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Botanical Display in Britain

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Introduction

In 1981 I had the opportunity to spend five months overseas, primarily in Britain and Australia. My time was devoted to several lines of work including investigation of botanical collections in the main institutions of the two countries, carrying out field work in Australia, participating in two major international botanical conferences and studying modern museum display techniques, particularly those involving botanical material.

This article deals solely with the latter aspect of my trip and relates only to institutions in Britain, those in Australia having virtually no botanical material on display. The main purpose of this part of my trip was to see what progress had been made in recent years in displaying botanical material, and to collect ideas for a major new Botanical Gallery in the National Museum of New Zealand. It is intended that, once the new wing to the Museum is completed, the public gallery now temporarily accommodating the library will revert to its former function as a plant and insect hall.

The comments that follow deal in turn with the major institutions that I visited. They are taken from a report on my five months' study leave prepared for the National Museum Council, the Royal Society of New Zealand and AGMANZ (De Beer Fund), all of whom made substantial grants to offset my travel expenses and to whom I am extremely grateful. Copies of the full report are available on request from the author.

For editorial reasons, this account is being presented in two parts. The first, in this issue of the journal, deals exclusively with displays at the Natural History Museum in London. The second part, to appear in the next issue of AGMANZ NEWS, will deal with the provincial museums, notably those in Liverpool, Edinburgh and Cardiff, and with institutions such as Kew Gardens, Edinburgh Botanic Gardens and the Commonwealth Institute.

PART 1: British Museum (Natural History)

Easily the most interesting and thought-provoking biological displays I saw anywhere were those at the Natural History Museum in London. In fact, the most recent displays had won for the institution the Museums Association "Museum of the Year" award for 1980. However, many of the earlier exhibitions still have a very old-fashioned look about them with rather unimaginative arrangements of stuffed animals, birds and insects in long, dull halls and corridors — not greatly changed from the scheme initiated by the first director, Sir Richard Owen, who attempted to follow the "Plan of the Creator" in displaying the diversity of Nature. Admittedly, some galleries were completely redesigned in the post-war development of the Museum, but it is abundantly clear that in recent years display techniques and concepts of what constitutes a readily assimilated display have altered radically. The Botany Hall, opened in 1962, is a good example of this earlier style consisting of 20 to 30 rather standard cases dealing with the systematics of different plant groups and with disciplines such as plant anatomy, ecology, physiology, cytology and palynology. The content and rationale of the exhibition have been well outlined and illustrated by Cannon (1962a, 1962b) who clearly states that the Hall was designed with the student of botany in mind. This is reflected in the displays which, apart from some dioramas dealing with ecological topics, bear a striking resemblance to pages from a text book, with a super-abundance of labelling, a wide use of concepts and technical terms intelligible only to people already familiar with the subject, and a general lack of interesting three-dimensional material (Fig. 1). This sort of gallery, though good in its day within the limits of its stated objectives, has been overtaken by progress in the design of books which can now cover the same ground more efficiently and more cheaply.

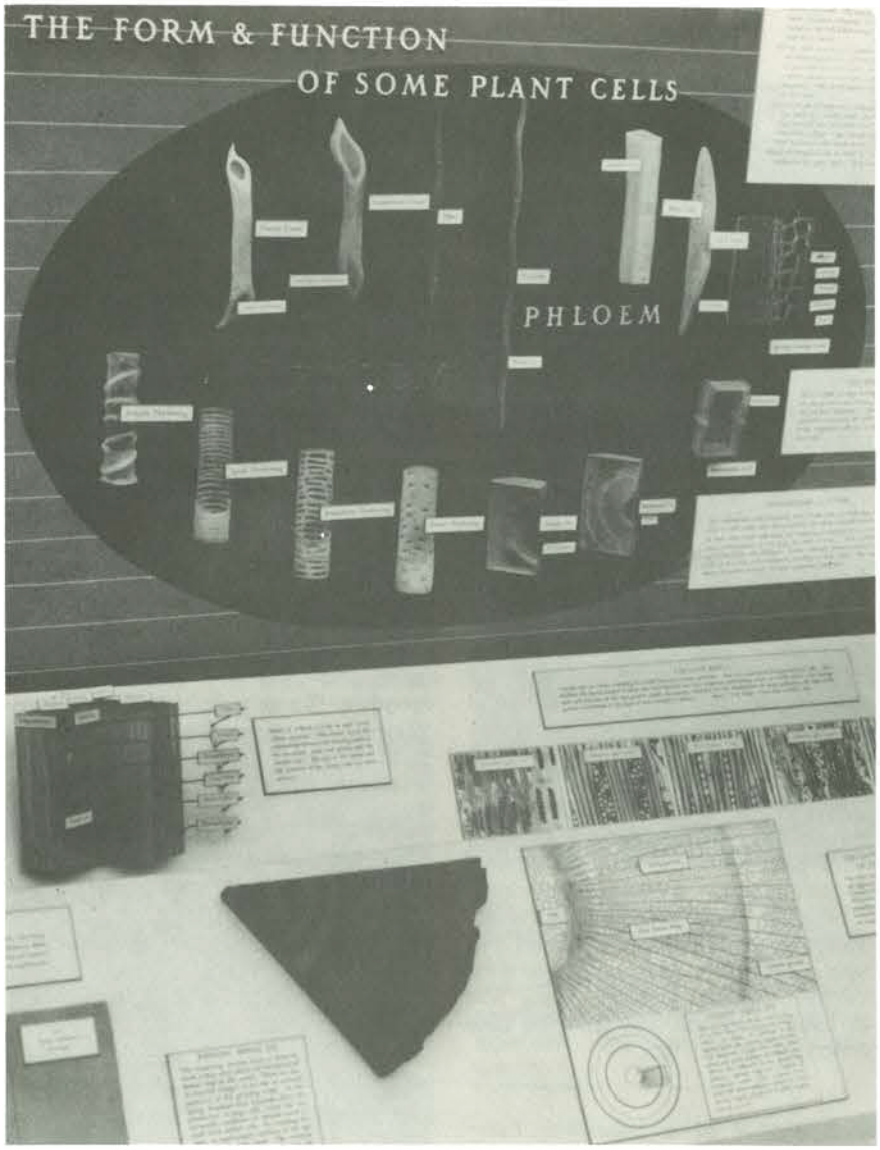


Fig. 1. A case in the Botany Hall dealing with plant anatomy. The extensive text and technical nature of the material do little to attract the average visitor's interest.

Problems of this nature induced the Museum to completely re-think its policies on display and have led, since 1970, to the implementation of a new Exhibition Scheme. The thinking behind this approach and its translation into a number of completely new Exhibition Halls have been expounded in detail in a long series of publications (Miles 1978, 1979a, 1979b; Miles & Tout 1978, 1979; Alt & Morris 1979; Miles & Alt 1979; Clarke & Miles 1980; Gosling 1980; Hamilton 1980). Very briefly, the new Scheme is innovative in being highly thematic, in attempting to get visitors actively involved with the displays, and in the design processes which precede exhibition. The scope of the displays has been broadened so as to include not only diversity of nature, but also the underlying principles of biology such as evolution, ecology, behaviour, and chemical and physical life processes; above all, it includes for the first time displays directly concerned with Man. Most importantly, the displays have been geared to the interests and abilities of the actual visiting public rather than, as in the past, to a particular section of the community — namely the students of biology. Extensive annual visitor surveys have consistently shown that about 80% of the Museum's audience has no biological training of any sort (Alt 1980), and the new galleries take full account of this fact.

