MATTS game, 2nd January 2026

I reread Frederic Wood Jones (1879-1954) book on the anatomy of the human hand during the holiday: *Principles of Anatomy as seen in The Hand*, Frederic Wood Jones, Baillière, Tindall and Cox: London 1946.

Wood Jones was a British observational naturalist and anatomist who spent considerable time in Australia and was one of the founding fathers of the field of modern physical anthropology. He taught at the universities of Adelaide, Melbourne, and Manchester (England). During WW2 he curated the Royal College of Surgeons' John Hunter Museum when the Museum suffered a direct hit on the night 10-11 May, 1941.

In Chapter XIX: The Action of Muscles, I was taken by the following passage:

> One group of fixation muscles is of some interest from the point of view of the student of Man as a zoological type. If one is sitting comfortably in a chair with the elbows resting upon the arms of the chair, it will be noticed that *if the elbow be pressed downwards towards the side the rectus muscle of the same side of the abdomen at once goes into contraction, and that the abdominal muscles and the muscles of the loin harden*. It is very surprising how slight a movement of the arm will evoke a response in the muscles that pass from the pelvis to the ribs. The fixation of the ribs by these muscles is evidently to allow the muscles passing from the ribs to the arms to act to the best advantage; but the ease with which the fixation action is evoked with even minimal movements of the arm is very remarkable. It is possible that here we have one of those co-ordinated muscular reactions that were highly specialised for the purpose of tree-climbing, for the muscles which pass between the arm and the ribs are the great agents for pulling the body up to the hands as the animal climbs upwards. In this act the fixation of the ribs to the pelvis by contracted muscles is of the greatest importance, and the rapid response of these muscles when even trivial arm movements are performed is, perhaps, reminiscent of the time when the act of pulling the body up towards the arms was one of the great functions of the costo-brachial group of muscles [italics added] (pp. 217-218).

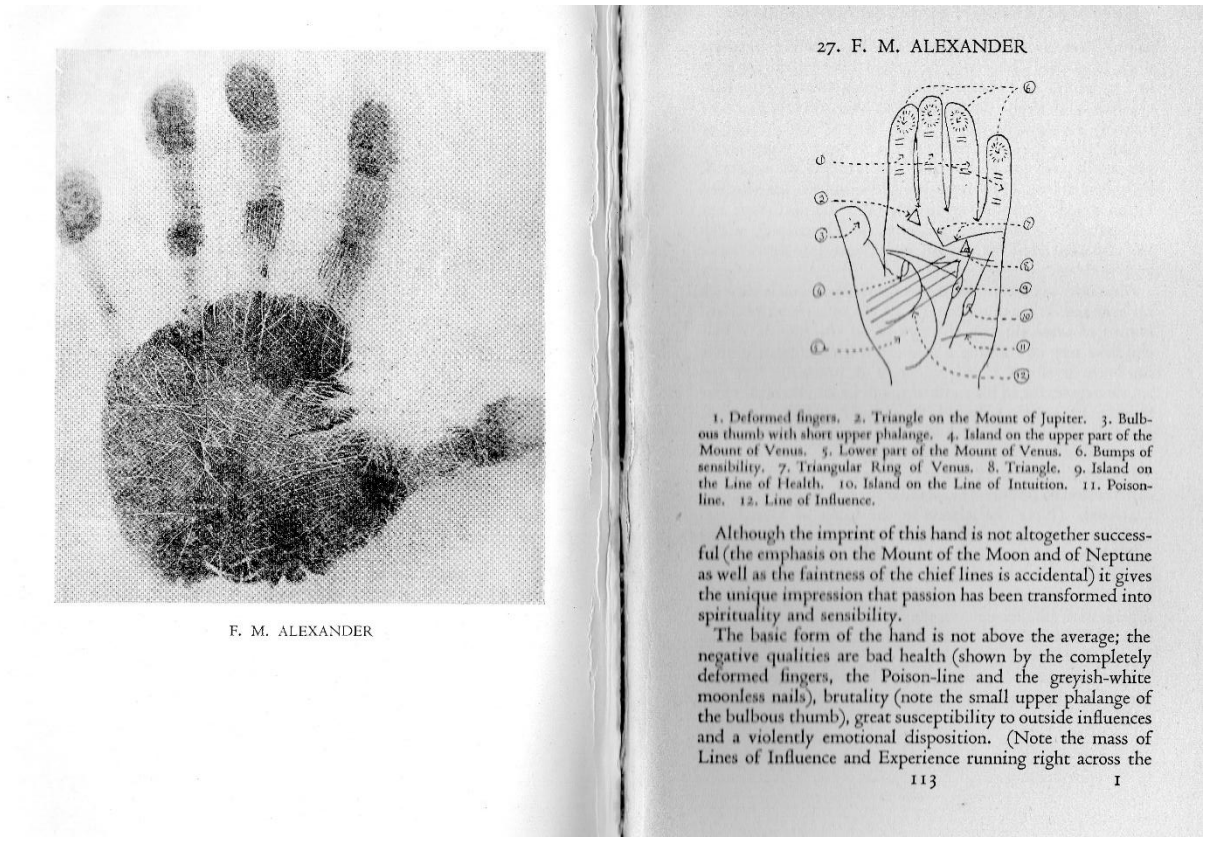
I wondered what relevance this coordinated action of arm and torso musculature had to do with the "forearm pull from the fingers" (CCCI, 120) or "pull to the elbows" instruction Alexander gives in the 'Hands on the Back of a Chair' procedure (CCCI, Illustration pp. 114-122) in which ". . . the movement of the arms is *linked up* with the use of the other parts of the body" [original italics] (p. 117).

