

The discovery of the remains of the last Tasmanian tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*)

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ABSTRACT

When the last known Tasmanian tiger or thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) died in Hobart Zoo, during the night of 7th September 1936, its body was reportedly forwarded to the Tasmanian Museum. The apparent failure of the museum to preserve the body has always been disquieting to thylacine researchers. A detailed examination of the unpublished zoo and museum archival records has resolved this anomaly. The apparent preservation failure being occasioned by searching for the wrong specimen: the much photographed and filmed penultimate thylacine on display. This research has resulted in the discovery and identification of a later thylacine arrival at the zoo, the endling of the species: an aged, adult female, whose body was indeed forwarded to the museum upon her death, and preserved therein; and we explain why no contemporary details of this arrival were recorded in the zoological collection registers. Now, for the first time, eighty-six years after the event, we present photographs identifying the skin and skeleton of the last-known living thylacine.

Key words: thylacine; Tasmanian tiger; extinction; endling; zoo; museum

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Introduction

The well-known photograph of a Tasmanian tiger in Hobart Zoo (Figure 1), taken by Benjamin Shepherd in the early weeks of May 1936 (Sleightholme, Gordon and Campbell, 2020), has traditionally been identified as that of the last known Tasmanian tiger, which died during the night of 7th September 1936, and whose body was supposedly forwarded to the Tasmanian Museum. With the hope of finding the endling in the museum's collection, or evidence of its use in specimen exchange, four professional Tasmanian scientists, known to the authors, who published research on the thylacine (Phil Andrews, Lindsay Crawford, Vernon Hickman and Eric Guiler) unsuccessfully searched the collection specimens and registers for its remains. Additionally, numerous amateur cryptozoologists have also searched for the endling in the museum's collection, with similar levels of success to their searching for extant members of the species in the wild. The failure to find the remains of this much photographed and filmed thylacine in the zoological collection registers of the museum, has always been troubling to thylacine researchers; prompting the suggestion that possibly it was never sent from the zoo, or that, upon its arrival, the body was discovered to be damaged, diseased or decomposed, and considered unworthy of preservation. However, detailed examination of the zoo archives has determined that the body

of this particular thylacine upon its death was destroyed at the zoo.

More significantly, this paper reveals that a later thylacine arrived at the zoo; the specimen which died on 7th September 1936. We have established that its body was sent to the museum, and preserved therein, and explain why no contemporary details of its arrival were recorded in the zoological collection registers. Now, for the first time, eighty-six years after the event, we present photographs of the skin and skeleton of the last-known living thylacine.

Between the years 1934 and 1937, the governance and administration of both the Beaumaris Zoo, in The Queens Domain, Hobart, and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, were in transition. After these changes, the zoo was allowed to run down and was closed to the public on 25th November 1937 (Hobart City Council, 1942), while the museum underwent a major re-organisation of staff, systems and procedures, and implemented a new vision for its future.

Hobart Zoo in the mid 1930s

Hobart Zoo was established in 1921 by the Hobart City Council, as part of the responsibilities of the council's Reserves Committee, and under the

