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Heritage of the Markham Car Collection

Estrangement from the West Australian Motoring Community



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Abstract The Markham car collection heritage was entrusted with the Western Australian Museum in 1969. Subsequent events caused estrangement between the state's motoring community and the Museum, and forty-seven years later still engender anger in motoring enthusiasts in Western Australia. Recollections of what actually happened are inconsistent; this paper investigates what happened and what went wrong. A qualitative research approach using interviews, archival records, car club magazines, and newspaper clippings was employed. The interviews were conducted with selected representatives from the motoring community and the Markham brothers. The paper concludes with discussion on the lessons learnt from this controversial incident for the Markham family, motoring community, and cultural institutions. Questions about trust and ethics with sellers, donors, and depositors, including the role of cultural institutions as custodians of national heritage, are posed.

Whilst conducting research into sustainable options for managing the motor sport community's information in Western Australia,¹ I encountered a combination of hesitation and resistance to depositing archival collections with the cultural institutions that are the traditional custodians of our national collections. References to what happened to the Percy Markham antique car collection that was deposited with the Western Australian Museum were raised several times.

Antique cars would best be described as collectable, rare, or classic cars from all history eras: Veteran, Edwardian, Vintage, and Post-Vintage cars. These have generally accepted date ranges. Veteran cars were manufactured before the end of the First World War (pre-1919). Vintage cars were manufactured between the end of the First World War and the last day of 1929 (1919 to 1929), whilst the classic cars

were manufactured post-1929 and throughout the post-World War II eras. Veteran cars made between 1901 and 1910, and occasionally up to 1914 (the start of WWI), are often referred to as Edwardian (British Isles) or Brass Cars (America) and accepted as built during the reign of King Edward VII.²

The Western Australian Museum has been the premier museum in Perth, Western Australia, since 1891. It is a statutory authority within Western Australia's state government's Culture and the Arts Portfolio, and was established under the Museum Act 1969. The Museum is governed by a Board of Trustees, eight in total. Seven trustees (including the chairman and vice chairman) are appointed by the Governor, and the eighth, who is the chief executive officer, is appointed by the Department for the Arts.³

The Museum's mission is to inspire people to explore and share their identity, culture, environment, and sense of place, and contribute to the diversity and creativity of our world.⁴ And its vision is to be an excellent and vibrant Museum service valued and used by all Western Australians, admired and visited by the world.⁵ This apprehension in the motoring community prompted me with research questions to find out who Percy Markham was, his connection with the Museum, and how and why the motoring community was still so troubled by this incident.

I took a qualitative approach to find answers to these questions, comprised of open-ended interviews and reviews of archival records and newspaper articles. A preliminary search of traditional library databases found nothing, but a Google search found some leads on private and government websites. Much had been written about the incident in newspapers from 1989 to 1990, and many relevant newspaper articles from the micrographics collection were retrieved from the J. S. Battye Library of West Australian History.

To begin, I conducted hour-long open-ended interviews in 2014 with three members of the motoring community who were aware of the Markham story. One was a long-standing member of the Veteran Car Club (VCC) who has variously acted as secretary, treasurer, and president of the VCC; one the president of The Western Australian Society of Motoring History, and one motoring enthusiast, currently in his fifties who was but twelve years old at the time of this incident. These interviews provided the background to the Markham story and alerted me to further information sources like car club magazines. They also led to introductions to the Markham sons, John, Roger and Barry, who were also interviewed. Barry also provided access to his father's private collection of correspondence with the Museum.

Access to the Western Australian Museum to review the archived records about the Percy Markham car collection was granted, but photocopying or photographing was not permitted. Some files contained news clippings about the incident, and these were later retrieved at the Battye Library.

All six interviews were outsourced for transcription. The transcripts were reviewed and, where relevant, the data was used to address the research questions. Recollections of what had happened from the interview data were confirmed by

the printed sources consulted, which included the newspaper collections; archival records about the Percy Markham car collection at the Museum and Markham's private archive collection; and the Early Auto newsletters published by the Veteran Car Club in Western Australia.

The data gathered from the different sources was read and re-read, and inductive analysis was used to find answers to the research questions. Yin describes this method of data analysis as “working your data from the ground up,” using inductive analysis to “pour [sic] through” the data looking for answers. Direct interpretation of the data to answer the original questions also informed the findings, and a story-line style was chosen to report the findings and explain what had happened.⁶

Percival Wynyard Markham (1913–1994)⁷

Markham's interest in cars began from the time he worked in garages when young, and he was familiar with vintage and veteran cars and their general functioning. He had good general knowledge of the mechanics of cars, and was comfortable restoring them. He was “a world-wide collector of rare old cars”⁸ and “one of Australia's foremost collectors of vintage cars”⁹ known for avidly collecting bits and pieces at auctions for restoring his cars; he once paid AUD 100 “just to salvage a Smith eight-day clock.” John, his first son, is reported to have auctioneered some of Markham's cars in 1971: a 1925 Chrysler Imperial 80 Tourer (AUD 5,000), 1927 Rolls-Royce (AUD 4,900), 1925 Austin 12 Tourer (AUD 1,200), and 1927 Talbot 6 Saloon (AUD 1,400).¹⁰

Markham had his own Antique Auto Museum at 76 Flynn Street, Wembley, that was opened to the public in 1965. The collection included 32 cars, five motorcycles, and one horse-drawn vehicle,¹¹ and was the only museum in Australia mentioned in *Car Museums of the World*.¹²

Percy Markham's Proposal to the Western Australian Museum

In 1966 Markham wrote to Sir Thomas Meagher, chairman of trustees of the Western Australian Museum Board, proposing the government should take over his antique museum to preserve the car collection, but more importantly to expand the collection and its building.¹³ In his letter he pointed out the interest in his cars by various clubs, private groups and tourists. He described the collection as “world standard and [containing] some extremely rare and valuable cars.”