Fig. 2. Model of a celandine from "Introducing Ecology", and freeze-dried toadstools from "The Origin of Species". The models are of a very high standard but are time-consuming to prepare. Freeze-drying is a much quicker process but is only suitable for certain types of material.

So far, five new Halls have been opened at the rate of about one a year — "Human biology", "Introducing ecology", "Dinosaurs and their living relatives", "Man's place in evolution" and "The origin of species". The first, on "Human biology", opened in 1977 and remains the most elaborate and most radical departure from previous displays (Miles & Tout 1978; Duggan 1978). It is entirely concerned with Man, exploring aspects of birth, growth, development, movement, hormonal control, learning, perception, mental development and language. It makes use of sophisticated models, films, slides, graphics, cartoons, levers, games and other interactive devices, and is housed in such a way that the architecture of the main building is totally excluded by a series of tunnel-like passages leading from one simulated human environment to another. Some people find it claustrophobic, gimmicky and totally alien to their concept of a natural history museum; others find that it provides a lively, exciting atmosphere in which they are encouraged to learn more about themselves from a range of participatory techniques. By any standards it has proved to be the Museum's most popular gallery and, if the visitor surveys are to be believed, there is evidence of its success as a teaching medium.

Next to be opened was "Introducing ecology" — a display which explores the complex interactions between living things and their non-living environment, using as examples an English woodland and a rocky shore (Miles 1979a; Swinney 1979). The main themes are concerned with the sources of energy for living organisms, the capture of energy by plants through photosynthesis, the transfer of energy to animals by feeding, storage of energy and the concept of ecosystems. Considerable use has been made of some very elegant dioramas incorporating both skilled taxidermy and some very convincing models of plants — the tree trunks, branches and small herbs such as primroses and violets are particularly well done, though the seaweeds are generally disappointing (Figs. 2 & 3). Photographs and superb graphics on back-lit screens supplement the three-dimensional material (Fig. 4). Participatory techniques are again evident though the levers and gadgets which proved accident-prone in "Human biology" are reduced in number. Instead there is a computer at the end of the hall which enables visitors to investigate an ecological problem by means of questions and multiple choice answers based on material in the exhibition. Unfortunately the current display is very poorly housed, the original exhibition having been reduced in size and moved to an old reptile gallery in which the magnificent wall fixtures of fossil pleisiosaurs and icthyosaurs continually distract one's attention.

More recently the "Dinosaur" and "Evolution of Man" exhibitions have been opened (Gosling 1980; Tynan 1981). The dinosaurs occupy the Central Hall of the Museum, appropriate to their popularity, wherein most of the space is devoted to a range of skeletons, each accompanied by a $\frac{1}{5}$ life-size model showing what the animal is believed to have looked like. However, in five bays on one side of the main hall, the relationships of the dinosaurs to each other and to their living relatives are explored by the use of cladistics and cladograms — a still controversial methodology which has

Fig. 3. A small woodland diorama from "Introducing Ecology". The exhibit is enclosed in a case and is easily portable.

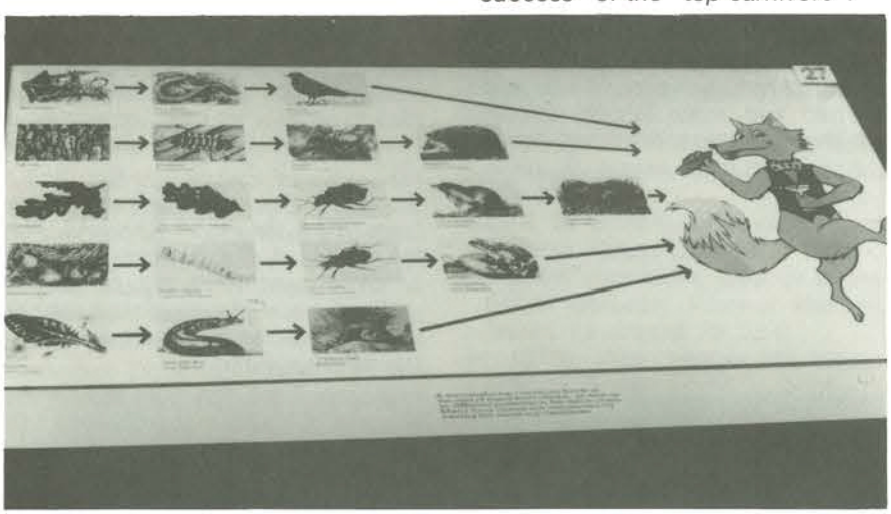


Fig. 4. Back-lit screen illustrating the principle of a food chain and the "success" of the "top carnivore".

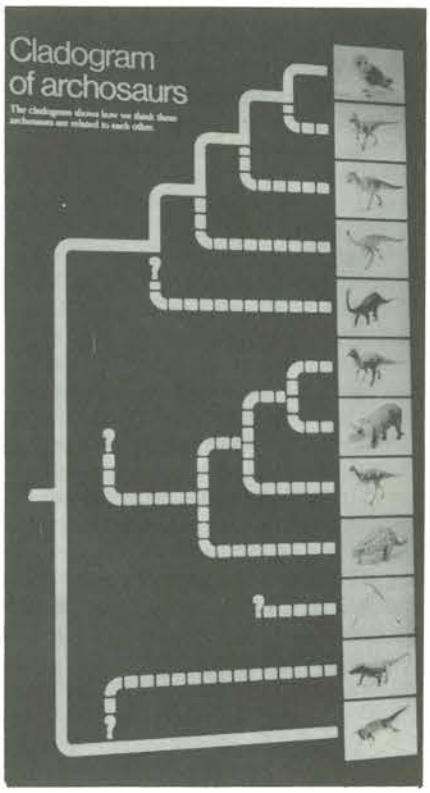


Fig. 5. An example of the controversial cladograms from "Dinosaurs and their Living Relatives." This means of determining the depicting relationships between different species can also be applied to plants.

gained wide but not yet universal acceptance in systematics (Fig. 5). Regardless of the scientific arguments, there does seem to be a feeling that the inclusion of cladistics within the public galleries was unfortunate simply because the subject is too technical and perhaps too boring to sustain most people's interest.

The most recent exhibition — "The origin of species" — is a *tour de force* (Clarke 1981; Cox 1981; Stansfield 1982; Tudge 1981). In a series of very simple stages one is taken through all the elements leading to Darwin's theory on the origin of species. The problem of how evolution occurs is posed and then followed by an explanation of the concepts of species, the "struggle for suvival", the inheritance of parental characters, mutation, variation, natural selection (Fig. 6) and eventually speciation itself. Examples from both plant and animal kingdoms have been chosen, the labelling is commendably brief, films and slides are shown in well constructed booths to elaborate the central text of the exhibition, and the display concludes with a computer game to recapitulate the main themes and a wall screen to illustrate a range of books which will take the interested student further. The whole exhibition is enhanced by the use of natural daylight, a comfortably carpeted floor and some concern for blending display material with the distinctive architecture of the hall.

