

NATIONAL MUSEUM
LIBRARY
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WELLINGTON, N.Z.

Editorial - Museums - To what purpose?

At each Biennial Conference and Annual General Meeting there is some discussion of the functions of a museum. Speakers at recent meetings have defined a museum as 'a collection', 'an educational institution' and as 'an institution for scientific research'. Less serious references to 'the edifice' and 'the old mausoleum' need not be considered here.

Museums have three basic tasks:-

1. to satisfy some portion of the general craving for knowledge.
2. to preserve certain material for future generations, and
3. to contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

1. The educational side of our work, performed by means of permanent displays and special exhibitions, has been discussed fully at recent meetings. At the 1958 Annual Meeting Olwyn Turbott described the new hall of ceramics at Canterbury Museum and Ray Forster illustrated displays in U.S.A. museums with a fine series of coloured slides. During the 1959 Conference Graham Turbott, Ralph Riccalton and Ray Jacobs described the new hall of birds at Canterbury Museum and Peter Middleton illustrated the setting and lighting of museum exhibits. We have heard little about the cost of this work. During the discussion of the hall of birds at Canterbury Museum, Roger Duff remarked that it had probably cost £3,000 in wages, materials and incidentals. More information is available regarding temporary exhibitions. The accounts for the tour of English Silver in 1956 showed a total debit of £1,356 for transport within New Zealand, insurance, printing, etc. and a total credit of £880 for admission charges, sale of catalogues and a government subsidy of £200. Eight institutions exhibited the silver and most of them were out of pocket. The transport costs to and from New Zealand were waived by the Conference Lines and are not included.

The Auckland Art Gallery brought nine overseas exhibitions to New Zealand in 1957 at a cost of about £2,000 of which half was recovered from participating galleries and grants from the Department of Internal Affairs. Owing to import restrictions this activity had to be curtailed and the Gallery did not import any exhibitions during 1959. The time is appropriate to discuss both costs and import licences and the Council has placed these topics on the programme of meetings to be held at the Dominion Museum on 6th-7th April next.

2. The collection and preservation of material (I dare not call it the 'curatorial function') has also been studied by the Association at recent meetings. The New Zealand Science Review published our statement on the 'Curation of Natural History Collections' in December 1958. In the last newsletter we published the resolutions of the Ethnology section of the 1959 Conference on the preservation of historic and technological material. Two members of the Association (Charles Fleming and Harry McQueen) prepared a report on this material for the Royal Society of New Zealand (Proc. Roy. Soc. N.Z. 87:14-16, 1959) and the Council has included the topic in the April programme of meetings. The

1959 Conference authorised Council to enquire into historic collections in the Bay of Islands and the report adopted by Council is reproduced in this newsletter. There will be an opportunity to discuss it at the April meetings.

The Council has decided to urge the Government to appoint an historical affairs officer to the High Commissioner's Office London to collect early pioneer material in Britain. There will also be provision for the discussion of this suggestion at the April meetings.

3. No museum or art gallery has ever achieved greatness without a strong programme of research. The names of Cheeseman, Oliver Hamilton, Von Haast and Hutton are remembered more for their contributions to knowledge than for their collections and displays. The prestige which they earned for their museums continues but the conditions under which they worked have changed. In the last newsletter Dick Dell mentioned the development of government institutions which now claim to be the national research institutions for botany, entomology, marine biology, etc. In the U.S.A. the pattern of this development is clear. The U. S. Department of Agriculture formed its own plant collections many years ago because the National Museum could not meet its needs. Now the Department of Agriculture is gradually transferring its collections to the Museum on the grounds that they are no longer in current use. For example the national Fungus collection of the Department of Agriculture, founded in 1869 and numbering 650,000 specimens, is to be transferred to the Museum as soon as space is available.

In other branches of natural history (insects, birds, fish, etc) the Museum provided working space for staff members of the Department of Agriculture and Fish and Wildlife services of the Department of Interior. The savings and benefits to both these departments, and to the Museum, have been considerable. This subject is not included in the April meetings but I suggest that it is one which the Association should study in the future.

