains. This was both flattering and daunting; nothing in my prior background had prepared me on either front. Possibly my very first assignment, less interestingly, was to attempt the smoothing of ruffled feathers in the Computing Service – the ruffling having been the work of one of our PhD students.

Although our biological anthropology stream was (and remains) unlike any other in Australia, we were not forging ahead on our own without wider connexions. When, in 1987, the Australasian Society for Human Biology was founded under the leadership of the Human Biology group at the University of Western Australia, our ANU group was strongly in support, and Colin was amongst those prominently and enthusiastically participating in its annual conferences. Later, Marc Oxenham and Alison Behie (see below) too took on its presidency. Importantly, the adjective 'Australasian' was not chosen merely on whim: the intention, mirroring our own approach, was inclusiveness. The group in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Auckland became and remains our closest comparator stream.

Facts, dates and numbers alone would make a historical account of our disciplinary stream a pale and lifeless thing. How to conjure up some sense of atmosphere and human interaction? I will try to recollect something of the day-to-day dynamic, in the essential context of the Department as a whole. On my arrival in 1981, I found the Department wonderfully welcoming. My wife Margherita and I were collected from the airport and accommodated with great kindness by Colin and Phyll Groves, before moving into university housing. Thanks to various new colleagues – not only the Groveses – we were lent cars until we could buy one; we were invited into new colleagues' homes; we were driven to Tidbinbilla, to properties in the bush, and to the coast; we were told much about Canberra and the ANU and the personalities in the circles we found ourselves in. Most of my Departmental colleagues were British by origin, via New Zealand in some cases; some were American; and even those who were Australian by origin were far from where they had grown up. No-one had local extended families, and to a degree we became each others' fictive kin.

We all inhabited the then new AD Hope Building and were very accessible to each other during the working week. In contrast to other departments where the 'god-professor' system still held sway at that time, Prehistory & Anthropology operated from the beginning, and for many years, a two-year alternation of headship between the foundation professors, John Mulvaney and Anthony Forge. Their very different styles could give rise to a roller-coaster sensation; but it was no doubt good for both men, and perhaps for all of us, that the role of Head was never a permanency for either of them. Apart from the foundation professors' office suite – 'the command module' – offices were allocated according to need and convenience more than either hierarchy or disciplinary stream. My office neighbours on

the ground floor were socio-cultural anthropologists or archaeologists, or – when I was on the periphery of Prehistory & Anthropology territory, in the area where a fibre-glass replica of an Aztec calendar stone loomed over a model of ancient Rome – a classicist.

The Prehistory & Anthropology tea-room, also on the ground floor, just down the corridor from the professorial offices, was very important. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only, one of the secretaries (not yet administrators) would make percolated coffee. Attendance at morning coffee and afternoon tea was a well established custom for staff, both academic and general, and for post-doctoral research fellows and graduate students. While this was a social event, it was also an occasion for genuine anthropological/ archaeological discussions. I learnt more about socio-cultural anthropology there than I ever had as a first-year undergraduate. These events also provided convenient opportunities for making practical arrangements or seeking ‘volunteers’ for tasks. If Anthony had something he needed doing, an improvisatory stride down the corridor might often find him someone to do it. In those days the demographic profile of the academic staff was young, and staff children were often amongst the occupants of the tea-room.

That age profile changed with passing time. Arriving near the end of an expansionary period in Australian higher education, I remained the youngest member of tenurable staff for a surprising number of years (I believe until the appointment of Christine Helliwell). The changing age profile might have been a factor in the ensuing decline in use of the tea-room. Other possible factors include, in my mind: the pressure on secretaries once they became administrators, no longer allowing time for coffee-making; the mushrooming of cafés on campus; the siren call of desktop computers on office desks waiting to be used; but most of all, I think, the rising sense, maybe attributable to the 1988 Dawkins ‘reforms’, that academics no longer had time for that sort of thing. All the same, lunch-time use continued even though there was less collective coffee- and tea-drinking. Colin, in particular, used to emerge from his basement office at lunchtimes, collect his pile of mail (we had physical mail in those days, and he received more than most of us), and chat sociably with whoever else might be there. There was outrage and resistance when, later on, a head of another department was discovered in our tea-room with his tape measure, working out how many PhD students he could fit into the space; it did not happen. The tea-room remained a significant if informal part of Departmental life.

