

WESTPAC LONG GALLERY



HISTORY

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The Westpac Long Gallery is Australia's first museum gallery, housed in Australia's first museum.

Year	History
1827	Earl Bathurst, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, writes to Governor Ralph Darling authorising the sum of 200 pounds a year for the formation of a "Publick Museum at New South Wales". And so the "Colonial Museum" or "Sydney Museum", as it was first known, was born.
1829 - 1840s	The Australian Museum (AM) and its small displays of "rare and curious specimens of Natural History" had operated from makeshift premises across Sydney's city centre, from Bent Street to Parliament House and the Darlinghurst Gaol.
1846	The NSW Government allocates funds for the AM's first permanent building.
1855	A modest, purpose-built museum is completed on the site of a former convict garden facing William Street.
1857	AM opens the doors of the Long Gallery to an eager Sydney public. The nation's first purpose-built museum gallery and its proudly Australian display of the natural history and wonders of the colony are enthusiastically embraced by the public. In the first week, at a time when Sydney's population was only 45,000, about 10,000 people flow through the gallery doors. Inside, the gallery was cramped and cases were stuffed full. It was crowded and dim, lit only by gas lamps and a central skylight. There was no access to the upper galleries, as funds had run out before a staircase could be built.
1864	35,000 people visit the AM. Opening hours were from midday until four o'clock. Glass-fronted cases lined the walls of the ground-floor hall, with a further 11 flat-top cases crowded onto the floor. There were displays of marsupials, along with fish, minerals and rocks, shells, insects, skulls and skeletons. Antlers and horns hung from the pillars.
1865	Additional gold specimens transferred from the Mint to the AM.
1869	Grand new public wing is opened, turning the AM's face towards College Street, and tripling the

	exhibition space. The Long Gallery is rationalised and rearranged, with a staircase added to connect the two wings.
1883	Foreign mammal specimens added to the gallery, including two cases of anthropological specimens, skulls and skeletons, a third case including skeletons of apes and monkeys and insects in two cases running along the centre of the room.
1895	A third storey is added to the William Street wing, to align it with the larger College Street wing. The Long Gallery assumes the physical space known today – three stories high, light-filled and spacious. The gallery becomes the Geological Hall, with fossils on the ground floor, minerals on the first floor and invertebrates in the new third-floor gallery. A glass roof allows natural light to flood the space.
1914	Addition of a palaeontology collection including Australian fossils, lung-fish, teeth of extinct sharks, ancient shells and the oldest-known bird and wing-fingered reptiles. In the centre of room, a long traverse case contains examples of gold, gemstones and meteorites.
1920s	Series of Australian dioramas – re-creations of landscapes and animals in their natural habitats – was installed on the ground floor of the gallery. Upright glass cases replaced the old table-style ones. During the 1970s and 1980s, the dioramas and wall cases were covered with curtains as the area in which they stood became a function space, a bookshop and a temporary exhibition gallery.
1938	The AM's Trust approves the installation of 24 seats in the gallery.
1982	Opening of the Birds in Australia gallery.
1989	All dioramas removed from the gallery, excepting the Lord Howe Island diorama.
1990	The Skeleton Gallery opens, featuring 120 skeletons. Its aim is to tell the story of vertebrate evolution and to display the functions and diversity of skeletons. Sir Hercules, the horse and rider, becomes one of the AM's most popular and iconic exhibits. The "skelecycle" interactive exhibit sees generations of schoolchildren pedalling a stationary bike to activate a human skeleton.
2015	The Long Gallery is closed for renovations.
2017, October 13	The newly-renovated Westpac Long Gallery opens with the permanent exhibition: <i>200 Treasures of the Australian Museum.</i>