These five exhibitions, though covering very different subjects, share a number of admirable design features. Visitor-flow is directed to a greater or lesser extent. An overall plan of the exhibition is prominently displayed at the beginning and constantly reinforced as one moves round. Each exhibition is broken up into a number of topics (usually 5-10) which are colour-coded in the flow-plans and signposted when they are reached. There is a simple storyline which develops through the exhibition; the text is brief and written in simple language which, for practical purposes, is geared to the reasoning power and vocabulary of an average 15 year old (this being the effective level of comprehension by adults *under Museum conditions*). Within each topic a wide range of display techniques, especially participatory ones, are used to retain the interest of the visitor (Fig. 7). Cases are designed with an absolute minimun of framing to ensure all round clear visibility; graphics are of a consistently high standard and include paintings, drawings, diagrams and cartoons; lettering is sufficiently large to be easily read. At various points, subsidiary cases or displays are introduced which are not essential to the main storyline but which explore the subject more fully — this may be in the form of a display with more detailed text, or a film booth with running commentary.

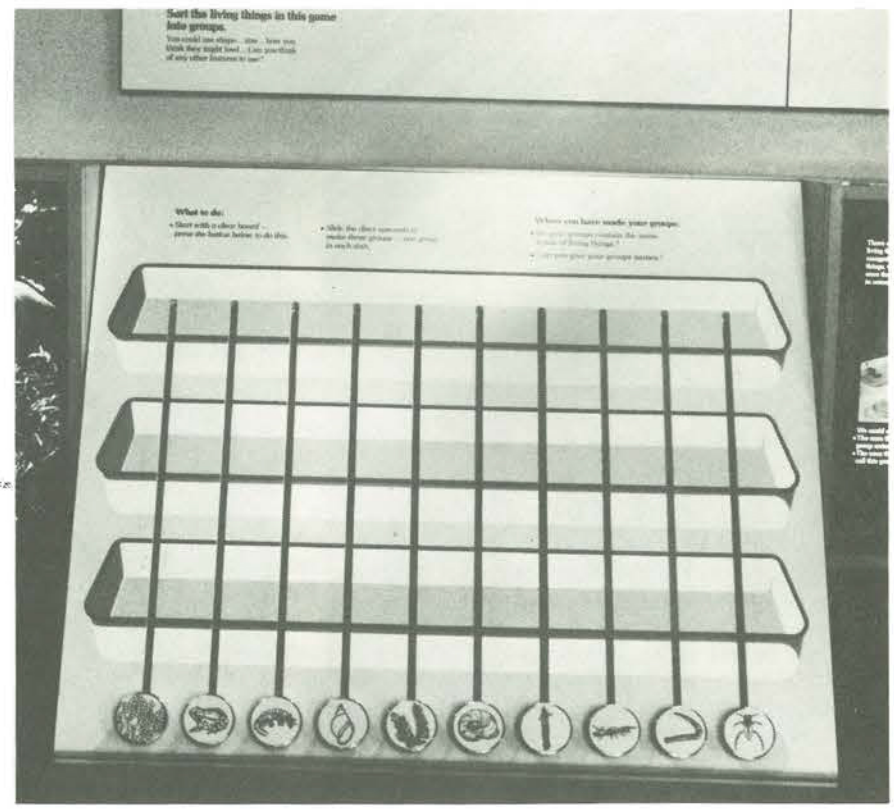
These strengths derive largely from the degree of planning and designing which goes into each new gallery. Initially a design brief is prepared which sets out the aims and objectives of the exhibition, indicates the area it is to occupy and lists the resources available. Then each of the 5-10 main topics of the exhibition is thoroughly researched by a biologist and designer working as a team. With assistance from educationalists and script writers they devise ways for displaying each component of their particular section. Ultimately a standardised document is produced for every topic of the exhibition containing the storyline, checklists of the exhibits and details of the display techniques. This part of the planning procedure is the most time consuming, each section occupying a pair of designers for up to a year. The documents are then subject to editorial work to unify the whole concept before production of the individual units begins. All the specimens, graphics, photos, cases, etc. are assembled in the workshops before the exhibition itself is put together so that the final stage of production is very short, occupying perhaps only a few weeks, and ensuring that galleries do not remain empty for months or years at a time whilst they are redesigned.

An important requirement of all the displays is that they must be essentially mobile. Assessment of the design and success of the exhibition starts before and continues long after it is opened to the public; areas which prove unsuitable are amended or even completely replaced, so that each gallery evolves in response to constructive criticism (Gregory 1981; Griggs 1981).

The whole exhibition may even be moved, as in the case of "Introducing ecology", Thus, large-scale fixed dioramas have no place in the modern scheme, not only because of their cost but also because of their inflexibility. The display team is, of course, gaining experience as it develops more exhibitions, and a greater degree of sophistication is apparent in "The origin of species" than in earlier galleries. For example, mechanical participatory devices such as levers and gadgets are being replaced by more reliable make-and-break circuits. Also, the computer has become a standard feature of every new gallery — "The origin of species" has no less than three terminals. The full potential of this new technology has certainly not yet been fully realised, but its relatively low cost, low maintenance requirements and obvious attraction to a generation of children familiar with pocket-calculators and "Space Invaders" ensure that it is here to stay.

Fig. 6. A small "port-hole" diorama illustrating the principle of natural selection. The light-coloured moth shows up better against the dark trunk of the tree than do the three dark-coloured individuals. The dark-coloured moths are less likely to be spotted and eaten by the bird and are therefore more likely to survive.

Fig. 7. A simple taxonomic game from "The Origin of Species". The ten discs at the bottom depicting different organisms can be moved vertically, and the visitor is asked to sort the species into three groups in the trays provided.



A well-written programme is demonstrably able to retain the attention of both child and adult for a much greater length of time than an average display; when used to reinforce the visual impact of an exhibition, it is a very powerful tool indeed.

Despite the high standard of display maintained in its new Exhibition Scheme, the Museum has received widespread criticism for moving away from its traditional role of displaying natural diversity. This continual pressure has evidently had some effect because many of the future exhibitions outlined by Clarke & Miles (1980), including unfortunately "Reproduction, variation and evolution in plants", have disappeared in the latest 10-year Exhibition Scheme publicised only one year later in *Nature* by Southwood and Hedley (1981). In place of such topics as the origin of life, and more extensive treatment of ecology, we find a series of exhibitions on mammal and arthropod diversity, and one on British natural history which will cater for "the needs of committed naturalists to whom the Trustees acknowledge a responsibility". In an institution as large as the Natural History Museum there is, of course, room for a range of both thematic and systematic displays.

For visiting Curators, however, the question of space may be only one of a number of much more acute problems. The range of display techniques, graphic design and model-making in the BM (NH) must be the envy of most similar museums in the world. Resources of other institutions simply cannot compare with the finance and staff available to the British Museum whose Display Department alone comprises nearly 70 full-time people including numerous scientists and designers, five model-makers and three taxidermists, as well as having access to scientific and computer expertise in other Departments of the Museum. Certainly no New Zealand museum can possibly emulate an exhibition produced with that degree of support. The best that can be hoped for is that the techniques and principles can be adapted and applied to museum display being carried out in a very different financial climate.

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Video in Art Galleries and Museums: No 2

Mike Sukolski

INTRODUCTION

Our expectations of video, of what we could, even should, be doing with it, have been very much defined by our experience of the only kind of video with which we are sufficiently familiar: *commercial television.*

Only recently has it been possible to recognise the arbitrariness of our conception of the potential of video. The development of small-format (eg, VHS) video technology has, at last, placed commercial television in its proper context: as just *one of a range of options* — simply one way of making one kind of videotape, and one way of getting it seen.