The New Zealand National Commission for Unesco has advised us that a preliminary recommendation on the most effective means of rendering museums accessible to everyone will be placed before Unesco in November next and then, if adopted, will be referred to member governments for further action. The recommendation adds another field of activity to those which I have listed:- "Museums should serve as intellectual and cultural centres in their own localities (for their own specialities). They should...make some contribution to the intellectual and cultural life of the community..." The recommendation is too long to reproduce here but a copy of it will be sent to each member institution. I think that it adds little to our present duties, as most New Zealand galleries and museums already play a part in social and cultural life.

From time to time the suggestion is made that a museum should elect to perform one or two of the services I have listed and abandon others. The prestige which our museums enjoy is based however on their past performances in all fields of activity. There is a time lag here, but the members of the community who use our services, and who support us, expect the staff to be interested in collecting, preservation, research and display, and to be competent at all of them. The public also expects the staff to lecture ably (and for free) and generally perform the community services described by Unesco.

Unfortunately staff members combine the talents required of them in varying degrees. Only harm can result if the trained research man is involved in an excess of display work for which he

has no talent. Likewise there is waste if a brilliant display person is required to produce learned papers to gain promotion.

The range of services provided by a museum is in fact a practical problem for directors - namely to recruit a staff of high creative competence, to reconcile its differences and to give its varied talents the freest possible expression. This is a matter for wise organisation, and also a matter of finance.

Robert Cooper.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE APPOINTED BY COUNCIL TO
REPORT ON POMPALLIER HOUSE AND THE WAITANGI TREATY HOUSE
WITH A VIEW TO ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL COLONIAL MUSEUM
IN OR NEAR EITHER SITE.

THE COMMITTEE:- Mrs. O.M. Turbott (coopted)
Dr. R.A. Falla
Mr. P.A. Tomory
Mr. P. Liddleton (architect and senior
lecturer, School of Architecture, Auckland)
(coopted)

THE FOLLOWING SITES WERE VISITED:-

Pompallier House, Russell
Russell Centennial Museum
The Waitangi Treaty House
The Stone House, Keri-Keri
The Vicarage, Waimate.

POMPALLIER HOUSE.

We were very much impressed with the atmosphere created by the simple treatment of white walls and black dado. The cork lino floor to simulate packed earth does not appear too durable. The furniture is a little too sparse and the beds could be properly furnished, labels removed from chairs and the writing desk in the parlour(?) put against a wall instead of in the middle of the room. The presence of the early New Zealand flag and its pole in the parlour is quite incongruous. In the hall a glazed panel shows the original cob mixture of which the walls are made, which was a thoughtful decision.

Much more could be made of the kitchen, i.e. a table, plates, cooking utensils etc. in period. A cannon and skittle ball in the hearth are cheerfully irrelevant.

Other irrelevances noted were a painting, in a bad state of deterioration, of the ship "Deborah", a reproduction of the burning of the "Boyd", the Tremain Tapestry, which appears to have no connection with Pompallier House.

Typewritten labels stuck to walls with sellotape were blemishes, but at least gave evidence of effort to provide information on the part of the caretaker. There are also too many photostats, instead of original engravings which are not impossible to obtain.

Pompallier House left a pleasant impression, and we would consider it apt for development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That A.G.M.A.N.Z., through its members, should offer to locate and select suitable furniture, household articles and prints to furnish the remainder of the house as a period residence.
2. That the properties adjoining on either side should be marked for future acquisition so that this end of the Strand could constitute an early Russell museum area.

RUSSELL CENTENNIAL MUSEUM

This small museum was started about $3\frac{1}{2}$ years ago under the curatorship of Miss King. It is an excellent small museum a short distance from Pompallier House.

Exhibits are clearly and accurately labelled and care has been taken to show related articles of the old industries of gum digging and whaling. In conjunction with Pompallier House and the further development suggested, the museum would add materially to such a group of period dwellings.