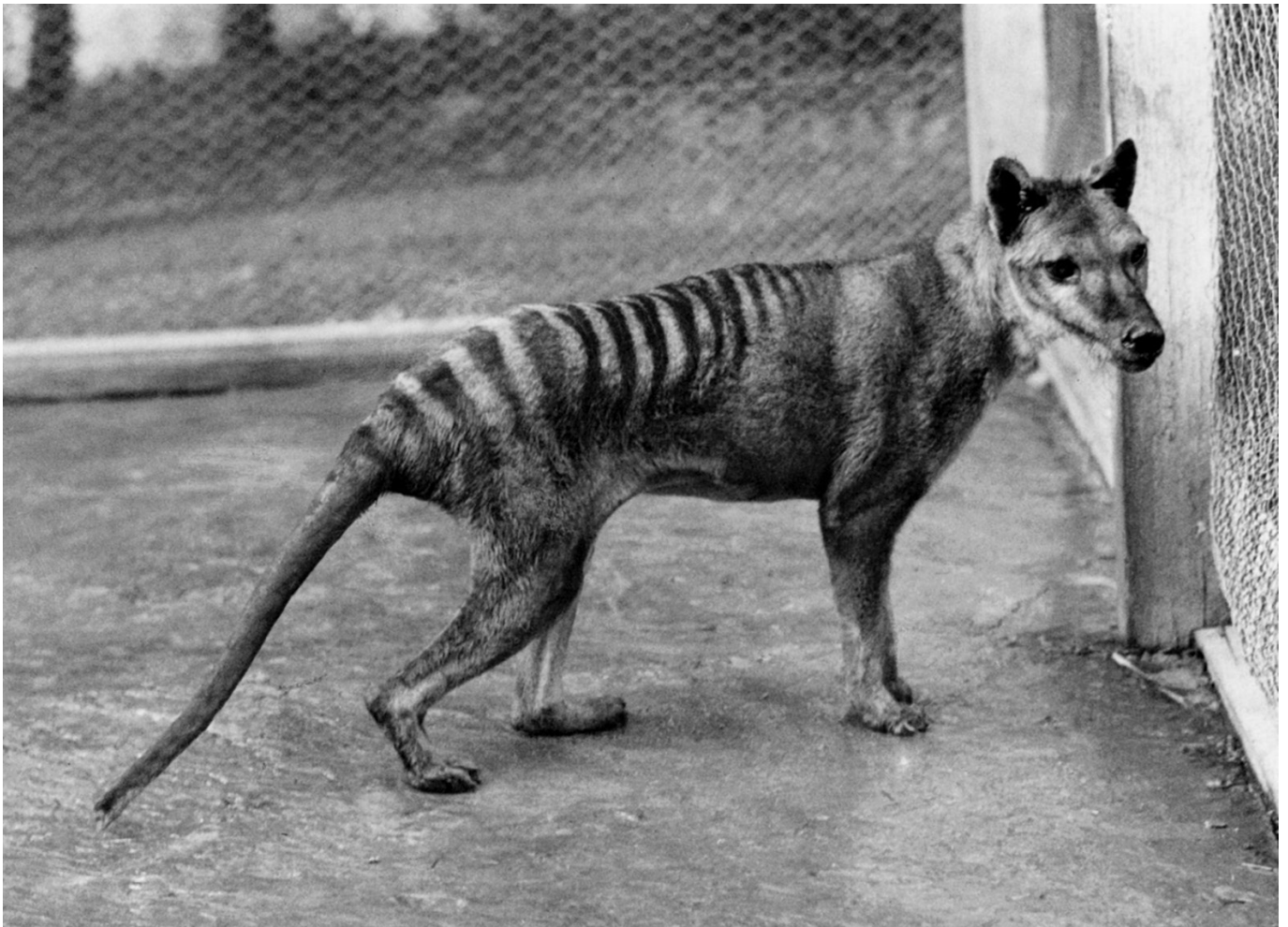


Figure 1. Hobart Zoo's second-last thylacine, photographed by Shepherd in early May 1936. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

curatorship of Arthur Reid. Reid's daughter, Alison, assisted her father in running the zoo by overseeing the animal nursery and hospital, and providing secretarial assistance, all in an unpaid capacity (Paddle, 2000). The curator's cottage had its own private, rear entrance to the zoo, through a gate situated directly above the thylacine's cage. After initial establishment, three full-time keepers were employed, and these were later joined by some part-time staff, who assisted in the management of the 78 cages, as well as the zoo grounds (Reserves Committee, minutes 28/8/1935).

In November 1930 Arthur Reid lost the sight in his left eye, after a vicious attack on him one night by a thief attempting to steal some parrots. The damaged eye and associated carcinomatous growth were removed in December 1931, but the cancer was not constrained. After a long battle, Arthur Reid died in December 1935 (Paddle, 2000). During the previous two years, he increasingly became less and less able to manage a full day's work, and his daughter Alison took over the zoo's administration. Although still working in an unpaid capacity, her role as acting curator was recognised by both the

Reserves Committee (minutes 30/10/1935) and the Town Clerk, William Brain: Miss Reid "took charge of the zoo ... when her father was injured" (letter 29/10/1935).

After Arthur's death, what had been a smooth transition from father to daughter in the management of the zoo changed. Amidst the prevailing economic depression, the superintendent of the Reserves Committee, Bruce Lipscombe, took over all non-animal administration. Only one full-time keeper was retained, with the responsibility to look after the placental carnivores. The other experienced staff were made part-time or redundant, and replaced with "sustenance workers", unemployed men who were placed in unskilled positions to earn their unemployment benefits by cleaning the grounds and cages, and feeding the less dangerous animals (Paddle, 2000).