It is easy to confuse small-format video with commercial television; to see in one only a pale reflection of the other. The pervasiveness of commercial television, its seductiveness, apparent inevitability, its determined domination of our thinking (about itself as well as about the things of which it speaks), have all led us to believe that small-format video is simply an inferior kind of commercial television: a mere plaything, though sometimes a useful one, only for those who can afford it. We believe that only those persons with certain unspecified skills, beyond the reach of most of us, can do anything really worthwhile with it; that many such persons are necessary to even the simplest project; that the cost of doing anything at all is unjustifiably high; and, worse, the initial technology investment is unthinkable!

None of this is so.

Nor has it ever been so for anything but commercial television — and here too things may well change.

Our intention in this and the next paper is to dispel this mythology of the dominion of open-broadcast television. In this paper we shall focus upon the local community art gallery and museum. We will attempt to specify, though by no means conclusively, the contribution that a *minimal video unit* would make to their already established programmes: how it could enhance, extend and increase the effectiveness of those programmes.

A minimal video unit is one which consists of the barest necessities (basically one camera, one recorder, one receiver); and which can be efficiently operated by one person — without unduly disrupting the primary functions of the art gallery or museum.

In the next paper we shall discuss the *practical* question: how? For the

moment however it can be assumed that every kind of project suggested here can be accomplished by one person with such a minimal unit.

For the purpose of exploring the potential application of video-technology we shall distinguish between its two most common, and simplest, functions: *recording* and *playback*. What kinds of things could the art gallery or museum make recordings of? What kinds of ready-made videotapes (for which the art gallery or museum is itself responsible, or which have been obtained elsewhere) could be profitably played back?

1. THE ART GALLERY

A) RECORDING

The Art Gallery could make recordings of

i) performance works given at the gallery (for documentation and for possible future exhibition);
ii) art making in process
iii) discussions and interviews with artists currently exhibiting (where appropriate);
iv) discussions and interviews with *local* artists, as well as recordings during their works in process (the gallery could develop an archive/resource centre on local art and artists);
v) of introductions to, descriptions or explanations of works currently showing — or forthcoming;
vi) *simple programmes* which introduce and promote the gallery, its collection, its function, its activities; or
vii) promote an understanding of particular aspects of Art; or
viii) discuss the work of local artists; or
ix) relate the gallery to the community which it serves; or
x) present to the community the needs of both local artists and of the gallery itself.

Further, local artists could be given the opportunity to explore the medium of video, and to develop simple video works.

The role of the gallery in community education could also be considered.

Schoolchildren, for example, could be encouraged to make imaginative videotapes — working with local artists or with gallery staff. Other groups, for example the unemployed, could be invited to make videotapes. Many and varied perspectives upon the one community could be presented back to that community. Such projects could well lead to worthwhile exhibitions. They would certainly prove useful in the various already established community education programmes, for which such material is scarce and often difficult to obtain.

B) PLAYBACK

The art gallery could playback

i) artists video-works;
ii) videotapes which place currently exhibited works in their stlistic, historic or cultural context;
iii) videotapes which introduce, describe or explain currently exhibited works;
iv) interviews or discussions with currently exhibiting artists;
v) videotapes which introduce and promote the gallery; or
vi) encourage more persons to take a greater interest in the arts, and in their gallery; or
vii) discuss the work of local artists; or
viii) discuss the importance of the arts to the community, and of active and actively supported local artists; or
ix) videotapes which publicise the gallery itself; or
x) which publicise special projects or exhibitons.

Playback can be easily undertaken both in the gallery itself and elsewhere. Thus the gallery can effectively, and directly, reach into the community — performing a valuable educational function.

Videotapes can be shown:

i) in schools (to assist teachers in developing, amongst their pupils, an understanding of the arts);
ii) during public lectures;
iii) when funds are being sought;
iv) in public places (for example, shop windows): this would effectively reach those persons who could not otherwise be attracted, and could generate an unexpected interest in the gallery.

Videotapes which the gallery itself has prepared could be made available to schools and to other educational organisations. Such tapes could, for example, prepare school children for forthcoming visits to the gallery; thus enabling them to gain more from those visits. Most secondary schools and more and more primary schools can now undertake video playback.

Videotapes could also, by negotiation, be made available through the local library. Owners of home video recorders could then be exposed to material with an artistic, cultural and local interest — and not solely, as now, to B-Grade movies from America, with no local relevance; and cheap porn, with even less!

Video can be effectively utilised by the Art Gallery to supplement current exhibitions, to encourage a greater interest in and deeper understanding of the arts and their importance to the community, and to initiate and sustain a working dialogue between the gallery, local artists and all sections of the community.

2. THE MUSEUM

While it has been necessary, for the sake of simplicity, to treat separately the art gallery and the museum, much of what has already been suggested applies equally to both institutions. In many cases the word 'museum' can appropriately be substituted for 'gallery'.

In addition to what has already been said further possibilities can be suggested.

A) RECORDING

The museum could make recordings of:

i) *simple programmes* which explore the relevant aspects of local history; thus providing the necessary background, context and basic knowledge for a proper understanding of the exhibits;
ii) simple programmes which introduce, describe and explain the history, making, function, or social or religious significance of particular artefacts;
iii) simple programmes which "re-create" the social conditions, cultural milieu and physical environment from which particular artefacts have been abstracted;
iv) simple programmes which discuss the importance of knowing and of preserving our history; and of asserting our cultural identity;
v) simple programmes which show how everyday taken-for-granted objects can become important indicators of the society in which they function;
vi) simple programmes which show how particular artefacts work, or the way in which they were used.

The Museum can develop an archive/resource centre of local history

B) PLAYBACK

The recording programme of the museum will necessarily concern itself with *local* history, and with issues which can be discussed, or demonstrated, by reference to what material is available *locally*.

An increasing range of more general interest videotapes are available, from various sources.

Videotapes can be played back both in the museum and, again, beyond it in the community. The educational

potential of video is considerable: particularly in promoting an interest in, an awareness of and a concern for our environment, our history and our culture.

A Wealth of Opinion; Some Points Raised by the Re-cataloguing of a 16th Century French Illumination.

Peter Entwisle,
Assistant Director,
Dunedin Public Art Gallery

In April of this year Dr C. de Hamel of Sotheby's, while visiting relations in Dunedin,called at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery and asked to see the Gallery's medieval works. Among these was one, 16-1951 which at that time was described as 'School of Avignon' and attributed to the 15th century. Dr de Hamel gave the opinion that it was French, probably provincial and dated it about 1550.

The work was framed and at the back of the frame all that could be seen was a wooden panel which was covered with a number of inscriptions, bore three collector's seals and was partly obscured by an old letter to a previous owner. Dr de Hamel said he thought the painting was probably not a fragment of an illuminated manuscript but a painted panel.

When the Gallery had been given the work in 1951 it had been told that it was a fragment of a manuscript. Since Dr de Hamel's other information necessitated re-examining the work anyway, the Gallery staff began a systematic re-cataloguing of it in an attempt to find out what 16-1951 really is. This involved removing it from its frame, noting its various associated inscriptions and seals, removing the letter from the back of the panel and photographing the work and these associated items.