THE WAITANGI TREATY HOUSE

The atmosphere of the park, house, exterior etc. is excellent, however the atmosphere which was so evident at Pompallier was absent on entering the house. Half the house is occupied by the caretaker whereas Pompallier loses only about a third of its space. In Pompallier House, no part of the original building is occupied by the caretaker.

The Treaty House interior is clean and neat except that the hall and somewhat grandiosely titled Ante-Muniment have their walls somewhat over cluttered with brass commemorative plates, pictures and photographs. The Muniment Room (an inaccurate title as nearly all the pictures, maps etc. are reproductions) contains desk cases filled with articles largely irrelevant to the site, viz: digging Kos found at the Hamilton Motor Camp and a stone axe found in Taranaki. A great many labels were badly faded and one desk case, opposite a window at the far end of this room, contained amongst other things autographed letters from Hobson, and James Busby's diary, which is in direct light and serious fading is already evident. We question also the advisability of placing a 12 bore fowling piece in this case with its weight resting on the coverless Busby diary.

Numerous photostat reproductions line all the walls. These are certainly relevant and arranged in chronological order, but the printed guide is unreasonably telegraphic with its information, i.e. no indication of the artist of the original work nor its present location in New Zealand. The photostating process may be adequate for documents but for engravings, watercolours etc. it is an unsympathetic medium. Again, there seems no reason - provided reasonable conservation was assured - that relevant original works could not be borrowed on long loan from institutions throughout the Dominion.

We are also of the opinion that the house is not the proper milieu for this material, but that it should be placed in an additional building. With fresh accommodation for the caretaker, the whole house could be furnished in period as the British Residency, for as the printed guide properly states, The Treaty site is not the house but the flag staff area.

The Committee feels that the particular matters of arrangement referred to above are indicative of the necessity for trained curatorship and this is evidently a need in all the museums visited. The effect of all the museums would be greatly improved if a more advanced stage of curatorship and display could be attained, but the difficulty of arranging this in a small local museum is realised. The danger of allowing a caretaker, unless trained, to add material and labels to displays is stressed.

The Committee's suggestion for a means of co-ordinating the museums around Waitangi with a professional officer in charge is given in the conclusion.

There is no doubt that The Treaty House park has ample space for further development as an early colonial and Maori museum park.

THE C.M.S. STORE, KERI-KERI.

It is gratifying to see that this historic house is still in use and some attempt has been made to establish a small museum in the attic.

The nearby Kemp House provides yet again another early colonial nucleus.

WAIMATE VICARAGE AND BEDDGOOD MUSEUM

This house, now the property of the Historic Places Trust, with its Church provides a further nucleus. The Beddgood Museum occupies a wing room of the house containing one of the best collections of agricultural craft tools with photographs demonstrating their use that we could recall seeing. Restored, and its grounds repaired, this house could become the main centre for early missionary history in New Zealand.

CONCLUSION

We were all unanimous in opinion that the sites visited and the area of which they form the periphery - namely Russell, Opua, Paihia, Treaty Park, Keri-Keri, Waimate and Whangaroa - is the ideal general site for the establishment of a National Early Colonial Museum area. Each site could have its own character by restricting its scope to one particular aspect of colonial life, i.e. Government, the Mission, the daily life, industries. The short distances involved would allow the visitor to spend a day visiting the individual places, while associated enterprises such as a whaling depot, printing press, mill, etc. could be established respectively at Whangaroa, Russell, Paihia and in the Treaty Park. Nor is it beyond the imagination to consider the reconstruction of a fighting pa on one of the nearby original sites.

Staffing could remain as it is with the appointment of a professional curator to coordinate activities and to take overall responsibility for all the associated sites. Agreement would have to be reached between the present controlling bodies, viz. Department of Internal Affairs, Department of Lands and Surveys, National Historic Places Trust and the Waitangi Trust Board.

We feel that this area has a truly national character and significance for the whole of New Zealand and it would provoke none of the regional objections which would be raised over an area near one of the major centres.

Further, land is available in the Bay of Islands and the fragmentation proposed would allow for a stage-by-stage development of the total area, thus easing expenditure over a number of years. We would also recommend the setting up of a permanent advisory committee by A.G.M.A.N.Z. which, until the appointment of a permanent official, could advise the relevant authorities and also take an active part in the collection of material.