How to describe such an intangible and unrecorded thing as the atmosphere in which we – both the biological anthropology stream and the Department as a whole – worked and interacted? I should obviously make a conscious effort to doff those tempting rose-tinted spectacles. Even with that said, my prevailing memory is of harmony and sociability. Within our small stream, co-operation and cordiality seemed easy to maintain. As I said in 2017, in a eulogy for Colin delivered, after more than 30 years of close collaboration, at a celebration of his life: “We never, that I can recall, had a cross word”. Even after the stream expanded, much the same spirit persisted, at least as far as my experience went.

The wider Department constituted a very important context for the stream, for two sets of reasons. On the one hand, the Department’s internal dynamics and the quality of its everyday life impinged, directly or indirectly, on everything we did. On the other, the Department was a single entity in the eyes of the Faculty of Arts and the wider University:

the streams were informal divisions only. At the Departmental level, life could be a little more complex than within our small stream. Unsurprisingly, given that the Department consisted of three streams and generally 16-18 permanent academic staff, there were episodes of tension and frustration, alliances and fissile relationships, long deadlocked meetings. Fictive kin, like any other kin, don't always get along smoothly. Nonetheless, such bumps in the road were the exception rather than the rule. They did little, to my perception, to tarnish the overall friendly and functional quality of the Department/School, at least during my time on staff. I have speculated to myself that maybe the founding professors between them set a tone that somehow substantially outlasted their tenures in post. At any rate, it was not until I moved on from the ANU that I learnt what it felt like to be in the midst of truly serious and lasting conflict within an academic department.

Like the other streams in the Department, we also joined in overlapping informal communities across and even beyond the campus, often well connected by communications and individual relationships across institutional dividing lines, for example with our sibling Departments in the Research Schools. Colin participated regularly in *Cooper's and Cladistics* discussion meetings which brought together evolutionary biology researchers across the campus with a focus on taxonomy. Archaeology/anthropology cross-campus communities were sometimes regional in nature: for instance, Australianist, New Guineanist or Southeast Asianist. When there was a special event on, such as an Aboriginal art exhibition and sale organized by Howard Morphy, or the *Rom* (Arnhem Land ceremony of diplomacy and friendship) organized and hosted in 1982 by Les Hiatt⁹ and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, these were open to all and attended by many, regardless of stream.

From 1982 on, Faculty Handbooks proudly announced that Prehistory & Anthropology had "a third major stream"¹⁰: biological anthropology. It did not always feel like that, though. With six tenurable academic staff in archaeology, and six (plus three more non-tenurable) in socio-cultural anthropology, a stream of two was relatively and absolutely small. Perhaps Prehistory & Anthropology was more like a two-and-a-half-stream department. The two larger streams held stream meetings, which we were frequently invited to attend (usually but not always, Colin to Prehistory and me to Anthropology). Whole-department meetings were rarer, but could be interminable, on a principle derived from ethnographic fieldwork that everyone should be allowed their say.

Colin and I never held formal biological anthropology stream meetings then; or needed to. With something to discuss, I would pop into his lower ground floor office, taking advantage of his genuinely open-door policy. Even if I had to wait a little while, until he had finished another paragraph or analysis – or even another paper, I sometimes thought – we would settle the issue there and then if we could. Though clearly the senior of us, Colin had absolutely no interest in administration, and could never understand why anyone with a research curiosity would feel differently. Even in later years when he became a professor,

⁹ Of the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, and a former president of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (later Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies).

¹⁰ <https://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/faculty-handbook-1982>

he was never Head of Department/School for longer than required to hold the fort during a designated Head's temporary absence. When required to take administrative action, he might – innocently rather than strategically – work across rather than with the system, giving rise to the gibe that he was “running his own university”. Anthony sometimes referred to the two of us as The Heavenly Twins (alike in being British, and bearded?). Colin, not to be outdone in references to classical myth, would respond: but which of us is the immortal one? Sadly, as we know now, it was not him. Is it me?