It was discovered that the work was quite separate from its panel, a fragment of a manuscript as it had originally been described. With the removal of the obscuring letter it became possible for the first time to read the inscriptions on the panel in full. As a result it was possible to build up an account of how the work, passing through several hands over the centuries, had been attributed to a number of different painters, nations and periods.

The result was a very lengthy new catalogue entry detailing all this information and ultimately paring the wealth of misinformed opinion down to what can be taken as reasonably firm. Characteristically the story is still not complete. Now the photographs must be sent away in order that more information (the identity of the seals would be useful to know) can be gathered.

The whole story of this recataloguing of one item well illustrates the typical difficulties of a New Zealand gallery dealing with an old and foreign work of uncertain provenance. With limited staffs and reference material the task is harder than it would be in Europe or America. But because such works are comparatively rare in New Zealand collections they assume a correspondingly greater importance which means the host institution has a responsibility to see them documented as thoroughly as possible. 16-1951 although far from being at the apex of European aesthetic achievement in the Middle Ages has this kind of importance.

And the work is important in another way too: it was the first item donated to the Gallery by the late Archdeacon Smythe who subsequently gave the Gallery a collection of some 1,100 British watercolours. He also gave the National Art Gallery (Wellington) a smaller group of about 300 British watercolours and these two collections constitute the bulk of British watercolours held by public galleries in New Zealand today. Our own landscape watercolour tradition grows directly from the British and so these collections are of some importance to us. Nevertheless while the collections undoubtably contain many good things the Dunedin group anyway has proved to be full of incorrect attributions which have only partly been set to rights. The recataloguing of 16-1951, revealing as it does something of the way in which Archdeacon Smythe's mind worked when approaching an interesting item of uncertain origin is useful perhaps in understanding his approach to other items in his collections. The catalogue card (which is reproduced in full below) not only describes the work 16-1951 but also gives an account of how the various claims about it have been sorted and weighed.

ARTIST UNKNOWN
16th century
French (Provincial)

THE PIETÀ c.1550 a fragment from an illuminated manuscript (shows the dead Christ at the foot of the cross surrounded by grieving saints and the Virgin Mary).

Inscribed: by Artist in panel on top of the cross: INRI *in lower left corner in gold:*
1. *In lower margin in ink in a much later hand:* Ce morceau de peinture paroit avoir eté fair avant l'invention de la peinture a l'huile. ("This piece of painting appears to have been made before the invention of painting in oil"); *below lower margin at left* (in artist's hand in paint): A fragment being the upper part of a capital letter, perhaps 'C', 'O' or 'Q'.
Egg tempera on parchment 19.6 x 23.3 cm. 16-1951

Donor: Archdeacon F. H. D. Smythe.

Prov: Archdeacon Smythe had owned the work at least since 19/2/26. At some time previously it appears to have been in the collection of one

Monsieur St André (See Notes 2 and 3 below).

NOTE:

(1) This is one of the three works whose presentation to the Gallery by Archdeacon Smythe constituted the beginning of the donation of the Smythe Collection. An account is given in Note 1 of 14-1951 and in the History of the Gallery.

(2) This work was previously (prior to May 1982) mounted on a board which bears on its reverse side various inscriptions and seals and had affixed to it a letter to Archdeacon Smythe concerning the work. The details of these are as follows:-

A. Inscriptions

(a) *in ink across top:* Ce morceau de peinture paroit avoir eté fair avant l'invention de la peinture a chuile. (This has been copied from the same inscription on the face of the work which was hidden when it was mounted on this board and framed);

(b) *below (a) in pencil* (Archdeacon Smythe's hand?): Dr Maynard says . . .

(c) *below (b) in ink* (apparently on top of pencil and thus to be read as a continuation of (b): signed with L is it Luca Signorelli;

(d) *right of (c) and part of same inscription, (ink on pencil):* School of Avignon.

(e) *Middle of panel in ink* (this inscription was previously (until May 1982) covered in part by a letter which had been pasted over it: Berna Sanese — Pinxt No. 597 Lancakes Cat. — Berna Born at *Sienna* (sic) in *1300* Died there *aged 50.* This picture, independently on the execution which marks the manner of that early period has the *curiosity* of being painted *BEFORE* the discovery of mixing colour with oil .. From the cabinet of *St. André.*

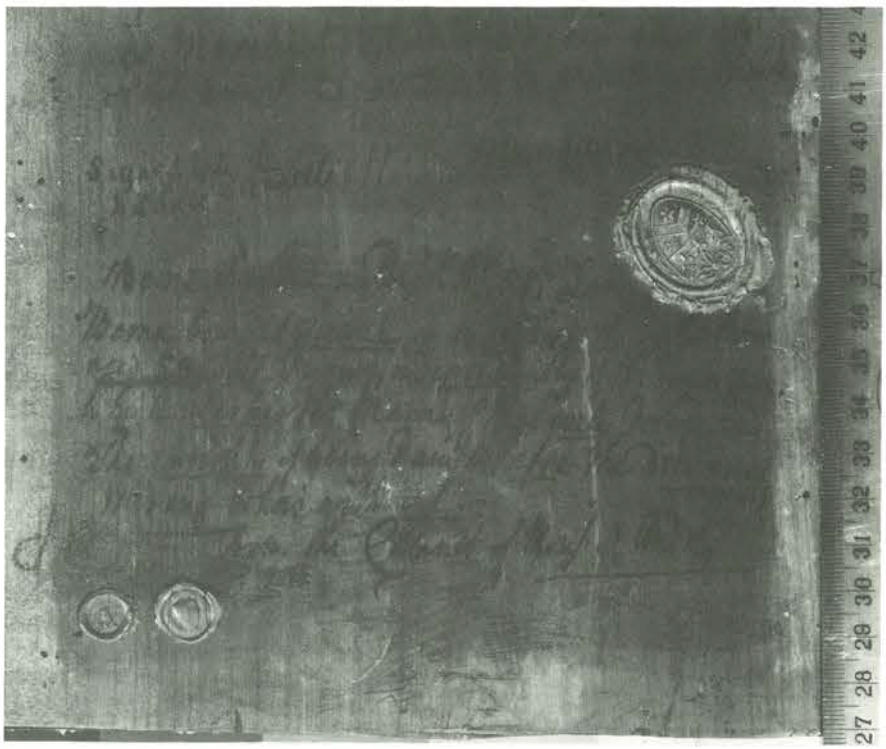
(f) *lower left* (in pencil upside down): TOP

B. Seals

(a) *UPPER RIGHT: IN SEALING WAX: Unidentified collector's seal bearing shield with coat of arms in oval cartouche. 3.5 x 2.5 cm.*

(b) *lower left: in sealing wax:* unidentified collector's seal bearing a tower with flag in circular cartouche 1 cm diameter.

(c) *lower left: in sealing wax:* unidentified collector's seal bearing a shield inside a circular inscribed blazon. Inscription reads: MACR AL SICRES . . . (the rest obliterated) 1.3 cm diameter.



A. Inscriptions

C. Letter:

(Removed from board in May 1982 by D.P.A.G.S. Conservation Unit). On headed notepaper. Headings reads: 37, First Avenue, Hove Sussex.