However, the real success of the scheme would lie in the appointment of a fully qualified person with an imaginative grasp of the colonial period and the area described.

HE WHO PAYS THE PIPER.....

A small item on page 27 of ICOM News, April - June, 1959 is titled "Preparation of international regulations on the most effective means of rendering museums accessible to everyone."

Some of the conclusions reached after study of answers to a questionnaire sent to museums in Member States, are of interest to us in New Zealand.

Number 5. states some of the advantages, material, service, and financial, which can result from effective "Associations of Friends of the Museum." Numbers 6 and 8 are concerned with problems of finance but it is doubtful if they can be of much assistance to us other than to show that we have some international opinion behind us when we approach various public bodies for funds.

It is possible, however, that the preparation of notes relating to the position as it exists in each New Zealand museum at the present could provide a guide. For instance, Canterbury's experience with an "Association of Friends" would be of interest to all. Each major museum, and probably every institution in our Association, has a different financial background. Surely each has some advice to give the others, advice on what works and what does not work for them. Just because the situation differs from place to place, does not prevent one learning from the experience of others, and many of the smaller and the more recently established institutions would value such guidance. Such notes would need to be produced by "AGMANZ" without individual authors being named and to be strictly restricted in their circulation.

A large part of the answer to our financial problems lies in the need to take cognizance of two of the conclusions in the report and I shall quote them.

- " (3) In order that museums may be made as attractive as possible and that it may be easy for all types of people to understand the collections, the attention of Member States might be drawn to the need for making their galleries more comfortable and to the advantages of arrangements making the collections easier to appreciate."
- " (4) In order to develop the vocational and intellectual culture of the working classes, Member States might be recommended to promote - in order to make them as close as possible - cultural relations between museums and workers' and employees' unions, and social services in factories, industry and business enterprises."

While we are all moving towards making our collections easier to appreciate, how far have we gone towards making our galleries more comfortable? The Auckland Art Gallery has moved a considerable distance in this direction and the restaurant integrated into the Hawkes Bay Art Gallery and Museum is another commendable example but consider the number of our institutions where visitors must sit on the front steps for a cigarette or go some distance for light refreshment. At least we might arrange a smoking lounge about half way round the displays and effective heating is essential in winter.

Just how we would implement the suggestions regarding cultural relations with industry and commerce requires considerable

study but perhaps cases, to contain loans of museum material which would be changed at intervals, could be constructed in canteens with the co-operation of the firms concerned.

The same issue of ICOM News mentions both a large scale "Operation Museums" in Belgium, designed to awaken public interest, and the regular yearly organization of a "Museum week" in Czechoslovakia. What is really needed is a continued effort to raise interest and to provide valued services by improving the attraction of the institution itself and making use of loans, associations, press and radio throughout the year.

We need to look well ahead because what seems like the best use of staff and facilities at the present, perhaps in the field of research, may place us in a poorer position in the future. It is necessary that the public think we are providing a worthwhile service. Obviously, until a feeling of goodwill and interest is fairly widespread, we shall continue to have difficulties in obtaining the co-operation and the finance which we require.

H. Grimson

The Organization of Museums - Practical Advice.

The problems of low budgets and narrow prospects are common to all galleries and museums today and Unesco has published a booklet with the above title as an aid to harassed directors. It is in the Unesco series "Museums and Monuments", 180 pages, illustrated, price 30/- sterling. The New Zealand agents for Unesco publications are Unesco Publications Centre, 100 Blackthorne Road, Christchurch.

The Perfect Museum.

The perfect museum would be one that had, in addition to a perfect staff, and an admiring public, a building and equipment capable of being expanded Aladdin-like to the needed proportions whenever the Air Force sent in a disused spitfire or the zoo sent along a deceased elephant. In such a perfect institution the capacity of the staff in pure scholarship would be exceeded only by its skill in constructing superb displays and exhibitions. There would be an ever-growing store of unspent funds and nobody, not even the director, would have to worry about money.