Colin (unlike me) had a lot of practical laboratory teaching to do. Since he was there from the start, it was possible to arrange that the Hope Building's facilities were designed for his (amongst others') needs. So, adjoining his office was a teaching and research laboratory, the 'bio lab', adorned, not only with the expected bones and fossil casts, but also, reflecting his broader mammalogical perspective, with horns and antlers. This was the location for his *Skeletal Analysis* classes, where students could study the materials directly in their own time as well as during the classes. In the days before dogs were debarred from campus, the Groves Old English Sheepdog, Chaucer, often accompanied Colin to work. It has been said that Chaucer “could quickly clear the bio lab of students with just one fart”. But Colin and his courses were popular with students, to whom his door was open just as much as to colleagues. He was the kindest, most inclusive and least hierarchical of teachers. He knew what he wanted from students, however. The quizzes which formed part of his habitual assessment schemes could be intimidatingly specific – “which monkey is named after a Turkish princess?” – and students would be gently but firmly corrected if they misused 'however'. His own memory was as retentive and well pigeonholed as his writing was clear and concise, and perhaps it surprised him when others didn't keep up.

Colin maintained a substantial book and reprint collection, often generously lent out. Eventually this outgrew the capacity of his original office, and he moved to a larger one down the same corridor. There too, his door was open to all – at least until the time, later still, when the shelves housing his collection multiplied to the point of blocking the view from his desk to the door.

A team of two responsible for a discipline and its honours program could not but aspire to grow, both to relieve workload and for fuller coverage of its subdisciplines. The strategy of taking on a heavy load so as to bolster the case for a new position had worked well for the Department as a whole; but we were still just two people. In 1994 the Department was reviewed. In my submission I identified two staffing needs in particular: in human genetics and in skeletal biology. Human genetics was a core topic in biological anthropology globally and in our honours program; it was developing fast and excitingly in the new era of direct DNA analysis; I was responsible for teaching it, but had other teaching responsibilities too, and would never have claimed to be a research-level geneticist. My identification of skeletal biology flowed from recurring strong student interest in that field – not only in palaeoanthropology, but more particularly in the analysis of more recent remains, especially Aboriginal remains, with a view to e.g. palaeopathological rather than evolutionary inferences. Colin had the osteological expertise to supervise honours and similar projects in this field; but he too had other teaching responsibilities; and similarly he would not have claimed to be a research-level palaeopathologist.

Recommendation 24 of the 1994 Review Report offered qualified support for the numerical staffing need of Biological Anthropology, but did not comment on the specialisms I had identified. It recommended: "That in its long-term staffing plan the Department look carefully at the teaching of Biological Anthropology, and if it is decided that this should continue that it should give serious consideration to a third post in Biological Anthropology, with especial reference to the impact of environmental factors on human biology".

Nothing at all came of this in the next few years. By early in the next millennium, however, student interest, especially at honours and postgraduate levels, in studies of skeletal and dental remains, in museums or archaeologically recovered, was undiminished. A proposal was developed (as I recall, principally by Peter Hiscock and myself jointly) for a new post essentially like the second specialism I had proposed earlier: a skeletal researcher. This was explicitly to be a joint post: 50% biological anthropology, 50% archaeology. In due course this proposal was supported, funded and advertised.

2003-2015

Our new colleague – the third (or two-and-a-halfth) biological anthropologist on the Department's permanent teaching staff – arrived in 2003. It was Marc Oxenham. Although he was a New Zealander with an Australian PhD, we would most likely never have succeeded in recruiting him, had the post not been internationally advertised, as he was teaching in Colorado at the time. He was the palaeopathologist we sought, or perhaps better put, the human bioarchaeologist. There may have been some surprise that the selection committee's top preference had not fallen on a researcher specialized in the study of Aboriginal (or any other Australian) remains. Marc's research focus was on excavated human remains from neolithic Vietnam. Many factors affect an appointment decision of course. It is no more than pure speculation on my part that one factor may have been a pessimism, perhaps particularly prevalent at that time, about the future of such research within Australia.

With characteristic energy and goal-orientation, Marc immediately set about expanding and teaching the coursework in the area for which he was appointed. By 2005 he was sharing the teaching of *Skeletal Analysis* with Colin, as well as running new and popular courses of his own, very much in keeping with his bioarchaeology brief and well appreciated as such by students: *Health, Disease and Behaviours in the Past* and *Archaeology of Death and Mortuary Practices*.