Historically and academically the collection is extremely important. Each car has its own particular history. As an example, two Frenchmen, Sizaire and Naudin, who made a car of that name in 1908, equipped their car with the first-ever independent shock absorbers.¹⁴

Markham wrote in 1969 to Sir David Brand, Premier of Western Australia, “My own long-standing ambition is to see my collection state-owned, to be preserved for all time for Western Australia. With this in mind I ask you give serious consideration to state ownership. Rest assured I will make my own substantial contribution.”¹⁵

David L. Ride, the Director of the Western Australian Museum in 1966, sought the opinion of Jack L. Willis, Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney. Willis wrote back,

Where on earth did you find such a magnificent array of vehicles! ... Needless to say the collection is extremely valuable...With the addition of your 1896 Benz & the Cobb & Co. Coach it would be a truly historic series as it would depict the main stages in the transition of the horse-drawn vehicle to the horseless carriage and the subsequent development of the motor car through steam, electric and petrol powered units...it is probably the best single collection in Australia at the moment.¹⁶

Willis described the collection a “national treasure” and appended a note by Norman Harwood, assistant keeper of exhibits from the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences NSW, who was appointed to recommend which cars to select, recommending that the Western Australian Museum acquire the collection:

1. It is the best collection of veteran and vintage motor vehicles in Australia, having regard to their originality and the high standard of restoration.
2. Selected vehicles from the collection would illustrate the technology and development of the motor car according to museum requirements.
3. The educational value of the collection is far-reaching as it can be studied from a sociological, economic and technical as well as an artistic viewpoint.
4. The collection would form the nucleus of a major transport museum.
5. It would be the first comprehensive collection of veteran and vintage motor cars to be acquired and exhibited in a State museum in Australia.
6. The collection contains several rare vehicles which will increase greatly in value and enhance the prestige of the collection...the possibility of such a collection being offered in the future is highly remote, and it is most desirable that the Markham Collection should remain in this country.¹⁷

Willis also stressed the investment value of the collection: “Values of veteran and vintage cars have spiralled over the last ten years and the trend indicates that this will continue, particularly so, in the case of rare and sought-after vehicles.”

Table 1. Listing of five Markham vintage motorcycles donated to the Western Australian Museum in 1969

Year	Make	Value (AUD)
1904	Liberty motorcycle	\$250
1906	F. N. Motorcycle (3)	\$200
1923	Sunbeam Motorcycle	\$150
1923	A. J. S. Motorcycle	\$150
1927	Indian Motorcycle	\$100
		\$850

While Ride and the state government were deciding whether to purchase the collection, Markham confirmed the appended gift of five vintage motorcycles worth AUD 850¹⁸ as part of the collection of cars initially proposed, presented in Table 1.¹⁹

Ride commented, “Mr Markham has been very generous and we have acquired them at terms which represents a present day value of less than half the market value as stated in the earlier lists.”

On November 13, 1969, the premier Sir David Brand approved the acquisition of the car collection, including approval of a special grant of AUD 30,000 for the financial year and AUD 15,000 in each of the succeeding ten years to enable the Western Australian Museum Board to acquire the selected cars on the terms agreed with Markham.²⁰ Sir Thomas Meagher “was delighted the Markham collection would be preserved for the state, rather than broken up and dispersed.”²¹

Deed of Sale of the 22 Markham Cars in 1969 by Percy Markham to the Western Australian Museum

In 1969 a total of “22 beautifully restored” vintage and veteran cars were sold for AUD 180,000 (US 200,484) to the Western Australian Museum Board as presented in Table 2.²²

When this agreement was signed, Sir David Brand was the premier of Western Australia and John Bannister the director of the Western Australian Museum. A payment of AUD 30,000 (USD 33,414) was paid to Markham immediately. It was agreed that the Western Australian Museum pay AUD 15,000 (USD 16,707) each year over a period of 10 years, the remaining amount of AUD 150,000, for which no interest payments were charged. The final payment of AUD 15,000 to Percy Markham was made on November 26, 1979.²³ The agreement was a simple four-page document with an appendix listing the cars by year of manufacture, and a one-line description of each car and its identification details that are essentially the engine and licence numbers. The agreement was signed in good faith, with no clauses, such as that the permission of Percy Markham had to be obtained if the cars were to be sold later. Much later in 2004 Dr. Gary Morgan, the then executive director of the Western Australian Museum, noted that the “deed of sale did not have any provisions restricting the museum’s freedom to use or dispose of the vehicles.”²⁴

Table 2. Listing of 22 Markham cars sold to the Western Australian Museum in 1969

