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September, 1963.

Supplement to A.G.M.A.N.Z. NEWSLETTER NO.16

Extracts from a SURVEY OF PROVINCIAL MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES by  
the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries, London, 1963.

History: Para.15. The whole Museum movement in Great Britain is a growth of little more than 100 years, and it is only in the last 30 years or so that the potentialities of an active Museum service have begun to be recognised. Development in this period has been haphazard and unco-ordinated, and it has outgrown its financial strength; but it has certainly not been ahead of demand ... Nor has this country been ahead of other European countries ... The development in the United States over the same period is perhaps even more marked.

Para.16. At various times during and since the war approaches have been made to Her Majesty's Government for help in solving the difficulties of Provincial Museums. The Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury responded in 1960 by inviting the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries, under the chairmanship of the Earl of Rosse, to make the survey.

Terms of Reference:

Para.3. ... To ascertain the scope, nature and significance of the local collections, the manner in which they are organised, the resources available to them and the possibilities of their further development on a basis of regional co-operation.

Government Policy:

Para.17. In a debate on the Fine Arts on 26th February 1960, the Financial Secretary made it plain ... that the willingness of the British Government to sponsor such a review of local museums and galleries does not affect their adherence to the principle that the central Government should not assume financial responsibility for the capital or running costs of these institutions and that he therefore regarded the enquiry as likely to be primarily useful to the local authorities in enabling them to form a clearer idea of the possibilities, and encouraging a more lively enterprise in the discharge of their responsibilities in this matter....

Fine Art: Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture:

Collections: Para 21. The 1962 Winter exhibition "Primitives to Picasso" at Burlington House, a joint enterprise of the Museums Association and the Royal Academy, revealed some of the wealth of local collections ....

Para 25. Less inspiring is most of the large quantity of work which has been collected, by benefactors or by the museums, from the walls of the Royal Academy - or the local art club - in the course of the last 100 years... it seems to us to point a moral... those who buy for galleries should be encouraged to learn discrimination by wide travel and to train their patrons' taste by frequent loan exhibitions.

Contemporary Art: Para.26. includes an extract from an editorial in the Burlington Magazine for September 1961: "... it is encouraging to discover, as one moves from town to town, how many museums have set aside whole galleries for the display of contemporary art... More encouraging still is the discovery that smaller or less well established museums in their unobtrusive ways (often in the face of violent opposition from local benefactors or members of museum committees who, because they may be rich or powerful, think they have the right to impose their philistinism on curators) have been building up imaginative collections." The Commission agreed with these remarks.



Para.27.... we have been particularly encouraged to see that the revival of interest in sculpture, which is an important phenomenon in contemporary British art, is strongly reflected in recent buying for provincial galleries and in their display. Both modern sculpture and examples of fine earlier works, such as 18th. century portrait busts, are given full value in the arrangement of galleries or rooms of furniture and several galleries are using courtyards, terraces or gardens for the display of sculpture in the open air.

Acquisition: Para.34. ...several galleries and their authorities have recognised how an outstanding centrepiece can raise the standard of an otherwise commonplace collection or section, and have adopted the policy of saving up at least a part of the annual funds available to them for purchase, for an occasional purchase of more than normal importance... this should be encouraged by a further increase in Her Majesty's Government's grant-in-aid to match the increase in the local funds made available for the purpose.

Para.174. ...we recommend that the grant-in-aid should be increased from £25,000 to at least £200,000 a year for a period of 5 years, and thereafter be subject to annual review in the light of need...

Temporary Exhibitions: Para. 36. ... we applaud the policy which guides the best of the provincial galleries to seek variety and breadth of interest for their public in temporary exhibitions, and to confine their acquisitions to certain specialities, aiming at quality rather than scope...

#### Archaeological Collections:

Para. 59. The main and proper concern... of museums... which contain archaeological material is their own regional or local world of antiquity... Pleasant and informative display is now increasingly understood... Legible, accurate and up-to-date labels with explanatory maps and diagrams are an encouragement to the young amateur. Links with the later history of the locality and with comparable archaeological material from elsewhere are of value in all local archaeological museums; and in the larger ones centrepieces of high quality are as important as in a picture gallery. In this kind of collection, which is for study and the encouragement of study, the display must not render the exhibits inaccessible to students.

Excavation and Research: Para. 60. But far more than acquisition and display is demanded of a museum which is to play the part it should play in the archaeological life of the community... the museum must, at the very least, be able to offer a library, lecture room, reading and study room, for whatever society or societies, independent groups, Adult Education classes or simply interested individuals, form the local or regional units of archaeological endeavour. What more it can do depends on the energy and ability of its curator and staff, but it ought to take a leading part in local excavations and be prepared to house, treat for preservation, classify and publish the results of local excavation and research.