At the same time Marc also introduced a course called *Forensic Anthropology and Archaeology*. Part of the rationale was that there is a significant (but not total) overlap between the knowledge and techniques deployed in bioarchaeology and in forensic anthropology. Forensic anthropology was another area of great interest to students, and given that pressure to maximize student numbers was considerable, there was a strong case for including this field in our offerings, including postgraduate coursework offerings and PhD supervision. Eventually, however, the total workload generated for Marc became excessive. In 2012 he ceased to teach his forensics lecture course, though the course itself continued, and continues, taught by others. In due course the Master of Forensic Anthropology was withdrawn, and Marc also ceased to take research students in the subject. It was not his principal area of expertise. Intellectually, there was some feeling that it did not belong so

well as part of the overall character and mission of the Department/School. There was also a concern that television-watching students, perceiving forensic anthropology as a viable and perhaps exciting vocational option, might be disappointed on encountering the actual job market in the field. Marc has continued, however, to work as a forensic anthropologist himself, with various national institutions, most notably in Papua New Guinea with the Australian Defence Force (Australian Army Unrecovered War Casualties Unit). In 2018, he was awarded a Silver Commendation by the Deputy Chief of Army in recognition of this work, the first time this award had gone to someone outside the military.

From 2010 Marc introduced a bioarchaeology summer session field school in the Philippines, which drew many applicants. Thanks to his enthusiasm and expertise, this proved to be an important addition to our advanced undergraduate education and training in the subject.

Meanwhile, Colin and I continued our teaching programs and patterns much as earlier, except that Marc's arrival permitted Colin to expand his primate teaching. From 2005 there were two primate courses: *Primate Evolutionary Biology* and *Primate Ecology and Behaviour*.

By then we were all three involved in offering shorter courses in research design, practical techniques, and analytical methods (statistics by any other name). From 2002-2012, in keeping with a wider initiative at the time, we also offered short courses linked to our lecture courses, designed to give students options to extend their knowledge of the relevant lecture course topics. We all held roles convening honours and major programs, both in biological anthropology and in cross-disciplinary 'field' programs such as *Health, Medicine and the Body*. Similarly, we played our part in the development of the Master of Culture, Health and Medicine. Biological anthropology meetings were by then meetings of the three of us, as necessary.

In 2013-2017 Marc was made an ARC Australian Future Fellow, a position which grants "4-year fellowships to outstanding Australian mid-career researchers". This permitted him to dedicate himself exclusively to research, though – enjoying it particularly as he did – he did continue his Philippines field school for a while. After this he returned to normal duties. But then, 2020-2024, he won a further award, British Academy Global Professor, held at the University of Aberdeen. This is his main position at the time of writing, though he has also continued to hold a fractional appointment in the School at ANU, covering PhD supervision.

Although there is no mandatory retirement age at the ANU, and although our oldest member, Colin, showed no sign of lacking either enthusiasm or ability to continue indefinitely, the horrible question of 'succession planning' could not be kept in permanent abeyance. In Colin's case, the question was particularly acute. How on earth could some successor be found to become our sole teacher of both primatology and palaeoanthropology – let alone do so at a high level, and be research-active in both fields? Even if we undertook a global search, we would find that people like that are very rare indeed. The solution was to split the two main components of his teaching and expertise. Thus in 2010, with Colin still in post, the School prudently advertised a lectureship in

primatology. In 2011 Alison Behie arrived from Calgary to take up that post – another appointment that we would have missed out on making if the advertisement had not been publicized internationally.

Alison is a PhD graduate of the primatology-strong biological anthropology program at the University of Calgary. She had undertaken her doctoral field research among the howler monkeys of Belize, during the course of which a hurricane had struck. Adapting her plans, she focused her project on the impact of the hurricane on the monkeys' nutrition, stress hormones and parasitic infection. This has subsequently meant she now has two research foci. Her long-standing primatological interests are in primate behaviour, ecology, conservation and responses to anthropogenic impacts. But she has also been able to develop a specific focus on the impacts of disasters, both for non-human primates and for humans – fire and cyclones being the most obvious Australian examples of the latter.