No.	Year	Make	Identification
1.	1898/1899	Star, 3 ½hp Vis-a-Vis	Number Plate FP37
2.	1904	Rover, 8hp Two Seater	Engine Number 110
3.	1905	De Dion-Bouton 8hp Two Seater	Engine Number 22346
4.	1909	Sizaire Naudin, 12hp Two Seater Type F Series 09, No. 153	Engine Number 1083
5.	1909	Renault, 20/30 Limousine	Engine Number 3176, Registration Number EP 1429
6.	1909/1910	Minerva, 30hp Tourer	Engine Number U10540 and No. 2914
7.	1911	Peugeot, 20hp Tourer Type 135	Engine Number HD 14836
8.	1911	Rolls Royce, Landaulet	Chassis Car No. 1547
9.	1914	Detroit Electric, Brougham	Engine Number 37393
10.	1920/1921	Studebaker, 23.4hp Tourer	Engine Number 43299 and No. 43151
11.	1921	Stanley Steamer, 20/60hp Tourer	Engine Number 22425
12.	1923	Vauxhall, 30/98, Sports Tourer	Engine Number 2595, Chassis Number OE 191
13.	1924	Morris Cowley, 11.9hp Two Seater	Engine Number 131088, Chassis Type MC119, Number 117731
14.	1924	Rolls Royce, "Twenty" Limousine	Engine Number G 1232, Chassis Number GLK62
15.	1927	Ford, Model T 22.5hp Roadster	Engine Number C 666534
16.	1928	Bentley, 25hp Sports Tourer	Engine Number HF (or HR) 3181
17.	1933	Rolls Royce, 40/50hp Continental Sports Sedan	Engine Number HF25, Chassis Number 99MW
18.	1910	Hupmobile, 20hp Two Seater	Series 010
19.	1910	BSA, Chassis and Engine	Engine Numbers C1-173 and 43/7
20.	1913	Delage, 12hp Tourer HB Series 7	Engine Number L20362
21.	1927	Packard, 29.2hp Sedan	Engine Number 171244, Vehicle Number 1714.23R, Type MC119.
22.	1937	Rolls Royce, V12, 40/50hp Limousine	Engine Number N58N, Chassis Number 3-AX121.

In December 1969, it was agreed that the cars would be initially housed at the Antique Car Museum at Wembley and available for public display on weekends in December 1969. The cars would then be moved into the Western Australian Museum's storage facility in Fremantle, which was undergoing maintenance, before being displayed in the new museum building in Francis Street, Perth when it was ready.²⁵

Donation by Percy Markham to the Western Australian Museum

In addition to the deed of sale, Markham made a donation of AUD 100,000 in two instalments of AUD 50,000 to the Museum²⁶ to be used for the extensions to the museum in Francis Street:

In view of the provision of one floor of the New Building to display the Markham Car Collection the Director has accepted, at the request of the Under Treasurer, AUD 100,000 from this source to be credited to the Western Australian museum fund as a contribution towards payment of the new wing.²⁷

Markham felt strongly that the wording adopted by the Western Australian Museum on the plaques for each car on display did not reflect the true position as 'Purchased By'.²⁸ Hence, Markham paid for them to be amended to 'Acquired By' because he felt the cars were virtually given to the Museum in terms of his cash contributions (AUD 100,000), gift of the five motorcycles (AUD 850) and the interest-free terms of his sale contract for the 22 cars. Markham said he would spend his spare time restoring the several old cars he still owned, now that he had "found the perfect last resting place" for his restored collection.²⁹

Decision to Dispose of the Cars in 1988

Nineteen years later, on June 30, 1988, John Bannister, still director of the Western Australian Museum, wrote to Markham advising him that 10 of the 22 cars were deemed by the Trustees of the Western Australian Museum to have no historical significance to Western Australia, and they were considering selling them.

When the State purchased your collection of veteran and vintage cars for the museum, the Markham Collection was unique in W.A. Today, as you are aware, there are private collections on display and a great many exhibited in rallies, shows and the like. This means that there is now a decreased public demand for the museum to display classic cars that have no direct connection with the state's history.

The collection policy for the Museum's History Department defines its area of relevance as Western Australian and Australian history. To this end vehicles collected since 1970 have had a clear background of use in this state.³⁰

There was a strong suggestion that this decision was in response to pressure from the government to reduce the number of items held by the Museum:

Recently, the State Government has asked us to examine our collections to discover if we hold items, which are no longer considered relevant to our collection policy. Currently, we will not dispose of items that have been donated, but we are obliged to examine which purchased items might come into that category.

After considerable discussion and research the Trustees have agreed to consider disposing of a number of vehicles from the Markham Collection. The vehicles under discussion are those that have no apparent Australian provenance. They include, for example, the Silver Ghost, the Bentley, the Minerva and the Peugeot... One question still to be resolved satisfactorily is whether the funds generated will be available to us for Museum purposes, or whether they will revert to the State with no direct benefit to the Museum.³¹

Initial Tender Process to Sell the Cars

There were initial plans to sell the cars by a tender process as indicated in the letter dated March 22, 1989 to Markham from Bannister³² and also published in the Government Gazette³³ and Australian newspapers:³⁴

TENDERS are invited for the purchase of a collection of 10 veteran/vintage motor vehicles from the Museum's collection, which vehicles are no longer relevant to the Museum's collecting objectives. A condition of the purchase of the vehicles is that the purchaser shall not remove the vehicles from the State of Western Australia and all tenderers shall therefore be required to provide with their tenders details of their plans for housing and displaying the vehicles in Western Australia.