Para.65. Any finds from an excavation... are legally the property of the owner of the site; but it is clearly desirable that they should be housed, even if only on loan, in an appropriate museum...

Par. 66. ...The number of these museums up and down the country is so great that most of them are too small and too poor to undertake more than a little local collecting and a limited display... Some of the very smallest museums have been wise enough to attach themselves to a larger museum, and nearly all the larger museums do what they can, within their limited means, to help the smaller ones in their neighbourhood with advice and technical services; but on the whole the tendency among these museums, great and small, is towards absolute, and most uneconomic independence... But museums of this kind have a place in every part of the country, with important work to do and material to work on. What they need is co-ordination. The activities of the larger museums must embrace those museums which are too small to be self-sufficient units. There should be, in our view, at least one of these larger museums in each area, able to take on the organisational, technical, reference and storage work of the area, and fully equipped for the purpose, with space for storage, workshops, files, card-indices, study rooms and library, as well as display facilities and above all, staff.



Financial Assistance: Para.68. The work which the larger museums could do for the nation and for their area, both themselves and through the smaller museums for whom they would be partly responsible, would reach far beyond the area of the local authority which maintains or grant-aids them... We are convinced that direct help must come to these museums from Her Majesty's Government...

Natural History Collections:

Type Specimens: Para.70...Type material belongs to science as a whole and not to an individual or a locality, and it is imperative that it should not be destroyed or damaged. All types, which are in any case indistinguishable from any other of their species, should be, with their historical data, in institutions where they would be associated with other type material, properly preserved, and readily available to scientists. Many small museums have handed over their unique specimens to the British Museum (Natural History); and we consider that this should be the general practice...

Foreign Material: Para.70...Many small museums have handed over those parts of their collections which do not directly relate to their own region, to the larger museums...This also seems to us a desirable policy. Good displays of non-regional material are very useful in local museums for general educative purposes but non-local study material is, we consider, more properly housed in the larger museums, in which it is more accessible not only for consultation on the spot, but for loan for research purposes or for special exhibitions.

National Value: Para.71. The most valuable functions of museums with natural history collections...are precisely parallel to those of local archaeological collections, namely, the collection, for preservation and study, of what might otherwise disappear; the housing, classification, display and publication of what is collected; and the association of local amateurs with this work by scholarly and instructive display and by fostering the activities of the local Natural History and Field Clubs and providing a centre for their activities. These activities, like those of the Archaeological Societies, are of national importance...and we recommend that the possibilities of co-operation between the local museums and national services in the collection and presentation (preservation? Ed.) of natural history objects...be extended and made better known.

Para.72. The proper use of natural history collections depends on the curator, and few of the smaller museums...can afford to have a naturalist or a technician on their staff. These museums will we hope be greatly helped both by the technical services made available by the Area Council scheme, and by the opportunity afforded by these schemes, of planning, with other local interests, the more rational distribution of material which, in isolation and without the necessary knowledge, can be often an embarrassment to the museum.

Scientific and Industrial Collections:

Para.76. The main problem of these museums is space for exceptionally bulky exhibits, and qualified technical staff... such museums are of especial interest to local industry, and have a claim on the generosity of local firms for funds and also, perhaps, for technical assistance. But their need for buildings is urgent...

Para.77. While these badly needed museums are building and efforts are made by their planners to ensure the preservation of the material which is to fill them, we see an urgent need for travelling scientific exhibitions to satisfy a demand, which we have noticed in many places, for temporary exhibitions of scientific material...

Ethnographical Collections:

Para.78... Travellers, soldiers, civil servants, missionaries and traders in the Empire and elsewhere have made collections...illustrating the customs, beliefs, arts and crafts of the peoples among whom they lived and travelled. Almost every museum in the country has received specimens. Many of these are important, and together they have great potential value for the public. A few, as native art, can be admired and enjoyed in isolation and



without knowledge...The objects with less aesthetic appeal need more explanation, and relation to other objects and among themselves; but if they are properly used, they can illustrate the working of men's minds...or they can be studied as material documents of social institutions or religious beliefs. But, although public interest in this material, as in archaeology, has increased in recent years, most of these collections are little more than an embarrassment to their museums... To build up a collection of miscellaneous and isolated specimens into a comprehensive and informative display needs knowledge which can be obtained only by a great deal of research or with the help of a specialist...

Para.81. These collections, more, perhaps, than any others, need organisation and constructive redistribution. The owners of small collections might well benefit if, by gift, loan or exchange, they were to transfer their isolated specimens to a centre where they could be cared for by experts and arranged instructively with related material. From this centre (of which there might be several in the country) exhibitions might be prepared and sent out again on long - or short-term loan to the smaller museums...