On her arrival in the School, Alison applied herself, as expected, to teaching primate ecology and behaviour, while also establishing a course in the Anthropology of Environmental Disasters which looks at cross-cultural and cross-species responses to disasters. With assistance from Ben Rawson (another of our 1998 honours graduates, in 2008 also one of Colin's PhD graduates), she had the enthusiasm and drive to go further beyond expectations, developing a primatology field school in Cambodia. From 2016-2021 she held an ARC DECRA Fellowship, which gives 3 years of dedicated research time to outstanding early career researchers. Following that, she returned to normal duties; or rather a super-normal set of duties, including Head of School. She holds that position at the time of writing. For the period of her fellowship, the school appointed Anja Deppe from 2017 – 2020. Anja is a primatologist trained at Stonybrook university who specialises primate cognition with an emphasis on lemurs.

In 2013, knowing that retirement date was in the hands of the individual, and glad that my last PhD student (at least I thought at the time that he was my last) had graduated, I made my move and retired. To begin with, I remained on the premises as a visitor, content to work on projects of my choosing. My course *'Race' and Human Genetic Variation* was offered twice more, by myself and my student Shaun Lehmann, on a casual basis; and then, though our stream had originally deemed it an essential core course, it was withdrawn. In 2014, a fixed-term lectureship at the University of Cambridge was advertised via email. Having failed to interest any PhD student or postdoc in applying for it, I applied for it myself. Thenceforward I was no longer an everyday presence on the ANU campus, though I remain affiliated with the School to this day.

There is no surety at the ANU that departing staff will be replaced in number or specialism, but the School was able to proceed with an advertisement to replace me. Its decision was to focus on the behavioural component of my repertoire (which had originally been an optional extra).

The successful appointee was another overseas recruit, Geoff Kushnick, who came from the University of Washington, where he had held a lecturer position for several years after having earned a PhD from the same university in 2006. With expertise broadly in evolutionary anthropology, his research is a blend of 'quantitative ethnography' and the

analysis of cross-cultural data that employs both theory and methods from human behavioural ecology. He has worked on several collaborative, interdisciplinary projects with leading global scholars in the evolutionary social sciences and humanities. He joined the School in 2014, having just completed a five-month fieldwork stint as a Fulbright Scholar in Indonesia, and developed courses of his own to replace his evolutionary anthropology inheritance from me, *Human Society as Animal Society*, since renamed *The Evolution of Human Behaviour*.

Meanwhile a chronic problem had begun to cause a slow deterioration in Colin's health, and even after operations it eventually precipitated acute crises. Despite initial recovery, he was left vulnerable to pneumonia. He was also left with difficulty lecturing: his voice had simply become too quiet. In 2015 he was forced by illness to retire. Alison and Marc organized a fine Festschrift for him (Behie and Oxenham 2015). With no let-up in his enthusiasm or mental ability to do research, he continued working, supervising graduate students, and publishing as prolifically as ever, or more so. The grand total of his publications, single-authored, co-authored, and edited, stands at 784 items, including 16 books, 216 chapters and 468 articles (Rookmaker & Robovský 2018, 2020).

Eventually the final crisis came, and Colin died in November 2017. Posthumously, he was given a Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Primatological Society at its Nairobi 2018 meeting. The loss of this quiet dynamo was truly the end of an era, for the Department as well as more widely.

2015 onwards

Colin's retirement had triggered the second step in the 'succession plan'. A lectureship was advertised, with a primary focus on human evolution, but also encouraging a broader interest in evolutionary biology, including primate evolutionary biology. In 2016, the appointee, Katharine Balolia, joined the School. Katharine had done her PhD at University College London. Her interests are in the evolution of the skeleton and dentition, human and other primate, and – like her colleagues of course – she has developed coursework accordingly, as well as student supervision and her own publications. She seeks to understand, correlationally and causally, how skeletal variation in extant primates relates to their ecology and behaviour, and thus ultimately, where possible, to infer what the skeletal morphology of extinct hominins might be able to tell us about their ecology and behaviour. She also seeks to apply advanced 3D shape quantification methods to the cranium and mandible to distinguish between extant primate species with the aim of interpreting taxonomic variation in the hominin fossil record.