There was an undertaking communicated to Markham in the form of a stipulation in the tender requirements that the ten cars would remain in Western Australia and the tenderer would provide details of how the cars will be housed and displayed. However, it would appear that without further consultation with Markham, the Museum made a decision to auction the cars and more importantly, remove the clauses to retain the cars in Western Australia.

Decision to Auction the Cars Instead

When the Labour government announced its decision to auction ten of the Markham cars in 1989, Peter Dowding was Premier and David Parker the Minister for Arts. Parker confirmed his approval to split the cars in the Markham collection,



1990 Sizaire-Naudin
12 H.P. Two Seater



1911 Peugeot Tourer Type 135



1937 Rolls-Royce Phantom
III Touring Limousine



1913 Delage
12 H.P. Tourer AB Series 7



1898/99 Star
3^{1/2} H.P. Vis-A-Vis



1909/10 Minerva
38 H.P. Tourer



1909 Renault
20/30 H.P. Limousine



1928 Bentley
4^{1/2}- Litre Sports Tourer



1911 Rolls-Royce Silver
Ghost Landaulet



1933 Rolls-Royce Phantom II
Continental Sports Saloon

Figure 1. Ten of the Markham cars that were auctioned³⁷

and is reported to have approved that ten of the cars be individually auctioned.³⁵ Christie's Australia Pty Ltd was appointed to auction the ten cars presented in Figure 1.³⁶

Markham was 75 years old when this decision was made.³⁸ In his letter to Bannister, dated July 13, 1988, he expressed his sentiments:

I must admit to being surprised by your letter dated June 30, 1988 and in consequence have given much thought to all you had to say before replying.

Yes, the State Government did, on behalf of the people, purchase 22 cars for a total of \$180,000 but, as the following will show, that deal included quite a substantial gift content. The motor bikes were gifted outright.

... I offered, before any negotiations began, to sell the cars, on an interest free terms basis ... The Treasurer later estimated that the interest saved, based on rates ruling at that time (7% to 8% from memory) was about \$40,000.

The West Australian broke the news with front page headlines and there was only one minor critic. This indicated whole hearted public support. I wonder what the public's reaction (if any) will be when the news does break?

... had I sold the cars individually for cash...I would have been much better off financially, but I wanted to leave something permanent for the people to enjoy and I hope it will stay that way.

However, had I for one moment believed that at some future date some of the cars might be sold the deal, on such terms, would never have been made.³⁹

Motoring Community's Outrage

The Veteran Car Club of Australia's annual conference in 1989 declared the collection "a valuable heritage collection...the property of the people of Western Australia." The president of the Combined Car Club Association of Western Australia, Maurice Brockwell, pointed out that Markham had "virtually donated the collection"⁴⁰ and the transaction was seen by motoring enthusiasts as "a generous citizen making a valuable collection available to a museum at almost donation status."⁴¹ The feeling was that the Museum should have treated the contribution as a donation and abided by their policy "not [to] dispose of items that have been donated."⁴²

The Western Australian Museum replied that the "money belongs to the Museum having been obtained from the sale of museum assets, given that the museum originally purchased the vehicles from Percy Markham"⁴³ and "the deal with Mr Markham was a straight-out commercial purchase of a collection of 22 cars in 1969."⁴⁴ What they failed to consider were the circumstances and the generous nature of the deed of sale as described in Percy Markham's letter.⁴⁵

Auctioning the cars because they no longer fitted the Museum's collection policy, as stated in Bannister's letter to Percy Markham, made sense neither to the motoring community nor to the opposition Liberal party.⁴⁶ In September 1989 a "spokesman for the museum said the policy was to exhibit vehicles that reflected

social history of Australia, not the history of transport.”⁴⁷ Philip Pental, who was the arts and heritage spokesman for the opposition pointed out the weakness of this argument to the Legislative Council:

it is a nonsense to suggest that the collection has no significance to Western Australia. If one accepts the argument that an item or an artefact has to be “born out of the local culture” for it to have value, one could logically argue that the meteorite at the Western Australian Museum also ought to be sold as a fundraiser, since it is not of our culture. One could also extend that argument to the magnificent works of art in the Art Gallery of Western Australia.⁴⁸

A month later the Museum’s position was rephrased: “when the museum bought Mr Markham’s cars, there was no policy for exhibiting transport history... Now we have formulated a policy and these cars do not fit”; to which Brockwell commented, “It seems to me that the museum is making up the script as it goes along.”⁴⁹

In November 1989, a government spokesperson weighed in: “There is a very great difference between items of historical significance that the museum thinks should be maintained and items that are collectors’ items,” and later Bannister added another point: “It would be wrong to continue to use public money to display, store and maintain major items that have no relevance to the history of either Western Australia or Australia.”⁵⁰