Text as follows:

Dear My Smythe,

I took the little picture up to London today + Maynard and I examined it very carefully. It seemed to us to be quite genuine and I fancy may be Tembrian but Maynard suggested School of Avignon: he discovered part of an initial letter at the bottom on the left which goes to prove it has been cut out of a missal or choirbook. The attribution to a Sienese painter which seems to be Barna or Berna or Siena is of course impossible. It would be well worth your while to take it to the B. Museum — I dare say they could tell you something definite. I believe they know more than the people at the Victoria + Albert.

I fancy that missals were always painted in some form of water colour or tempera and never in oil which may have caused that mistake in the attribution to Berna of Siena. I have never studied miniatures so ought not to be to (sic) positive about the picture but Maynard and I both like it and he is a really good judge.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely,

W. B. CHAMBERLAIN.

(3) The work has recently (21/4/82) been inspected in Dunedin by Dr C. de Hamel of Sotheby's who saw it framed and still mounted on its backing board. He noted:

"*The Pietà*

French Provincial c.1550. I doubt that it is from a manuscript: it may be a panel of a portable altar or something like that."

(4) The present attribution of this work depends upon a reconstruction — so far as that is possible — of its provenance in order to establish the order of the various claims that have been made about it (and each other): and on a subsequent scrutiny of those claims to decide what weight may be given to any of them.

The work has in fact been cut from a manuscript and is not a panel from a portable altar as D de Hamel thought. This was not apparent when he inspected it because it was still framed with the frame obscuring the fragment of a lower initial and it was behind glass and securely glued to a wooden panel which was only subsequently revealed when the glass and the panel were removed.

The hand written French inscription attributing the work to a time before the invention of oil painting was presumably put on the lower margin before the work

B. Seals

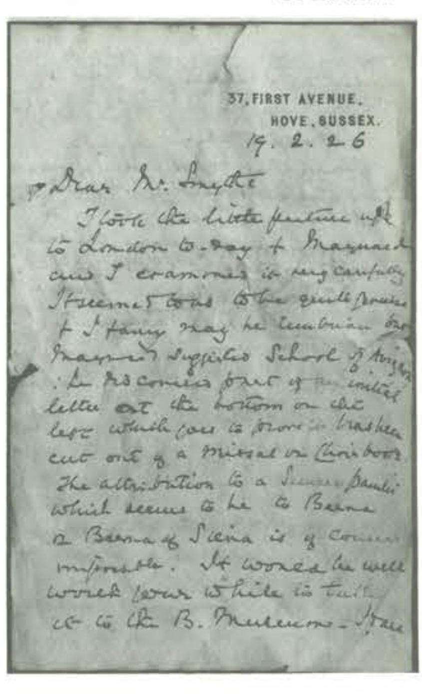
was mounted and framed. This is because the frame obscures the French inscription and it has been rewritten verbatim on the back of the panel. That the attribution to so early a date is mistaken might be deduced from stylistic considerations and Chamberlain (the writer of the attached letter) is probably right in thinking that the author of the inscription failed to realise that water-colour and tempera painting continued on manuscripts long after the invention of oil painting.

Once framed and mounted the work may then have entered a private collection (if it was not already in one). At this point some or all of the seals may have been affixed, perhaps as the work passed from one collection to another. It may be that one of these collections was the 'Cabinet of Mons. St André' referred to by the writer of the long English inscription (2 A(e)) and another might be 'Lancakes' whose catalogue the same writer refers to. It is not entirely clear whether the writer of 2.A(e) is suggesting that this work was once No. 597 in Lancakes catalogue or whether he means that the painter Berna Sanese is assigned that number in that work. The inscription 2.(A)(e) has been carefully written around the top right hand seal and so clearly post dates it. Equally its neat fit above the other two seals may be evidence that it is later than them too.

The writer of 2.A(e) ascribed the work to Berna Sanese whose birth he puts in Siena in 1300. Again this is unsupportable on stylistic grounds and the writer has clearly taken as his clue the erroneous French inscription attributing the work to a time before the invention of oil painting. The idiom, the spelling and the hand in which 2.A(e) is written all suggest the eighteenth century as the time of its writing.

When Smythe acquired the work cannot now be discovered but that he had it on the 19/2/1926 is proved by the letter from Chamberlain. Perhaps at that time he had not long acquired it. Chamberlain and his collaborator, Dr Maynard seem to have arrived at mostly sensible conclusions. They must have had it out of its frame because they noted the fragment of a capital in the lower left hand corner which led them to

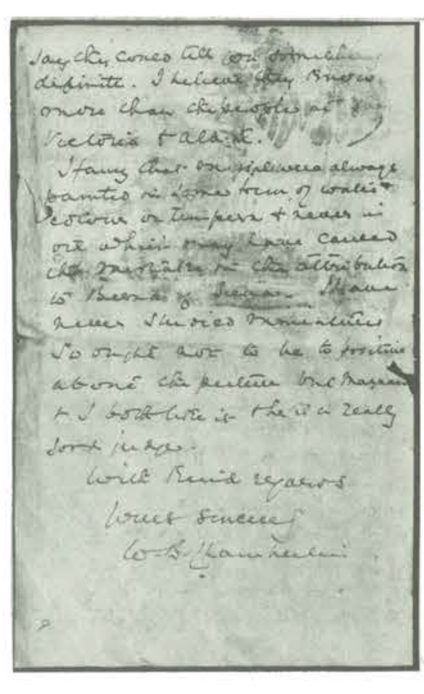
C. Letter:



37, FIRST AVENUE.
HOVE, SUSSEX.
19. 2. 26

Dear Mr. Smythe

I took the little picture up to London to-day & Maynard and I examined it very carefully. It seemed to us to be quite [illegible] & I fancy may be Umbrian [illegible] Maynard suggested School of [illegible]. The red comes part of an initial letter at the bottom on the left which goes to prove it has been cut out of a Missal or Choir book. The attribution to a Sienese painter which seems to be to Berna or Berna of Siena is of course impossible. It would be well worth your while to take it to the B. Museum - they'd



say they could tell you something definite. I believe they know more than the people at the Victoria & Albert.

I fancy that [illegible] were always painted in some form of water colour or tempera & [illegible] one which may have caused the mistake in the attribution to Berna of Siena. I have never studied miniatures so ought not to be too positive about the picture but Maynard & I both like it & he is a really good judge.

With kind regards
Yours sincerely
W. B. Chamberlain

think, probably correctly, that it had been cut out of a missal or a choirbook. They rightly dismissed the Sienese conjecture as a mistake. Maynard's suggestion of School of Avignon agrees with de Hamel's description as 'French Provincial'. It seems to be these thoughts that have led to the inscriptions 2.A(b), 2.A(c) and 2.A(d). But here again confusion arises.

The inscriptions have been written originally in pencil and then (c) and (d) were inked over at a later date by another hand. The inscriptions appear to report Dr Maynard's opinion but in fact go rather further than the information contained in the letter. This writer thinks that the first writer of the inscriptions and the originator of the new ideas it contains was Archdeacon Smythe. Together the inscriptions at first glance appear to read: "Dr Maynard says: Signed with L is it Luca Signorelli School of Avignon . . ." However in the context they make more sense taken in another order ((a) and (c) with (b) as a quite distinct rider). This renders: "Dr Maynard says School of Avignon. Signed with L is it Luca Signorelli."