Alison Reid and her mother were given permission to continue living in the zoo cottage, rent free, provided Alison continued to provide her unpaid services towards the management of the animals in the zoo, as well as the hospital and nursery (Reserves Committee, minutes 22/1/1936), but

she could no longer keep her keys to the zoo, or deal with the petty cash. This meant that she could not pay for veterinary services or purchase new arriving animals, nor could she conveniently enter and leave the zoo via the back gate above the thylacine enclosure.

In early 1936 the only thylacine at the zoo was consistently neglected. Its cage was rarely cleaned and, at times, it was unfed or left with the remains of the previous day's food before fresh meat was supplied. It was frequently locked out of its sleeping quarters, and left exposed to the elements for 24 hours a day (Paddle, 2000). The keyless Alison was unable to respond to social-contact coughing calls from the thylacine, and provide it with access to its sleeping quarters at night. When Alison's complaints to Lipscombe, over the daily treatment of the animals, and his blatant refusal to pay for veterinary care were ignored, she took her complaints to the Town Clerk, who occasionally interceded on her behalf; at times writing to Lipscombe, directing him to proceed with veterinary treatment and, specifically on 13th May 1936, to reform the daily mistreatment of the zoo's thylacine. These directions from senior management, annoyed Lipscombe to the point where he demanded £1 per week rent from the unsalaried Alison for living in the curator's cottage; forcing Alison and her mother to leave the zoo by 2nd June 1936 (Evans and Jones, 1996, p34). During Alison's last weeks at the zoo, the penultimate thylacine died, and, shortly thereafter, the last-known living thylacine arrived.

The Hobart naturalist Norman Laird purchased a copy of Shepherd's 1936 photograph of the zoo's second-last thylacine, and "permission was given to use it in a book publication". While Laird never completed a monograph on the thylacine, he left behind copious notes on the species, including the detail that Shepherd informed him that "The animal died the day after it was photographed", alongside comment that the photograph "does not represent the species in good condition, in fact, the subject of the photograph is emaciated" (Laird, 1977). The specific date of death has not been recorded, but apparently occurred between 12th (the probable date of Alison's letter to the Town Clerk over the mistreatment of the penultimate thylacine) and 19th May. Alison, no longer walking past the thylacine cage on entering and leaving the zoo, was unaware the death had occurred. When it was found by sustenance workers, the body was simply removed from the cage and placed with the refuse that was daily collected from the zoo (Reserves Committee, minutes 20/7/1931). Alison did not learn of its death until the following day, by which time the specimen had already been destroyed. Alison complained to Lipscombe about the loss of such a valuable specimen, which should

have been passed on to the museum. For once, Lipscombe took notice of Alison's advice, as two months later, on 25th July 1936, when a lioness died at the zoo, it was promptly sent to the museum (Pearson, diary 25/7/1936).

The last Tasmanian tiger definitely known to exist, and displayed by the zoo, was an adult that arrived on, or shortly before, 20th May 1936. Alison certainly associated the arrival of the last known thylacine with Elias Churchill (Paddle, 2000). In the 1920s and 1930s Churchill worked as a trapper in, and around, Adamsfield and the Florentine Valley. Out-of-season, he helped run an unlicensed, illegal sly-grog shop "The Miner's Delight" at Adamsfield. Alison met Churchill at the zoo in 1934 when, for a six-month period, he ran the Duke of York Hotel in Hobart. He quit the legal, licenced hotel business in March 1935, and "went bush" once again (Haygarth, 2017). Churchill consistently claimed to have caught and brought the last thylacine to Hobart Zoo, occasionally suggesting it was captured with the assistance of Albert Harris (Bailey, 2013, p74). After capture, the thylacine was pack-horsed to Fitzgerald and then railed to Hobart.

On the thylacine's arrival Alison, lacking petty cash to purchase the specimen herself, contacted Lipscombe, who arrived at the zoo, and after some hard-bargaining, paid £5 out of his own pocket for the specimen, and then wrote a cheque to himself from the Reserves Committee account for £5/0/5, (the extra five pence as recompense for the bank's charge for the cashing of a cheque). The transaction was recorded as an "Already Paid" account tabled at the Reserves Committee meeting of 20th May 1936.