The reasoning that these cars had no historical provenance and hence no significance to Western Australia or Australian history was unpalatable to the motoring community, including the Markham family. Barry Markham stated that the cars in his father’s collection were a good representation of the fabric and culture of society, both in Australia and overseas, in the era in which they were built (1900s to 1930s), that is, from the humble Ford T to the luxurious Rolls Royce.⁵¹ Thomas Benson-Lidholm, a motoring enthusiast, noted that the Renault Landulet from the collection was a Marne taxi, used in 1914 to deliver Allied troops, including Australians, to the battlefield in France during World War I.⁵² Lingane in his article, reported that the 1928 Bentley being auctioned had heritage value as two W. O. Bentleys were used in 1928 by the Western Australia Police until retired in 1948.⁵³ Additionally, these cars were used in car rallies, as touring cars, and for family outings when they were owned by the Markham family. Such usage was evidence of links to West Australian family history and the history of motoring in Western Australia. In short, the collection indicated the mode of motor transport of affluent Australians in that era and had Australian history and significance.

In the minds of the motoring community, the auctioned cars clearly fitted the Australian provenance criteria of the Museum’s collection policy. At their annual conference in 1989, the Veteran Car Club of Australia argued that the Museum was hiding behind an illogical collection policy to auction the cars at a time when the

government had not yet recovered from recent disastrous financial losses and was looking for any means to find extra funds. Maurice Brockwell's damning comment was, "If I have anything to do with it, nobody in the old car movement will ever leave anything to this museum again."⁵⁴

Maurice Brockwell, then President of the Combined Car Club Association of Western Australia, led the protest against the auction of the cars to the Labor government. The CCCA represented marque and restoration motor clubs like the Veteran Car Club of Western Australia. Brockwell wrote to Peter Dowding, Premier (September 19, 1989), and David Parker, Minister for Arts (April 26, 1989), deploring the decision of the Minister to sell the cars, and authorised a press release by the CCCA:

The Association earnestly request the Minister to review his decision and keep the vehicles in Western Australia. We are still more than prepared to meet with the Minister and discuss our proposal, which will enable the vehicles to be kept in Western Australia and form the nucleus of a Museum of Motor Transport to be funded without Government assistance.⁵⁵

David Parker replied,

I regret that I cannot agree that the Museum should lose the opportunity to obtain major funding benefits by confirming [sic] with your proposal for the cars to be transferred to your Association for public display.

I share the Museum's view that along with them to the State will accrue by the sale of the vehicles for the best price that can be obtained, and for the use of the funds to enhance the Museum's existing collections—including, of course, the acquisition of further vehicles important in the history of the State's development.⁵⁶

Brockwell asked the Premier to intervene, but the request was declined.⁵⁷ Subsequently, Philip Pandal stepped in to support the motoring community and moved that a Museum Amendment Bill be introduced to prohibit "a statutory body of the Western Australia Government, from selling the cars unless it had the consent of both Houses of Parliament."⁵⁸

For the second time in a year, the Government of this State is seeking to sell the family silver in order to pay its bills ... The vintage and veteran car movement, not only throughout this State, but also across the Australian continent, is angry with the Government's decision.⁵⁹

As Pental pointed out, the auction in Western Australia was a topic of discussion at the Veteran Car Club's annual conference held in September 1989 in Melbourne: "the delegates from all States believed the cars should be placed on permanent public display by the Museum of Western Australia or loaned to the Combined Car Clubs Association of Western Australia (Inc.), which has shown a willingness to accept responsibility for the care and display of the vehicles."⁶⁰ More than 100 vintage cars drove up St. Georges Terrace to Parliament House and "honked their horns in protest against the sale."⁶¹

Establishment of the Percy W. Markham Fund

The Trustees of the Western Australian Museum resolved in 1988, Resolution 193/88 that the funds derived from the part sale of the collection were to be used for specific purposes under the "Percy W. Markham Fund."⁶²

The resolution provided for the proceeds of the sale to be used for acquisition and conservation of motor transport items in the Western Australian Museum collections. The principal of the fund was to be preserved:

Percy Markham Fund: Proposals for expenditure

1. Under the trustees resolution 268/88 the funds derived from sale of vehicles from the former Markham collection and the proceeds used for 4 purposes, in priority, as follows:

- i) conservation or restoration of the existing motor transport collection;
- ii) acquisition of additional motor transport items;
- iii) acquisition of items relevant to the museum's collection policies;
- iv) conservation and restoration of other items in the collections.

Consideration is also to be given to use of some of the interest to maintain the capital value of the fund.⁶³

The records indicate that the Trustees amended the guidelines on how the fund should be used on a number of occasions.⁶⁴ For example, when the director sought advice from the Treasury of the relevant amount to be repaid from entrance fees to the exhibition, he was advised by the Treasury that they were unable to meet the request, particularly given the funding available to the Museum from the Markham Fund; hence, at the Trustee Meeting dated February 19, 1991, it was resolved "that capital from the Markham fund be used as necessary in extreme financial need, to permit payment of amounts, not exceeding AUD 40,000 each, due to the Australian museum and/or Dinamation in July/August 1991...to be recouped from the exhibition takings."⁶⁵

The Markham Fund was again reviewed in 1995 and resolution 25/95 introduced further amendments, which broadened the scope of the priorities and uses to which the interest from the Markham Fund could be applied.⁶⁶ Development of exhibitions was a significant addition to the range of uses for the fund.