A close inspection of the work reveals in the bottom left hand corner of the image, inside the margin, not an 'L' but a vertical stroke thus: '/' in gold possibly followed by a dot and, if the imagination is willing the eye will attach to it a vestigal loop at the top of the stroke which would turn it into a 'P'. This writer thinks the vertical stroke may be intentional (though its significance can only be guessed at) and is inclined to think that the notion of 'L' arises out of an unrelated background stroke coupled to it by a fertile imagination seeking confirmation of a preconceived attribution.

As all who have studied Archdeacon Smythe's attributions will agree, when he was in doubt the hopeful collector tended to get the better of the disinterested judge. Luca Signorelli (1441(?)-1523) was a famous Italian history painter of the 15th and 16th centuries. (He was Vasari's grandfather and a student of Piero Della Francesca). It seems that Archdeacon Smythe reading the inscriptions 2.A(a) and 2.A(e) with their mistaken attribution to a very early period before the invention of oil painting and thus to a Sienese Italian of the 14th century and unable or unwilling to believe that his work was French, of a later century and anonymous, dutifully recorded Dr Maynard's opinion but nevertheless looked for Luca's mark and found it — as he thought — at the bottom left corner. He then recorded this 'discovery' — almost wistfully perhaps — alongside Maynard's attribution to the School of Avignon.

By 1951 Smythe was offering the work for sale at Christie's where Mrs Pearse came across it during her buying trip for the D.P.A.G. She asked Christie's man (and the Gallery's agent) Sir Alex Martyn about it and he told her the work was for sale but only to a British gallery. Mrs Pearse then wrote to Archdeacon Smythe — thus making his acquaintance for the first time — and he donated the work to the Gallery and sent two other medieval illuminations (14-1951 and 15-1951) in addition. These were the first gifts in a long series that are collectively known as the Smythe Collection.

For her part Mrs Pearse didn't put too much weight on Smythe's attribution to Signorelli preferring Maynard's assessment as 'School of Avignon early 15th century'. The work remained so ascribed — and described as a fragment of a manuscript until Dr de Hamel's visit in 1982. One of the leading authorities in the field, Dr de Hamel's attribution as 'French Provincial c.1550' cannot be doubted (and is anyway close enough to Maynard's claim to confirm his broad assessment) but his suggestion that it is not a manuscript but a panel is demonstrably mistaken. It was that suggestion that led the Gallery to investigate the work with the present result. Further information waits upon the identification of the collector's seals and Dr de Hamel's comments on the whole image, complete with the fragmentary inital at bottom left, a photo of which will be sent to him, now that it has been revealed.

NB.: The Dunedin Public Art Gallery has only a very few items that could stylistically be termed medieval. Those who are interested in making a closer study of medieval painting are recommended to consult the Grey Collection in the Auckland Public Library and the Reed Collection in the Dunedin Public Library as the two most substantial collections of medieval literature in New Zealand.

The Return of Cultural Property

Geoffrey Lewis

Mr Geoffrey Lewis is Director of the Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. He has recently been in New Zealand, with the assistance of the British Council and AGMANZ to chair a three day seminar on Museum Documentation. This visit was preceded by the ICOM International Seminar on the same subject held in Sydney where Geoffrey Lewis gave the keynote address.

The following article, The Return of Cultural Property, is the address Mr Lewis gave to the public while he was in Wellington.

Before turning specifically to the question of the return of cultural property to its countries of origin or its restitution in case of illicit appropriation it will be worth spending a minute or two on this phenomenon called cultural property.

It seems that from earliest times mankind has come to respect and indeed treasure certain tangible evidence that remains of their past, their development, their traditions, their artistic and scientific achievements and generally the environment of which they are a part. This, together with their propensity to collect has been responsible for the accumulation and preservation of what the international community normally calls cultural property. The significance of this is surely the fact that this material has the ability to communicate, either directly or by associaton, some aspect of reality which transcends time or space. It is, of course, from this that the idea of the museum emerged.

This is not to say that all private collections which eventually found their way into museums were formed for this purpose. As Wittlin (1970) has pointed out private collections can be accumulated for a variety of reasons: personal prestige; group loyalty; religious, scholarly or even for economic purposes.

Notwithstanding this, the formal use of historical material to communicate information takes us back to the beginning of the second millenium BC when the Mesopotamian schools in Larsa were certainly using copies of earlier inscriptions for teaching. In Minoan Greece there is evidence of the preservation of art objects but the credit for the first museum must go to the daughter of Nabonidus the last of the Babylonian Kings. Evidence from Sir Leonard Woolley's excavations at Ur of the Chaldees, show that she kept a series of antiquities, apparently

labelled, in the room adjacent to her boys' school. This teaching collection was far nearer to the museum that we know today than to the learned institutions and places of contemplation of classical times from which the word museum originated.

The idea of the public museum, of course came much later, through the opening of private collections to visitors and eventually the establishment of some of the great institutions that we know today: the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, opened in 1683; the British Museum in 1759 and the Louvre in 1793 although its initial opening was short-lived. The public museum movement in Britain did not gain impetus however until the mid-nineteenth century; this was also the time when your mechanics Institutes with their collections were providing a museum-type service and, which, of course, saw the founding of your first truly public museums, your National Museum here in Wellington being amongst them.

With the development of public museums, so it would be reasonable to expect developing attitudes towards cultural property. This is indeed the case and the special nature of cultural property received increasing attention in the ensuing century. But there have been particularly important developments in the world attitude towards cultural property over the last thirty years. Perhaps understandably, the earliest manifestations of these concerned the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict. But this concern soon spread to peace time activities. Major construction works were having a considerable impact on heritage sites and the denudation of cultural property in certain countries to feed an increasingly lucrative world art market were important contributory factors. In addition a growing conservation awareness, the need to control legitimate scientific collecting expeditions and, more recently the considerable development of tourist interest in cultural affairs have all kindled additional interest and action in these matters. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been particularly active in this field.

UNESCO was created in 1946 as one of the international agencies of the United Nations organisation. Included amongst its terms of reference was a reqirement to ensure 'the preservation and protection of the world heritage of works of art and monuments of historic and scientific interest'. Coincidentally with this increasing concern about our heritage came the establishment of many of the old colonies as independent states which took up membership with the UN and its agency UNESCO in the 1960s. Thus at an international level the changing world order was to have a marked impact on the things which concern curators. Over the last quarter of a century UNESCO has issued no less than seven conventions or recommendations concerned with cultural property. Many of these have been based on the notion that cultural property is a part of the heritage of mankind at large and therefore to be protected at all times. But from this has arisen a greater realisation of the significance of cultural property to a nation and so the doctrine that cultural identity and cultural unity can be promoted through this material evidence of mankind.

In addition cultural property has been deemed to have an important contribution to make in achieving a better understanding between peoples in the cause of lasting peace. This can be exemplified well in the Helsinki Final Act (HMSO, 1975) which concluded the deliberations of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Its many recommendations included references to improving facilities for the exchange and dissemination of cultural property and for implementing joint projects concerned with the conservation, restoration and display of works of are etc.

When it comes to the issue of the return of cultural property, I am conscious that from a European standpoint the Antipodes are already well advanced along this road. Indeed, New Zealand initiated the return of cultural property to the National Museum in Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, while some twenty years ago a number of New Zealand museums were involved in the transfer of material to the Cook Islands Museum. Clearly then, I am hardly breaking new ground with you. My approach therefore will be to give the topic some historical perspective, interwoven with a continuing commentary on the changing attitudes to cultural property.