Alexander was concerned with promoting increased thoracic ("vital") capacity and "widening of the back". He also noted that "undue tension is particularly noticeable in the case of the contractor muscles of the arm in the region of the biceps and in that of the pectoral muscles in the front of the chest, whereas in a satisfactory state of sensory appreciation these muscles would remain more or less relaxed during the movement, and the greater part of the work would fall on the muscles of the opposite side of the arm and the back (chiefly on the latissimus dorsi)" (p. 121).

So, we explored as a “game” pressing the elbows down towards the sides and Alexander’s instruction to direct the elbows “outwards and slightly downwards”. As Wood Jones observed, “It is very surprising how slight a movement of the arm will evoke a response in the muscles that pass from the pelvis to the ribs.”

In an AT context, sitting with the forearms resting on the arm rests, we could “find our sit bones” and direct the head “forward and up”. Simply the thought of pressing down with the elbows stimulated the torso musculature. A hand placed in the customary way on the subject’s neck could detect a lengthening spine and a turbo-charged upward directional energy! Tree clambering must be a very ancient skill going back further than the emergence of Homo as a species. Our musculature must have evolved to act in a “linked up” way and (maybe) we lose this integrated action at our peril.

The other book I mentioned has just been published, *Decoding the Hand* by the historian of health and medicine, Alison Bashford (University of Chicago Press 2025). It is a history of palmistry. Bashford writes, “I became a historian of the hand between one instance and another in early 2020, in the time it takes to open a manila folder researching the files of a berlin-trained medical doctor, Charlotte Wolff” (p. 3). Wolff took palm prints of celebrities (also London Zoo primates!) including Frederick Matthias Alexander to analyse them for anatomical surface signs of the inner person.



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1. Deformed fingers. 2. Triangle on the Mount of Jupiter. 3. Bulbous thumb with short upper phalange. 4. Island on the upper part of the Mount of Venus. 5. Lower part of the Mount of Venus. 6. Bumps of sensibility. 7. Triangular Ring of Venus. 8. Triangle. 9. Island on the Line of Health. 10. Island on the Line of Intuition. 11. Poison-line. 12. Line of Influence.

Although the imprint of this hand is not altogether successful (the emphasis on the Mount of the Moon and of Neptune as well as the faintness of the chief lines is accidental) it gives the unique impression that passion has been transformed into spirituality and sensibility.

The basic form of the hand is not above the average; the negative qualities are bad health (shown by the completely deformed fingers, the Poison-line and the greyish-white moonless nails), brutality (note the small upper phalange of the bulbous thumb), great susceptibility to outside influences and a violently emotional disposition. (Note the mass of Lines of Influence and Experience running right across the

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Charlotte Wolff, *Studies in Hand-Reading*. Chatto & Windus: London 1936.

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