At the time £5 was a relatively modest price for an adult thylacine. (The penultimate thylacine was purchased as a juvenile in 1931 for £8 [Reserves Committee, minutes 3/8/1931].) Prior to the depression, the most expensive animals purchased by the zoo, by some considerable extent, were thylacines. The purchase price for adult thylacines was nominally set at £15 by the Reserves Committee on 19th June 1923 (five times higher than the second most expensive animals, deer). However, captors of lone adult thylacines often received £20 or £25. But, given the depth of the depression, coupled with the captor's desire to avoid publicity (over a breach of the current game laws), the legal inability to sell the partially protected species elsewhere (either interstate or overseas), and, potentially, the condition of the specimen itself (now known to be an elderly female), Lipscombe's offer to purchase the thylacine for one-third of its pre-depression value was accepted. At £5, however, this was the most expensive single-animal purchase Lipscombe made in the 23 months he controlled the zoo, before its closure.

At first, it may seem unusual that the snaring and live capture of such a rare animal as a thylacine in May 1936 did not rate a written mention or photograph in the press, or generate publicity for the zoo that had a thylacine once again on display; but closer inspection resolves this anomaly. In Tasmania, the usual autumn and winter furred-game season was closed in 1936 for all but King Island, a locality lacking in thylacines. On mainland Tasmania, ground-based snaring, to catch kangaroo and wallaby was prohibited from May to July 1936 (*Hobart Mercury*, 1/4/1936), thus the possession of a thylacine during this time by a licensed trapper, not supposed to be ground-based snaring, was certainly dubious. Consequently, its captor would have been keen to avoid publicity that would attract the attention of the Animals and Birds Protection Board, as well as the constabulary, and result in a fine.

There is no reason to suggest that Lipscombe's and the sustenance workers' cavalier treatment of the newly acquired and last zoo thylacine, was any different from the mistreatment of the penultimate one. It survived in the zoo for a little less than four months.

The social activist, Edith Waterworth, was incensed at the zoo's published intention in 1937 to pay £40 for the exhibition of another thylacine (*Hobart Mercury*, 9/3/1937). Waterworth objected to the proposal, not just in terms of cost, but because it represents "the keeping in captivity of a frenzied, frantic creature". Waterworth visited the zoo at least once, shortly after the last thylacine's arrival, and again, shortly before its death: "I have seen one animal brought in from the bush ... After the frenzy has died down it will pace up and down, its whole body expressing the devastating misery it feels". Some months later, Waterworth re-visited the zoo before the last thylacine's (not unexpected) death, and predicted a similar fate for any future captive: "The frozen despair which its face and its whole body expressed would wring the heart of any person ... Its frenzy was over, it had refused to eat ... and in the course of time it will die" (Waterworth, 1937).

In the absence of Alison Reid, and a zoo workforce of conscripted, unemployed workers, there was no one to consistently calm, care for, and help the newly acquired thylacine adapt to a life in captivity.

At the Reserves Committee meeting of 16th September 1936, Lipscombe reported: "the Tasmanian tiger died on Monday evening last, 7th instant, and the body had been forwarded to the Museum".

The Tasmanian Museum in the mid 1930s

There was no formal record or acknowledgment of the arrival of the last thylacine at the museum.

Therefore, it was either assumed that the zoo had, as previously, discarded the specimen and the report of its transfer to the museum was incorrect, or that the museum had considered the specimen unworthy of preservation, due to the skin being in poor condition, deteriorated or diseased; (the latter something that occurred at both the National Museum of Victoria and the South Australian Museum, with specimens received from Melbourne and Adelaide Zoos [Paddle, 2012]).

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery was established in 1848 by the Royal Society of Tasmania. Although transferred to the Tasmanian Government in 1886 (Huxley, 2007), it consistently struggled to obtain the funding necessary to transform itself into a modern museum that conducted research, ran education programmes and had up-to-date displays. When a new director, Joseph Pearson was appointed in March 1934, the Trustees asked him to write a report on the museum. Pearson's report covered all aspects of museum operations, including staffing levels, funding, space, research and future possibilities. He stressed the importance of the Tasmanian fauna to zoologists around the world, while noting that "the Zoological collections ... are poor beyond description, and the worst part of the Zoological section is that dealing with Tasmania" (Pearson, 1934).