Given current information technology and the role of the Western Australia Museum, it is now recommended that the guidelines for the use of the Markham fund interest be amended slightly to include projects, which allow the museum to disseminate knowledge through all forms of media to the general public. An example of this use could be using the Markham fund interest to assist with the development of the museum's web site. A significant component of the web site could be transport, and specifically, the remaining items in the Markham collection.

The current value of the principal of the Markham Fund is AUD 1,358,854 with accrued interest of AUD 208,111. To maintain the real value of the Markham fund the principal should stand at AUD 1,400,574. (Based on Australian bureau of statistics consumer price index for the June 30, 1990 and June 30, 2000.) This represents a shortfall of AUD 41,720 in the principal.⁶⁷

The Markham family and the motoring community have not been informed as yet of what new museum collections were acquired using the "Percy W. Markham Fund," except for the purchase of a Fowler traction engine in 1990.⁶⁸ Further expenditure from this fund has not been communicated to the Markham family or the motoring community. John and Barry Markham in 2014 knew only that the money was used to shift the Museum's premises from Francis Street, Perth City location to its current location at Kew Street in the Welshpool suburb. These topics warrant further research.

Myths and Facts About What Happened to the Markham Car Collection

Many myths according to the motoring community and the general public surround the Markham car sales, which are clarified in this section and summarized in Table 3.

There is uncertainty amongst the motoring community and the general public regarding whether Markham donated, gifted, or sold the cars to the Museum. The fact is that Markham sold the cars, at an advantageous price of AUD 180,000 to the Museum.⁶⁹ As part of this sale, Markham donated AUD 100,000 for the extension of the building in Francis Street to display his cars, further donated five vintage motorcycles valued at AUD 850 and did not charge interest payments for the 10 years it took the Museum to pay his remaining sale amount of AUD 150,000. Given these facts, there exists a perception within the motor-

Table 3. Myths and facts regarding the Markham car collection

Myth	Fact
Markham donated the cars to the museum.	<p>Markham sold the cars, at an advantageous price to the museum.</p> <p><i>(See Deed of sale agreement for the sale of 22 cars from the Markham car collection at AUD 180,000, signed by Percival Wynyard Markham and the State of Western Australia, November 26, 1969, Veteran and Vintage Vehicle—Markham Collection—General, box 71, file 163, vol 01, Western Australian Museum, Perth, WA.)</i></p>
The WA Museum made a professional decision to auction the cars because of a change in its collection policy.	<p>The (Labor) government of the day decided to sell the cars as a direct result of the Functional Review Committee report on the museum's activities. "The argument was that if the Museum wanted some extra money for its own purposes it should dispose of some of its "unwanted" artefacts". <i>(See John Bannister, letter to the editor, Daily News, February 13, 1990.)</i></p>
All of the Markham cars were sold.	<p>Ten of the 22 cars in the Percy Markham collection were auctioned in 1990. Nine were sold.</p> <p><i>(See John Bannister, letter to the editor, The West Australian, December 1, 1989.)</i></p>
All cars that were auctioned have left Western Australia or Australia	<p>The bidder at the auction for the <i>1898 Star</i> did not follow through with his bid, hence this one car survived the auction and is retained in Western Australia.</p> <p>The five motorcycles that were donated by Markham remains with the Western Australian Museum and were not subject of this auction.</p> <p>The cars went to three buyers from Western Australia, two from Victoria, one each from South Australia and New South Wales, and two from United Kingdom. One car, the <i>1898 Star</i> that survived the auction is on display at the Whiteman Park Museum in Western Australia.</p>
The auction breached export regulations by selling cars to overseas buyers	<p>Under the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act a licence is required if the vehicle was in use before 1920. <i>(See Protection of Movable Heritage Act 1986, PMCH Act, 1986.)</i></p> <p>The Markham cars were imported in the late 1960s and so could be sold internationally. The Museum confirmed that it was not auctioning the 1904 Rover as it did not comply with the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act. <i>(See Percy W Markham Fund, 1990, box 257, file 250, vol 01, Western Australian Museum, Perth, WA.)</i></p>
Proceeds from the auction were used to recoup some of the funds lost during the Western Australia Inc. (WA Inc.)* era under the former Premier Brian Burke's government.	<p>The sale of the cars had nothing to do with Western Australia Inc. They cars sold because they were deemed to be of no significance to Western Australia. "The decision to sell these vehicles was carried out in accordance with strict museum industry guidelines on deaccessioning and disposing of material in public collections." <i>(See Dawn Casey to Michael Heath, 2 November 2005, Financial Management / Grant Funding / Percy W Markham Fund, box 0389, file 0413, vol 02, Western Australian Museum, Perth, WA.)</i></p>

*WA Inc. was the title given to a contentious involvement of the Western Australian Government with a group of prominent Perth businessmen and their associated commercial enterprises in the 1980s. It caused a public furore with the loss of substantial public funds, and culminated in a Royal Commission being held.

ing community that Markham ‘donated or gifted,’ not sold, his car collection to the Museum.