#### Folk Material:

Para.83. Conservation is the essence of these museums - not only the conservation of their collections, the sheltering of objects of considerable size such as wagons, looms and even cottages and barns, from the weather, and the preservation of all their objects from woodworm, moth and other dangers, but the conservation by collection of common objects before they vanish. These are objects of small value in themselves, which amply repay imaginative labelling and display.

#### General Museums of Local Interest:

Para.84. Many museums have their origin in the collections made in the region by local learned societies, of historical, natural history and archaeological material...

Para.85. These are not easy collections to display. The exhibits cannot be left to speak for themselves...a real sense of history and development of the locality is needed if the display is not to be aimless and depressing... Imaginative labelling and disposition can produce a valid and vivid picture of the domestic and industrial past of a region, from very modest resources of local archaeological, industrial and historical material, "bygones" and natural history, with the help of old posters, topographical water-colours, and photographs.

Para.86...to be really successful a museum of this kind needs a focus in some picturesque local hero, natural feature, historical event or industry... local material also needs to be relieved by some comparative or contrasting material of other kinds which may be on permanent display or kept handy for temporary exhibitions for variety. Moreover the material of these museums is usually of more historic than aesthetic value; and the best of them therefore keep space for temporary art exhibitions.

#### Educational Activities:

Para.94. The full museum service is a two-way service...with facilities both for school visits to a museum and for loans of museum objects to schools...

Para.96. We strongly recommend the extension of school museum services all over the country. Schools in rural districts, however, cannot make full use of a two-way service. For them, the important feature of the museum service is the loan service...

Para.97. Another urgent need to which thought has lately been given is the training of the schoolteachers themselves to make use of museums and museum objects in the course of their teaching...

Para.99. It seems to us impossible to over-estimate the importance to future generations of teaching children the use and significance of museum objects, and we urge those local authorities which have not yet developed, or assisted museums in their areas to develop, a school museum service to do so without delay; and especially to provide a loan service in all rural areas.



We also admire the experiments which have been made in the teaching of students in teachers' training colleges, and hope that proposals for the use in provincial museums of training officers trained for the purpose will receive encouragement and financial support from the Ministries of Education and local education authorities

#### Social Activities:

Para.100. More and more, in the course of this survey, we have noticed how important the local public is to provincial museums; and how important the museums ought to be to their local public...we cannot feel that any museum which has interesting material, and a local public to serve, is performing its proper function unless it succeeds in associating the public with it in all its activities. It is not too much to say that the main museum of a town...ought...to be the centre of the artistic and intellectual life of the town. There are many different levels at which this can be achieved... Nor is it necessary for these functions to be confined to subjects of which the museum has collections. If a museum can provide exhibition walls, lecture room and library for the local art club, photographic club and other kindred societies, it will strengthen its position as a cultural centre and widen the circle of those who come to regard the museum as their own...

#### University Museums:

Para.106. Among the conflicting calls on the universities' funds, and on the University Grants Committee...the claims of museums do not generally appear to come very high; and it has, moreover, been brought to our notice that, generally speaking, museum staff are graded low in comparison with other university staff ... museum experience is not regarded favourably as a qualification for archaeological posts in the universities...

Para.107...The natural connection between a university and a museum, and the common interest of a City and its university in their museums, are points to be borne in mind, we think, in setting up new universities. In those cities which have an established museum service.... and are about to have a new university, an opportunity exists for creating from the start an association which could be of mutual benefit.

#### Curatorship:

Honorary Curators: Para.113... The devotion and the quality of the work which has been and still is given to museums by honorary curators cannot be too highly honoured, and we would like to think that the voluntary spirit will never disappear from the museum service... We do however, consider that at least one paid official on whose regular services the museum has a right to depend is essential to every museum.

Salaries and Conditions of Service: Para.114. By the activity of the Museums Association and the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, museum curatorship in provincial as well as national museums has in the last 30 years developed into a career, to the great advantage of the museums, the curators and their employers. Much remains to be done in the provision of training... but we also consider that a very important part in this development still remains to be played by the employers, notably the local authorities, first in recognising the importance and variety of the work that a good curator, even in a small museum, can do, and the influence that he can have on the cultural life of their community, then in insisting on adequate qualifications for their appointments and, finally, in offering, for qualified curators, the appropriate salary and subordinate staff.

Para.116... The career is...unsatisfactory in the following ways:-

- (i) The grading and salaries of provincial museum curators often compare unfavourably, even allowing for differences in responsibility, with those of other Chief Officers in Local Government.
- (ii) The salaries of all grades in provincial museums compare unfavourably with salaries in other employment requiring comparable qualifications and carrying similar responsibilities.
- (iii) There are not enough qualified candidates to fill existing vacancies, even where the posts are recognised as worthy of reasonably high grading and salary - not nearly enough to staff the museums as they



ought to be staffed. The shortage of scientists for research and academic work through the attraction of industry is well-known and museums are more seriously hit by it than any body. There is also a shortage of qualified art historians...