With Marc on his Future Fellowship around this time, the teaching team was in need of other support too, and so a further post in his field was advertised. The first appointment for that post was Kate Pechenkina, but for personal reasons she departed ANU after just one year. The position was re-advertised and the successful applicant was Justyna Miskiewicz, an expert on the biology of bone. She arrived at the same time as Katharine, in 2016, and she too set about teaching her specialism and supervising research students in it. Justyna had received her PhD from the University of Kent. She analyses human bioarchaeological remains to reconstruct past human adaptation, biomechanics and behaviour, and to investigate skeletal growth and metabolism, using mainly her particular

expertise in bone histology, but other techniques as well. From 2019-2022 she held an ARC DECRA fellowship. Subsequently the School lost her expertise, unfortunately, with her move in 2021 to an honorary position at the University of Queensland.

Stacey Ward gained her PhD from the University of Otago in 2019 and joined the biological stream of Archaeology & Anthropology in 2020, in a fixed-term contract originally to replace Justyna during her DECRA; but extended to 5 years to also cover teaching for Laura Wilson, while on her Future Fellowship. Stacey's main focus is also on bioarchaeology, especially bioarchaeology of ancient Southeast Asian populations, with a further focus on repatriation of remains. She currently teaches bioarchaeological and forensic courses and convenes the biological anthropology major.

Laura Wilson gained her PhD (Dr Nat Sci) from the University of Zürich in 2010, and joined the biological anthropology stream of Archaeology & Anthropology in 2021. Her technical expertise is principally in statistical shape analysis and 3D modelling, and she applies these to biological anthropology and to evolutionary biology more broadly, to address questions about how ecology, adaptation, function, evolution and development interact. She is currently both an ARC Future Fellow and head of the School's biological anthropology stream.

By 2017, staffing was sufficient to permit an arguably long overdue development: a first-year biological anthropology course, co-taught to introduce students to the discipline's main components as they were by then perceived to be: primatology, skeletal biology, human behavioural ecology, and primate/human evolution. And although the growth and internal strengthening of streams might seem to threaten their inter-connexions, 2022 saw the re-design of a first-year offering so as to bring together socio-cultural anthropology, biological anthropology and archaeology in one educational setting.

Finally

Does my account imply overall any insights as to how a new discipline can begin and grow in a tough and competitive academic environment? I will leave the reader to judge. But either way, it can be seen that 50 years have brought about an almost complete replacement in many aspects of the stream's life. The change in location, to the Banks Building following the disastrous flood of the Hope Building in 2018, completes the sense of wholesale change. But may the best things about its beginnings – in my estimation, curiosity, quality, energy, whole-hearted engagement with students, but also conviviality, collegiality and inclusiveness – still be there in another 50 years' time.

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most (not quite all) of the changes and additions suggested to me. Responsibility for the personal and perhaps idiosyncratic tone, as for all omissions and any errors, remains, of course, mine.

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Other sources

Obituaries for Colin Groves and Alan Thorne, as well as some other individuals mentioned here, can be found in *Life Celebrations: ANU Obituaries 2000-2021*, produced by the ANU Emeritus Faculty. References to Faculty of Arts Annual Reports and to ANU Faculty Handbooks and Undergraduate Handbooks are provided in footnotes through the text and in the caption to Table 2.

Table 1: Staffing of the biological anthropology stream

YEAR CAME	NAME	DOCTORATE	PREVIOUS POSITION	YEAR LEFT
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1974	Groves, Colin	PhD, University College London	University of Cambridge	Retired 2015
1981	Attenborough, Robert	DPhil, University of Oxford	University of Oxford	Retired 2013; Employed, University of Cambridge 2014-2019
2003 (joint appointment with Archaeology)	Oxenham, Marc	PhD, Northern Territory University	Colorado College	Australian Future Fellow 2013-2017; University of Aberdeen 2020-2024; then ongoing at A&A, ANU, fractionally; resigned 2024
2011	Behie, Alison	PhD, University of Calgary	University of Calgary	
2014	Kushnick, Geoff	PhD, University of Washington	University of Washington	
2014	Pechenkina, Kate	PhD, University of Missouri-Columbia	Queen's College – City University of New York	2015; Resigned to return to previous position
2016	Balolia, Katharine	PhD, University College London	George Washington University	
2016	Miskiewicz, Justyna	PhD, University of Kent	Imperial College London & University of Kent	Resigned 2021; moved to University of Queensland
2017	Deppe, Anja	PhD, Stonybrook University	University of Birmingham	2020 contract ended
2020	Ward, Stacey	PhD, University of Otago	University of Otago	
2021	Wilson, Laura	Dr Nat Sci, University of Zürich	University of New South Wales	
2019 (fixed term lecturer then post-doctoral fellow on MFO's's global professorship)	McFadden, Clare	PhD, ANU	ANU	Resigned in 2022 to move to an industry position