Over the next two years Pearson reorganised the zoological collection, in terms of its holdings, displays and utility for research, as well as introducing a new registration system that separated the collection into a systematic framework (Huxley, 2010).

With the appointment of a full-time taxidermist, William Cunningham, and a dedicated education officer, Arthur Powell, work began to develop and organise a scientific research collection, and to create a separate education collection for display, as demonstration specimens for visiting school groups, and for school loans. To ensure the organised development of a research collection along scientific lines, only those specimens possessing accurate data, or deemed scientifically useful, were registered into the new system.

As the position of education officer was a new one for the museum, Powell spent most of 1936 on the preparatory work of acquiring and preparing exhibits, collecting new material and sorting specimens for school loans (Powell, 1947). He was employed by the Tasmanian Education Department, and required to report on his activities to the Director of Education. His unpublished reports show that the scheme developed quickly, and that in 1937 he delivered classes to some 7,650 children, both in schools and in the museum. The classes were accompanied with demonstration specimens from the museum's

education collection (Pearson, letter 27/1/1939). In his 1937/1938 report Powell stressed the importance of the thylacine, noting that, with Grade V students, the “Tasmanian tiger dealt with especially” (1938).

Due to pressure to establish an education collection few registrations of mammalian specimens for the research collection were recorded for the years 1936 and 1937, and all these were preserved as either spirit specimens or skulls (and none of these were thylacines). Some existing animal specimens were re-registered, but those in poor condition, or lacking basic scientific data (a recorded collection locality, and age and sex details, that would make them scientifically useful for research), remained un-registered.

During this operation, most thylacine osteology specimens were registered into the new system, even those lacking basic data. Skulls and skeletons could provide important data for research into the now almost extinct thylacine because precise measurements could be taken. In contrast, the usefulness of tanned skins and mounted specimens for research were deemed minimal. Morphometric data from mounts rarely represent the living animal, because the accuracy of the final mount depends largely on the skill of the taxidermist. Prior to X-rays and scanning technology, bones contained within the mounts (usually the skull and limb bones) were inaccessible for research purposes. Therefore, while skeletal specimens were incorporated into Pearson’s new scientific research collection, mounted specimens and skins were not.

In similar fashion to Hobart Zoo, sustenance workers for the dole, were placed in the museum. On 25th May 1935, two sustenance workers, were assigned to clean out the museum’s overcrowded basement store that had been described as “a hinderance to the museum for some time” (Pearson, 1935a). The clear-out resulted in the partial destruction of six mounted thylacines (an adult male and female with four young) that had been on display since 1885 (Special Reporter, 1885), either because they were considered too shabby for further display, or just to make space (Boswell, 1935). Despite the specimens being deemed no longer suitable for display or research, Pearson clearly understood the value of retaining what he could, and a few pieces from this significant group were salvaged. This consisted of a small amount of osteological material, feet and leg bones from the female, the head of the male, and a piece of skin from the least-faded sides of the two adults (now specimens A1285a and A1285b). None of these remains were registered at the time. All except the head of the male are still in the collection. No material from any of the young was retained.

Identification of the Endling’s Remains

Due to the re-organisation of the Tasmanian Museum’s operating systems in 1935 and 1936, when the last known thylacine died in Hobart Zoo and was reportedly forwarded to the museum, it was not registered into the newly-created scientific research collection on its arrival.

The recent discovery of an unpublished 1936/1937 Annual Report for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, for the first time, confirms that the last captive thylacine from Hobart Zoo was genuinely transferred to the Tasmanian Museum after its death (Pearson, 1937). This unpublished report includes an appended taxidermist’s report for the year written by Cunningham, in which he records the thylacine among the list of the eight mammals received and significantly worked on during the year (1937).

The specimen was not registered into the zoological collection for two reasons. After Alison Reid’s departure from the zoo, there was no-one who could provide the necessary details about the thylacine’s captor, capture locality, capture date, potential age, longevity in the zoo, or cause of death; and the specimen was considered at the time to be more useful as an addition to the recently established education collection.