Paras.117 - 130 deal with examinations and training.

Co-operative Organisation of the Museum Service:

Paras.139 - 155 deal with the Area Councils which are being developed to improve museum service and to administer Government aid to provincial museums and galleries.

Resources Available to the Museums:

Endowments: Para.162... In general, the endowments made in earlier times by private patrons, whether for maintenance or for purchase, have dwindled in value, and are now quite uneconomic.

Admission Fees and Subscriptions: Para.163... the proceeds of admission fees at present levels rarely cover current expenditure and are never enough to cover any kind of development.

Para.165. The museums which are run by societies have brought their members' subscriptions up to as high a figure as is possible (most of them about £1 to £2 a year) but the proceeds...rarely amount to more than £1,000 a year and are, of course, devoted not only to the museum but to other expenses of the society...

Rate Finance: Para.167. The place of the private patron has been progressively taken by the local authorities...but... para.168... the general level of expenditure seems to us very low, and confirms our impression that the importance of museums in the life of their towns is not fully appreciated, or their needs given adequate priority...We recognise that the present level of the rates and the overwhelming public demand for education are considerations which no elected representative can, or ought to, ignore. All the same, local authorities ought, in our view, never to forget that museums are an essential part of education. Moreover, we believe that they should be ahead of public opinion and we hope that if, as a result of our recommendations, Her Majesty's Government is prepared to recognise the collections of provincial museums as a national possession and their preservation and use for the benefit of the public as a national service parallel to the education service, and to give the necessary lead by making some contribution to it, local authorities may be encouraged to increase the scale of their expenditure.

Government Finance: Paras. 174-179.

Charitable Trusts: Paras. 180-183.

Private Benefactors (Estate Duty and Income Tax): Paras. 184-193.

Assistance to Needy Museums: Paras. 194-202.

Administration of Possible Government Grants: Paras. 203-206.

Summary of Recommendations:

Para.207. The survey which we have made of the provincial collections has convinced us that they contain material of intrinsic value which in itself, mixed and scattered as it may be, adds up to a great national heritage. It has also confirmed our belief that museums and galleries, big and small, should, and more often than not do, contribute to science, history and scholarship generally, and have a real significance in the cultural and social life of the country. The successful examples we have seen have made us the more aware of what is missing in the life of a town where the museum does not perform its function; and we believe that the proper use of these collections is a matter of concern to Her Majesty's Government.

Para.208. We were asked to examine the possibilities of the further development of museums and art galleries on a basis of regional co-operation; and we have shown in the preceding chapters that this is where, in our view, the most promising possibilities lie. We recommend accordingly:



- (1) That all local authorities should, as a matter of urgency, join with the other local authorities and voluntary organisations maintaining museums in their area, in reviewing the provision of museums in their area, and prepare a co-ordinated scheme for improvements and developments, and that their review should include the provision of school museum services;
- (2) That Her Majesty's Government should be prepared to give financial assistance up to the equivalent of the amount subscribed locally, towards the initial expenses of setting up schemes for the mutual help of museums... and in so far as these schemes involve the provision of free or subsidised services to the poorer museums, that Her Majesty's Government should be prepared to contribute up to the equivalent of the amount subscribed locally to this continuing expense...
- (3) That Her Majesty's Government should be prepared to make grants up to the equivalent of the amount subscribed locally to assist museums which are unable to raise capital for the buildings, show-cases, lighting etc., which are necessary for approved development and reorganisation...

Para.209... summarises the recommendations of the survey.

Para.210... the annual additional cost to Her Majesty's Government of the recommendations... apart from any increase in the general local government grant arising from an extension of the School Museum Service is:-

Assistance to conservation and other approved schemes carried out through Area Councils, including...grants...for reorganisation and development	150,000
Assistance to training schemes...	50,000
A Circulation Department for the Science Museums...	25,000
An increase from £25,000 to £200,000 in the... grant-in-aid for purchases....	<u>225,000</u>
	£450,000

Para.211. This sum is but a tenth of the all too small amount of money which is now spent altogether on provincial museums. It is also very modest in comparison with Her Majesty's Government's other grants, which we do not consider excessive, to the Arts and Science...

NOTE: While the Survey is under consideration by interested parties, Treasury has taken immediate action in putting £10,000 into the current estimates to subsidise the initial expenses of schemes for mutual help and the provision of services to the poorer museums.

ROBERT COOPER  
HON. SECRETARY.