

## Francis Edgar Williams, anthropologist of Papua

Francis Edgar Williams was born in Adelaide in 1893. He graduated from the University of Adelaide in 1914 with first class honours in Classics. He was named the university's Rhodes Scholar for 1915, but the outbreak of World War I prevented him taking up the scholarship. He immediately joined the First AIF and served in France and the Middle East. In 1921 he completed a Diploma in Anthropology from Oxford University.

In 1922 Williams was appointed Assistant Government Anthropologist in Papua, the former British colony administered by Australia from 1906. He became Government Anthropologist in 1928, a position he held until his death in 1943. Williams devoted his years in Papua to detailed studies of traditional Papuan society. He undertook extensive field work, spending long periods living among the people in native villages. Several of the reports he prepared for the territorial administration were subsequently published by Oxford University Press. As part of his field work Williams compiled a large photographic collection, mainly taken by himself, that recorded many aspects of the village societies he was studying.

His anthropological studies gained him further academic qualifications (including a Doctorate in Science from Oxford in 1941) and recognition within the scientific community that included several awards during the 1930s. In 1939 he served as president of the anthropology section of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS).

With a Pacific war imminent in May 1941, Williams was given responsibility for air raid precautions in Port Moresby. He subsequently re-enlisted in the Army, and served with military intelligence preparing manuals on Papua for the Allied Geographical Section. While serving as a liaison officer with the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) in 1943, he was killed in an aircraft crash on the Owen Stanley Range.

### **Records holdings on F E Williams**

Records relating to F E Williams held by the National Archives and the Australian War Memorial include records on his appointment as Assistant Government Anthropologist (and later Government Anthropologist) for Papua, papers written by him about the native peoples of Papua, and files of his wartime Army service. Examples of these records are listed below.

## Records held by the National Archives about F E Williams

### Anthropologist of Papua – Records held in Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Anthropological and Ethnological Collections of Papua and New Guinea</u>	1914–61	A452, 1959/4708
<u>FE Williams – Assistant Anthropologist, Papua 1922</u>	1922	A1, 1922/6792
<u>Papuan staff – Williams, FE</u>	1935–67	A452, 1959/5972
<u>Second International Conference on Anthrology and Ethnology</u>	1934–38	A659, 1939/1/1868
<u>Letter received by Sir Hubert Murray from FE Williams</u>	1935	M2096, 8
<u>The Grasslanders, Central Highlands– report by FE Williams, Government Anthropologist, Papua</u>	1939	A7034, 10

### War service – Records held in Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Williams, Francis Edgar (First AIF service)</u>	1915–53	B2455, Williams F E
<u>FE Williams T/Captain 32nd Battalion – free passage to Oxford, England to continue studies</u>	1919–20	A2489, 1920/3248
<u>Drafts by Lieutenant FE Williams, Allied Geographical Section, supplied to the Royal Australian Air Force (Papers titled Relations with the Natives of New Guinea in Wartime, Getting about in New Guinea and The Native Courier)</u>	1942–43	A9716, 1566
<u>Williams, Francis Edgar (WWII service)</u>	1942–70	B883, VX136033
<u>Francis Edgar Williams – Application for reseal exemplification of probate</u>	1944–46	A939, PAPSC8/1944

### Records held in Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Captain Francis Edgar Williams – claim for war damage, Port Moresby–Darwin</u>	1942–46	SP24/1, M/W/21

### Records held by the Australian War Memorial about F E Williams

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Captain FE Williams – Infantry Company Library</u>	1924	AWM93, 12/5/34
<u>Geographical Section South West Pacific Area – Relations with the Natives of New Guinea in Wartime by Lieutenant FE Williams, Government Anthropologist, Papua</u>	1942	AWM54, 506/8/2
<u>Notes on collecting information and writing – by the late Captain FE Williams</u>	1943	AWM57, 18/3

## Collection references

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Subject classified prints of photographs relating mainly to Papua and New Guinea (includes several hundred photographs attributed to Williams)</u>	1904–54	A6510
<u>Glass plate negatives of ethnological photographs of Papua taken by FE Williams (reference set available)</u>	1922–35	A6003
<u>Celluloid negatives of ethnological photographs of Papua taken by FE Williams (reference set available)</u>	1931–37	A6004

## Photographs taken by F E Williams

Williams was an accomplished photographer and, as part of his observations in the field, took hundreds of photographs that depicted the lifestyle, customs and habits of the people of Papua. The National Archives in Canberra holds several of these collections, including one comprising over 700 images ([A6003](#)). Details of series are listed below. You can identify individual photographs using PhotoSearch. Digital copies of many of these photographs are also available on PhotoSearch.

## Further information on F E Williams

The National Archives' co-publication *An Anthropologist in Papua: The Photography of FE Williams, 1922–39* (Adelaide, 2001) by Michael W Young and Julia Clark documents the work undertaken by Williams in Papua.