During the years 1926 to 1928, the museum had acquired three thylacines, a large wild-caught adult male, a juvenile female and a small adult female, (both from Hobart Zoo). These had all been mounted for display purposes by Alison Reid, as a contract employee (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1932). As the mounts formed a pleasant family group in the public gallery, there was no requirement for Cunningham to prepare another mounted thylacine that would require further display space or take up valuable storage space. Particularly, as six excess mounted thylacines had been deliberately destroyed in 1935.

Although the Tasmanian Museum had regularly exchanged material with other museums, the exchange of thylacine specimens had ceased in the 1920s. The last thylacine export from the Tasmanian Museum occurred on 1st May 1924 when a spirit specimen of a young thylacine that had died in Hobart Zoo was sent to the Melbourne anatomist Colin MacKenzie (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1928). Requests for thylacine material from both national and international museums continued to be received for many years. Pearson refused thylacine requests from the Royal College of Surgeons of England in October 1935: “owing to the great scarcity of this form it will not be possible to issue any further specimens from our Museum”

(letter 16/12/1935). In March 1937 the Animals and Birds Protection Board even granted a permit to kill a thylacine “for the purpose of the Tasmanian Museum” (Lord, letter 3/3/1937). But unsurprisingly, the permit was never able to be utilised. A request in July 1939 from the comparative anatomist, Harold Munro Fox at Birmingham University was also declined: “This animal is extremely rare, and we have very little material which we should feel justified in selling or giving ... I have offered £50 for one living specimen and I have not the slightest expectation of receiving a specimen” (Pearson, letter 27/7/1939). Therefore, the possibility that the last representative of the species was transferred to another museum was discounted, and we turned our attention to the existing collection.

The Tasmanian Museum currently has four mounted specimens and eight complete or partial skins in its collection. The three mounted specimens prepared by Alison Reid in the 1920s had been registered into the system that operated from 1913 until Pearson’s arrival, but were not re-registered in Pearson’s new system in 1935. They were not regarded as scientifically significant because they lacked essential diagnostic data. These mounts (A1298, A1299 and A1300) were not registered into the collection until June 1980. The fourth mount (A1400) is without provenance, but is clearly present on display in a 1924 photograph of the zoology gallery.

The provenance of six of the eight flat skins was determined using historical records. Three were obtained before 1924 (A1282, A1285a and A1285b), and three were donated by their owners; two in 1949 (A1284 and A1287) and one in 2004 (A3235). Two skins (A1281 and A1283) remained with no clear provenance, save that one of them was purchased from a furrier in the 1930s (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1945).

Tasmanian Museum specimen A1281, is the flat, tanned skin of an adult thylacine, of unknown sex, that has been roughly skinned, the jagged edges indicating that a large knife was used (figure 2). The skin is incomplete, missing the paws, nose and tail. A regular series of holes around the edge are consistent with it having been nailed onto a flat surface. The skin is tanned, but is heavy and thick and has not been softened. There is no evidence of further preparation. These characteristics suggest that this skin was most likely removed from the body in the field, later tanned and nailed to a flat surface to dry. It is likely that it was intended for sale to a skin-dealer along with other skins intended for the fur trade.

Thylacine specimen A1283, is the flat, tanned skin of an adult thylacine of unrecorded sex (figure 3). The skin is complete with head, tail and paws. It has been

neatly cut from the body and is tanned and softened, and the fur is in good condition apart from a little wear on the head. The ears are turned to separate cartilage from skin, the nose and lips are split and fully cleaned, the footpads have been cleaned and retained. A small portion of the tip of the tail is missing. This careful preservation suggests that this skin was prepared by an experienced professional with an understanding of museum standards that aim to preserve as many features of a specimen as possible. The reverse is inscribed with the words “TAS MUSEUM” in ink. The skin has a nose to tail length of 1510 mm.

The Tasmanian Museum currently holds two articulated and nine disarticulated thylacine skeletons in its collection. Both articulated skeletons, A312 and A315, have a known history and were articulated in 1922. Three complete disarticulated skeletons are stored in separate lots indicating that all bones originate from single animals, and are registered as A295, A297 and A300. All five of the above specimens are transcribed with original registration numbers prefixed with the letter D, a system used to register all vertebrate specimens from 1913 until Pearson’s arrival. All were re-registered into Pearson’s newly introduced system as vertebrate osteology specimens, prefixed by the letter L (Huxley, 2010). Five of the six remaining disarticulated skeletons are incomplete, consisting of only a few bones or the remains left over from mounted taxidermic preparation. One complete disarticulated skeleton, A1546, remains without provenance.