There is nowhere in existence such a perfect museum of course; and if there were it might turn out to be a somewhat boring place, afflicted with fatty degeneration of its vital passageways. The fact is that a museum man's prime duty is raising funds, not only for the situation today, but for the collecting, displays and research he anticipates in the years ahead.

Adapted from Virginia White - "The
Perfect University."

RAIL FREIGHT ON EXHIBITS FOR MUSEUMS.

The following ruling from the Department of Internal Affairs (reference L.A. 113/8 of 14th January 1960) will be of interest to member institutions:-

"The position has been reconsidered and it has been decided that exhibits sent to museums may be carried at the expense of the Department of Internal Affairs on the following conditions:-

- (a) The concession applies to railway freights only.
- (b) It relates only to specimens and exhibits for display in public museums.
- (c) It relates only to donations, and then only when the exhibits, etc. are being sent by the donor to the museum.

The amount available for the year is £20 only, and the concession is intended to cover small freight accounts."

MUSEUM FINANCES.

"All progress is based upon a universal innate desire on the part of every organism to live beyond its income." Butler.

The last Biennial Conference requested Council to make application to the Department of Internal Affairs for fund, similar to the British Grant-in-aid, to assist the smaller galleries and museums to purchase exhibits for their permanent collections. The accounts of ten member institutions were forwarded in support of the application and it is hoped that the decision of the Government will be available shortly.

It is clear from the accounts that some municipal authorities have generously accepted responsibility for their local galleries and museums in recent years. Grants varied however from nil in one town to nearly £1,800 in another of almost similar size. Two cities, Nelson and Wanganui, are supporting both a gallery and a museum.

All institutions derived surprising sums from members' subscriptions, donations, rents, door takings and sales of publications etc., and it is presumptuous to offer suggestions and comments. It is remarkable however that in almost all the accounts there were unspent funds at the end of the financial year. One institution which made a loss was the Southland Museum. Income for the year ending 30th April 1959 was only £679, expenditure £714 and the loss amounted to £35. Following the resignation of the director, due to a breakdown in health, the trustees were forced to close the Museum in April, 1959. The press gave wide publicity to the closing and by July the local bodies of Southland had agreed to continuing annual contributions amounting to £2000 per year. Later the trustees were assured of £3000 a year, and have appointed Gordon White of the Dominion Museum as director at a salary in line with the Association's 1957 scale. The moral will be obvious to other galleries and museums! It is most prudent to have ever-increasing reserves, but can any gallery or museum afford to save at the present time? It is known of course that some accumulated income is required for future building or lighting plans, special purchases, and so on, but it is seldom clear from the accounts that a gallery or museum needs more funds.

It is suggested that partly self-supporting services may be worth study. If members desire it the Association will circulate lists of publications prepared by each gallery and museum. If each institution had an enquiry desk stocked with the saleable publications of other galleries and museums, as well as its own booklets, total sales should improve to the benefit of all.

The arrangement recently made between the Auckland Museum and the Government Tourist Bureau may also be of interest. The Museum provides guided tours for parties of overseas and New Zealand tourists in return for a small fee. A retired school-teacher assists the staff in providing the service which seems to be a popular one. The Tourist Bureau collects the Museum fee, along with other charges for the tour, and accounts to the Museum later.

None of the accounts of the ten institutions showed any receipts from research grants, although two of the museums at least have done worthwhile historical and archaeological work in the past.

On the expenditure side of the accounts no salaries, wages or honoraria were paid in two institutions. In the other eight galleries and museums it appears that the salaries paid to staff are far below the levels recommended by the Association in 1957. This

scale was not high and last year the Council decided to revise it. The new scale, when issued, will not improve the position of the staff however unless some means is found to increase gallery and museum incomes.

In the U.S.A. and Australia, galleries have benefited greatly from the remission on income tax and estate duties on gifts in the books of the donors. In New Zealand, under existing law, galleries and museums can achieve better incomes only from increased public and local body support. And for this, increased services will undoubtedly be expected.

Robert Cooper.