Bannister wrote a letter to the editor of *The West Australian* newspaper to clarify the more common myths regarding the sale of the cars: “However hard we try, we seem unable to convince the public that only a portion...is to be sold. The remaining 12, with our other vehicles, some 30 all told, are to be used in displays on the history of transport in this state.”⁷⁰ Not all of the 22 Markham cars were sold. Only 10 of the 22 cars in the Percy Markham collection were auctioned in 1990. Nine were sold.⁷¹ The bidder at the auction for the 1898 Star did not follow through with his bid, hence this one car survived the auction and is retained in Western Australia.⁷² The five motorcycles that were donated by Markham were not subject of this auction and remain with the Western Australian Museum.

Another myth is that all the Markham cars that were auctioned have left Western Australia or Australia. The fact is, the cars went to three buyers from Western Australia, two from Victoria, one each from South Australia and New South Wales, and two from the United Kingdom. One car, the 1898 Star that survived the auction, is on display at the Whiteman Park Museum in Western Australia.

There was also the perception that the auction breached export regulations by selling cars to overseas buyers. In fact, under the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act⁷³ a licence is required if the vehicle was in use before 1920. The Markham cars were imported in the 1960s and so could be sold internationally. The Museum confirmed that it was not auctioning the 1904 Rover as it did not comply with the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act.⁷⁴

There was also a perception that the proceeds from the auction were used to recoup some of the funds lost during the Western Australia Inc. (WA Inc) era under the former Premier Brian Burke’s government. WA Inc was the title given to a contentious involvement of the Western Australian Government with a group of prominent Perth businessmen and their associated commercial enterprises in the 1980s. It caused a public furore with the loss of substantial public funds, and culminated in a Royal Commission being held. From the review of the Museum archives, it would appear that the sale of the cars would have nothing to do with Western Australia Inc. The cars were sold because they were deemed to have no significance to Western Australia. “The decision to sell these vehicles was carried out in accordance with strict museum industry guidelines on deaccessioning and disposing of material in public collections.”⁷⁵ The WA Museum made a professional decision to auction the cars because of a change in its collection policy. The (Labor) government of the day decided to sell the cars as a direct result of the Functional Review Committee report on the museum’s activities. “The argument was that if the Museum wanted some extra money for its own purposes it should dispose of some of its ‘unwanted’ artefacts.”⁷⁶

Discussion

It is common practice for museums to buy and sell their collections, as evidenced by the sale of artworks, oil paintings, and coin collections by museums in the United States and United Kingdom,⁷⁷ so why did the sale of the Percy Markham cars outrage the motoring community and the Western Australia Liberal party? There were a number of reasons, reported widely in Australian local and national newspapers and commented on in a considerable number of letters to the editors.⁷⁸ As Barry Markham pointed out, “The sad thing is that this Minister and curator will one day move on. But a new Minister and curator won’t be able to undo the damage. These 10 cars are the cream of the collection and they will be lost to Western Australia people for all time. The Museum won’t be able to afford to buy them back.”⁷⁹

This incident raises the importance of establishing clear agreements to help museums, sellers, and donors understand what they are getting into. Markham’s arrangement with Brand was largely based on trust and entered in good faith, but the sale of the cars shattered that dream and his faith in government departments: “I shouldn’t have been so trusting ... they are using a legal point claiming that the deal was the subject of a contract of sale. Technically that’s true but it’s morally wrong,”⁸⁰ Lingane quoted him as saying. Barry Markham recalled his father “was extremely disappointed with the Museum’s decision to [re]sell the cars that he sold [to it] at an advantageous price” and John Markham was even less reserved: “my father was devastated.” Others learned from this incident: Brockwell, who argued that the incident “cost the museum credibility,”⁸¹ reported that “One caller...was planning to leave the museum a copy of a treaty. Now he won’t because he feels he can’t trust them.” When a motoring enthusiast passed away, he bequeathed his Chevrolet to a car club with instructions that the car “must never be sold or given to the museum.”⁸² Sadly, this course of action is followed by fellow motoring enthusiasts in the state.

How can the broken trust between the motoring community and the Western Australian Museum be amended? John attempted to purchase the 1898 Star (Figure 1, second row, center) when the bidder at the car auction did not follow through, and Barry mentioned that he failed in his attempts to negotiate the purchase of the Ford Model T, one of his favourite cars in his father’s collection. John passed away in August 2014, but communicating with Barry to negotiate the purchase of the Ford Model T should be given consideration by the Museum.

If the Western Australian Museum’s role was to only collect “items of historical significance,”⁸³ was it fair to sell the cream of the collection according to car collectors? That the Museum sold some cars on the grounds that they had no historical relevance to the state raises the question of how relevance is determined. What are the parameters of social history: who decides which bits are worth recording, collecting, and keeping? Whose stories are prioritised? If a touring car used by wealthy

citizens is sold and a car used by middle-class families is later purchased, what ideas about Western Australia are being promoted by the museum?

And there are other questions: who decides what to collect, to tell these stories? Which community artefacts are collected and preserved? It is clearly important to have documented collection policies to guide decisions on what to collect and not to collect; and to lessen the chances of having bad decisions forced on collecting cultural institutions by financial or political pressures.