Specimen A1546 is a complete skeleton. It was found in a cupboard during restoration of one of the original museum galleries in the early 1980s. On 26th January 1939, due to a lack of work-space, this gallery had been closed to the public and reorganised to house the education office, taxidermist’s workroom and as a laboratory for the Tasmanian Biological Survey (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1947). Former employee Richard Johnson, who held the position of museum cadet, with responsibility to assist with education programmes in 1945 and 1946, clearly recalls the large cupboards in this area being used to store the education collection (Johnson, interview 9/2/2022). The skeleton had never been registered or given any museum identification number, but obviously had been professionally prepared and presented. The skeleton is arranged with the bones grouped anatomically on a series of five robust cards (A1546.1-5), each element is attached by twine threaded through holes and tied at the back. The skull has loosened from its ties but has been kept with the rest of the skeleton. The tip of the tail is missing. Each card is stamped in ink with the words “TASMANIAN MUSEUM”. Individual bones are not labelled but are arranged in groups to distinguish the major skeletal sections. The arrangements on



Figure 2. The roughly prepared flat skin of Tasmanian Museum thylacine specimen A1281. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)



Figure 3. The professionally prepared flat skin of Tasmanian Museum thylacine specimen A1283. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)



Figure 4. Tasmanian Museum specimen A1546.1, skull and pelvis skeleton card identifying the thylacine as female. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

each board are as follows: A1546.1 skull, mandible and pelvis, hand-written label inscribed “*Thylacinus cynocephalus* ♀” (figure 4), A1546.2 hind limbs and feet, A1546.3 ribs and clavicles labelled in pencil as “left side” and “right side”, A1546.4 fore limbs and scapula, and A1546.5 vertebrae (figure 5). The foot bones are not fully disarticulated, are held in position by dried sinew and flesh, and the claws are in place.

The A1546 skull fits exactly with the head on the A1283 skin, and has extremely worn teeth, with the dentine exposed on all tooth types, not confined to any particular teeth or area of the jaws (figure 6). Even-tooth-wear such as this indicates that this was a very old animal.

Conclusion

We contend that the thylacine flat skin, A1283, and skeleton, A1546, in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery collection are from the aged, adult female Tasmanian tiger that died in Hobart Zoo on the night of 7th September 1936, the endling of the species (Webster and Erikson, 1996). Its body was forwarded

to the Tasmanian Museum, and on arrival it was professionally skinned by the museum’s taxidermist Cunningham, using the latest museum techniques of the time. The skeleton was retrieved and prepared as an anatomical education skeleton. Neither the skin nor the skeleton were registered into the zoological collection, as they were lacking in essential research collection data, and because they were kept aside for the developing education collection, kept physically separate from the research specimens. The flat skin and grouped presentation of the skeletal elements means they were easy to store, transport and use in classroom teaching.

Background education work started at the museum in January 1936, and school programmes, concentrating largely on natural history, began in 1937. Arthur Powell also visited schools, taking skins and demonstration specimens with him. It appears this skin and skeleton were used for in-house museum teaching, taken on visits to schools, and possibly made available for school loans. This explains the need for the inscription on the back of the skin, and the stamps on each skeleton-board, identifying them as museum property. The wear to the fur on the head likely explained by the exploring hands of school children patting the thylacine’s head as though it was a dog.

The lack of arrival publicity, or a known photograph from life of the last zoo thylacine and its low purchase price were due to its dubious capture in a ground-based snare. Her short time of display was compounded by a lack of consistent, professional care in the curator-less zoo, although given her age, she may also have been in less-than-ideal condition on arrival. Because of the lack of diagnostic data on her capture and display history, and the use to which she was to be put, the museum did not register the new acquisition into the zoological collection. Instead, the cleaned and arranged skeleton and well-prepared skin were incorporated into the museum’s developing (but uncatalogued) education collection where they could be put to maximum use.

A major role of any natural history museum is to retain and protect holotype specimens. Equally, for those museums fortunate enough to possess them, is the need to retain and protect an endling. Holotypes are common, endlings are rare. But endlings have enormous power to make people reflect and think about the past and our role in environmental degradation and destruction. Important reflections, given the contemporary climate crisis and extinction rate. With the identification of the thylacine endling’s remains, and placement on public display in the Tasmanian Museum, as a species the Tasmanian tiger may now appropriately take its place alongside the passenger pigeon and Carolina parakeet.