Table 2: Themes of BIAN-coded undergraduate course offerings, 1975-2024

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Course title/s</u>	<u>Convener/s & lecturers</u>	<u>First offered</u>	<u>Most recently offered</u>
Primates	The primates; Primate evolutionary biology; Primate ecology & behaviour; Primate behaviour & conservation; Primate behavioural ecology field school in Cambodia; Primate conservation biology	Groves, Balolia, Behie, Deppe	1975	2024
Human evolution	Human evolution	Groves, Balolia	1976	2024
Genetics/variation	Human variation; 'Race' & human genetic variation	Attenborough, Lehmann	1978	2016
Population	Population in Anthropology; Culture, biology & population dynamics	Harrison, Farrington, Urry, Attenborough, Ferguson, Hull, Shawcross, Kushnick	1978	2020
Indigenous Australia	Biological anthropology of Australian Aborigines	Thorne, Webb, Groves	1981	1995
Environment	Human physiology & the environment; Nutrition, disease & the human environment; Nutrition, disease & the environment	Attenborough, Gilligan (humans), Behie, Deppe (primates)	1982	2012 (humans) 2023 (primates)
Behaviour	Biological perspectives on human social behaviour; Human society as animal society: sex, conflict, cooperation & human uniqueness; Evolution & human behaviour; Evolutionary perspectives on parenting & childcare; Mating & parenting: evolutionary ecology of human reproductive strategies; Sexual selection & human evolution	Attenborough, Kushnick	1982	2024

Bioarchaeology	Health, disease & behaviours in the past; Ancient health & disease; Bioarchaeology field school; Ancient medicine	Oxenham, Miskiewicz, Ward, Tilley, Behie	2005	2024
Forensics	Forensic anthropology & archaeology	Oxenham, Meyer, Semper Carro, Ward	2005	2023
Disasters	Anthropology of environmental disasters	Behie, Deppe	2012	2024
Half-length extensions of above-listed full-length courses	Themes as above	Full-length course conveners	2002	2012
First year	The human voyage: introduction to biological anthropology	Balolia, Deppe, Behie, Kushnick, McFadden	2017	2024
Honours preparation courses	Biological anthropology C honours (from 1976); Skeletal analysis; Supervised research in biological anthropology; Techniques in biological anthropology; Analytical methods for anthropology & archaeology; Research design (& analysis) in biological anthropology; Human skeletal analysis; Analysis of mammalian remains; Analysis of vertebrate remains; Scientific dating & isotope analysis for archaeology & palaeoanthropology/palaeoenvironmental studies	Groves, Mountain, Hiscock, Attenborough, Oxenham, Grün, Willis, Ward, Kushnick	1994	2024
Honours	Honours in biological anthropology; Combined honours in archaeology & biological anthropology; Population health honours; Population studies honours	Groves, Attenborough, Oxenham, Behie, Ward, McFadden	1982	2024

Notes: Courses with closely related themes are grouped together. Dates are the first and last (so far) dates of offering of any of the courses in a given group. Major variations in titles are included; minor ones omitted. While the BIAN code was not introduced generally until 2002 (1985 in the case of honours only), earlier courses that were given a BIAN code in later

years, or clearly would have been, are included here as if BIAN-coded. Other than first-year and honours preparation and honours courses, most of the courses listed were usually offered in alternate years. Course conveners/lecturers were not named in the handbooks before 1986, so they are identified so far as possible from other sources. Individuals listed here but not in Table 1 are members of other streams within the School, members of other sections of the ANU, or sessionally appointed staff. Population, in particular, was taught collaboratively across disciplines.

Principal sources: Faculty/Undergraduate Handbooks:-

<https://dspace-prod.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/116825> to 2012;

<https://studyat-archive.anu.edu.au/studyat.anu.edu.au/2013/index.html> 2013 (2008-2014);

<https://programsandcourses.anu.edu.au/catalogue> from 2014.