The financial element requires further consideration: is it reasonable to expect the museum to finance the housing, maintenance, restoration, display, and exhibition of such large collections forever? Who pays for these activities: taxpayers, state, and federal government, or a specific community-based organization? If the larger community, or the car community, expects the cars to be restored and maintained in roadworthy condition, should they volunteer their expertise and passion to assist? Should the Western Australian Museum reach out to the motoring community and seek their advice and assistance in maintaining its collections? Would allowing the motoring community to borrow these cars for car rallies, or events commemorating special anniversaries, assist in rebuilding bridges? A dialogue between the motoring community and the Museum may address these questions.

The Markham incident has implications for managing seller/donor expectations, as well. Is it reasonable for sellers/donors to expect their collections to be taken care of by museums forever? Is more seller/donor education needed for citizens to understand that collections can be sold or deaccessioned? It is ethical practice that when donations are made by citizens to cultural institutions, it has to be honoured as agreed that the donations are held in good faith in perpetuity by the museum. This assertion is not reasonable unless there is a formal agreement in writing to such terms. In the case of the Markham car collection, the 22 cars were not donated but were sold via a deed-of-sale agreement. Nevertheless, the sale agreement did not state that parts of the collection could or could not be sold or deaccessioned by the Museum. Nor were there clauses stating that in the event the Museum decided to sell or deaccession the collection it would seek the explicit consent of Markham or the family, or it would provide them the option to buy back the collection in the first instance.

Percy Markham left the cars as a legacy of motoring history to be enjoyed by West Australians. His wishes were not respected because of the weakness highlighted by Philip Pandal, spokesman on heritage matters for the Liberal party at the time:

The Museum of Western Australia does not have an acquisition fund... the Museum does not have any recourse to a fund for the purchase of items... To force the Museum into selling off its property in order to make a few dollars is absurd.⁸⁴

The Markham incident further raises questions about how Western Australian museums are funded, and whether there is a requirement for cultural institutions like

museums to be independent of the government in power. Should museum directors and trustees be accountable to the community who entrusts them with personal and cultural treasures, or to the government that funds them from that same community's taxes? Autonomy would avert the danger of museums having to obey the government at the expense of the community they serve.

Conclusion

In essence, the Western Australian Museum changed its mind about its collection policy nineteen years after purchasing the Markham cars. Policies do change; but why did the Museum stand by this unsatisfactory policy given the outrage and protests about the decision to auction the Markham cars? Perhaps what should have prevailed was the "will of the people."⁸⁵ The cars were a gift by a generous citizen to the people of Western Australia, and the government should have taken his wishes into account. The Museum could have listened to the public outcry and amended their collection policy; or they could have used the proceeds from the auction of the cars for the maintenance, display, and promotion of the remaining cars. Alternatively, the Museum should have followed through with their initial tender process with conditions that the ten cars should remain in Western Australia and be housed and displayed in Western Australia, instead of their later decision to auction the cars and permit the removal of the cars from Western Australia. Neither of these actions was carried out.

The motoring community still holds the perception that "The whole business [was] a slap in the face to Percy Markham, who was trying to do the right thing by the people of Western Australia." Brearley argued that citizens' trust was broken: "What a tragedy that one humble person's lifetime's dedication is suddenly whisked away by people who are in part trusted and elected to preserve and promote such valuable contributions."⁸⁶

Citizens entrust cultural institutions with the long-term preservation of their valuable collections, which is why they gift or deposit or sell their treasures for insubstantial funds. Is it fair or ethical that cultural institutions later decide to sell or dispose of these treasures because they no longer align with a new collection policy, or are no longer part of their significant collections? The role of cultural institutions such as museums is questioned. Are museums keepers or traders of our national treasures?

This leads to the question of whether it is fair for museums to take on collections when they are unsure if they can house and maintain it? In the Markham case, it is evident that the Western Australian Museum was not positioned to accept, house and maintain collections prior to making the commitment with Markham (the citizen) via formal contracts.

There were no good reasons for auctioning the ten cars. A bad decision was made by the Western Australian Museum and thus the Western Australia govern-

ment of the day, and a valuable, world-class collection of cars has been lost to the state. The Museum has outraged the motoring community and has lost its reputation as a cultural repository, at little financial gain as the money was spent not on acquiring more ‘acceptable’ items for display. The motor community received limited benefit from the sale of these cars at the approximate value of AUD 1.2 million dollars (USD 927,960) or at today’s value AUD 2,215,665.80 (USD 1,620,537.97) as evidenced by how the Percy Markham Fund was spent.⁸⁷ Promises were made by the Museum and the government on how the money from the auctioned cars would be used, and promises were broken.

Is it appropriate to expend the Percy Markham Fund on items not related to motoring? Should the funds be spent just on restoration and maintenance of the remaining twelve cars from the Markham collection? What would be the reaction of the Markham family, Veteran Car Club, Combined Car Club and the motoring community in general if they were aware of how the Percy W. Markham Fund was spent? Would they support the expenditure? The evidence indicates the Western Australian Museum sold the crown jewels to fund its operations, and Western Australia is the poorer for it!

Further Research

Further research is underway to develop a digital story about the Markham car collection at Curtin University’s Hub for Immersive Visualisation and eResearch (HIVE).⁸⁸ The digital story will be used to conduct focused group sessions with various stakeholder groups to explore in depth some issues raised from this research like: trust; ethics; collection management; deaccessioning; donations; advocacy in community engagement projects; and the role of cultural institutions like museums. If you would like to participate in this research, please email the author.

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