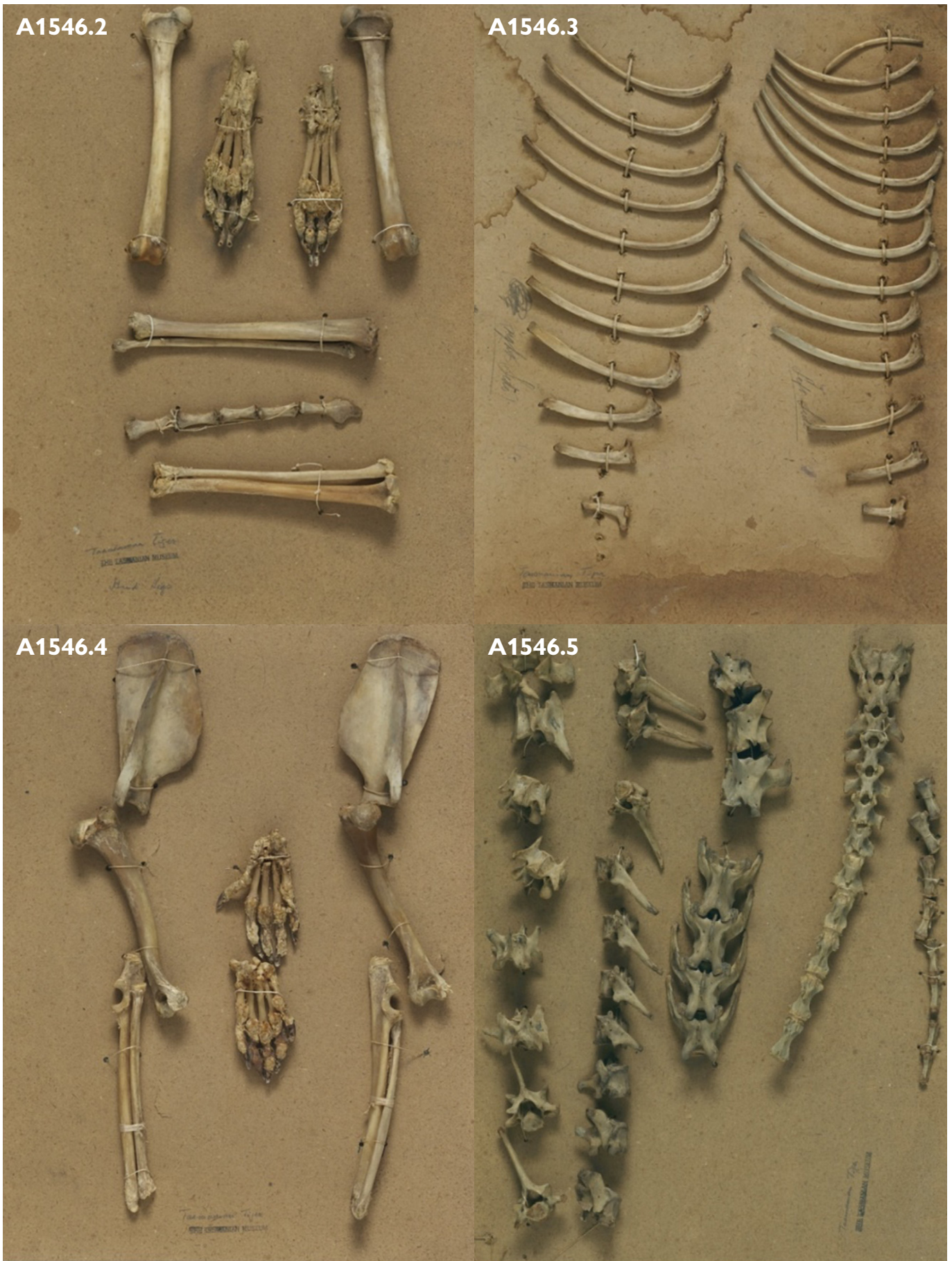


Figure 5. Tasmanian Museum specimens A1546.2-5, skeleton cards. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)



Figure 6. The skull of A1546, with exposed dentine on all tooth types, placed over the skin of the head of A1283. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

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