There is a long history of the restitution of cultural property to its rightful owners. This has resulted particularly through Treaties following armed conflict where cultural property has been included in the spoils of war. Certainly the largest recorded case of restitution in history followed the Congress of Vienna in 1815 which ruled that the treasures plundered from European churches and collections by Napoleon should be returned to the nations concerned. The significance of cultural property has been recognized for a long time and when deprivation through conflict takes place it commands considerable political attention. UNESCO's first major cultural legislation dealt with this issue, the *Convention for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict,* approved at The Hague in 1954. The intention here, of course, is to prevent the pillage of cultural property and ensure its safety because, as the Convention states:

> 'damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world.'

The 1960's saw a marked rise in plundering of a different sort. Many of the now emerging nations were subjected to a systematic denudation of their cultural heritage by agents acting for dealers operating on the increasingly lucrative world art market. It was time for UNESCO to act again and it did so with a recommendation on the illicit import and export of cultural property in 1964.

It is interesting here to note a changing attitude to cultural property for the preamble of this resolution ran:

> 'cultural property constitutes a basic element of civilization and *national culture* and that familiarity with it leads to understanding and mutual appreciation between nations.'

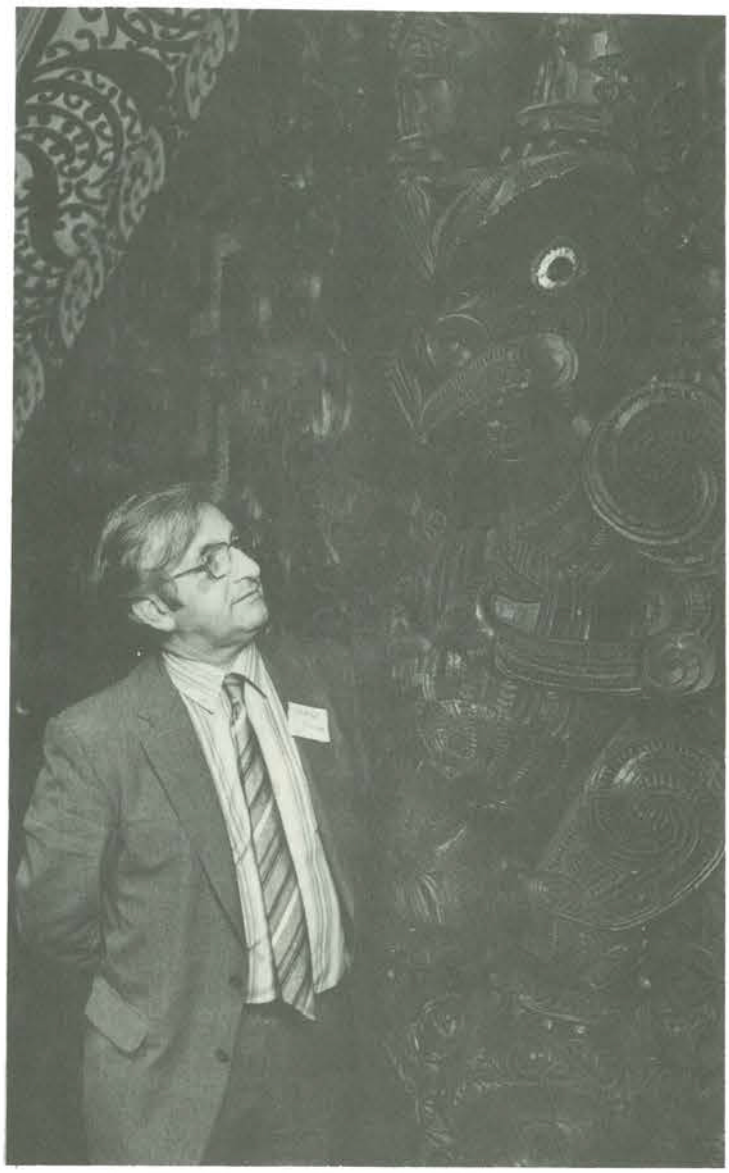
Not surprisingly as looting of this nature continued, UNESCO found it necessary to strengthen its attitude towards this illicit trafficking and in 1970 approved its *Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property.* This encouraged member states to ratify the convention and so adopt it within their own national legislation. About forty nations have done so. Most of these are 'third world' countries but Canada did so in 1977 and a recent report by Ian Clark (1982) gives details of this. The USA, however, has not ratified it, nor any of the major ex-colonial powers although rumour has it that France may do so shortly. Britain has not ratified the convention although it voted in favour of adoption at the UNESCO General Conference and is said to be in favour of the principles underlying it. New Zealand has not rectified it either. If both nations had done so the events currently taking place in the United Kingdom to recover the magnificent TARANAKI panels would have taken a very different course. This UNESCO Convention requires all participating countries to collaborate with each other in securing the return of illicitly

exported cultural property. As far as Britain is concerned there are arguably technical difficulties of implementation associated particularly with the identification and control of illicitly imported material in a nation with a large art market. Professionally, however, it brings us into disrepute because by not ratifying it we appear to be condoning illicit trafficking. It was for this reason that the Museums Association in the UK, the British Museum, the then Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries and the British Academy issued a statement in 1972 to the effect that it would continue to be the practice of museums and galleries in the UK that they will not knowingly acquire cultural material which they have reason to believe has been exported illegally from its country of origin; this statement forms part of the Museums Association's code of practice for museum authorities. It should be noted in passing that the *European Convention on the protection of the archaeological heritage* has been adopted by the British Government. This Council of Europe convention is concerned mainly with preventing the illicit acquisition of material from clandestine or official excavations.

None of this legislation, however, is retroactive. In other words it could not be invoked for dubiously acquired material before it came into force or, for that matter, material, the legal acquisition of which has not been documented. UNESCO's concern for cultural matters is reflected in further legislation during the 1970's. This includes a *Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage,* which also created the World Heritage Fund, and a *Recommendation concerning the protection, at national level, of cultural and national heritage,* both passed in 1972. Four years later a *Recommendation concerning the international exchange of cultural property* was approved which was aimed particularly at institutions holding duplicate material and encouraging them to exchange them with other less favoured museums. This, the recommendation states:

> 'would not only be enriching to all parties but would also lead to a better use of the international community's cultural heritage which is the sum of all national heritages.'

The notion that cultural property forms part of the common heritage of mankind appears again in the *Recommendation for the protection of movable cultural property,* 1978 which urges that every State has a moral responsibility to the international community as a whole for its safekeeping. This recommendation, *inter alia*, stresses the responsibilities of State in providing adequate museum provision to achieve this.



Mr Geoffrey Lewis examines part of New Zealand's cultural heritage, the carvings in the meeting house in The National Museum.

It was during the last decade that the United Nations and then UNESCO on its behalf began to consider the idea of returning cultural property to its country of origin. The early discussions centred much on the losses which had been sustained by nations previously under colonial rule and there was much talk and emotion about the need for the restitution of this material. It will be appreciated, of course, that the idea of the restitution of material looted during armed conflict can be sustained on a sound legal base whether considered in terms of simple honesty or the special nature of cultural property. Much of the material now in European museums from previous colonies, however, was perfectly legally and legitimately acquired and the calls for its restitution immediately implied that the opposite was the case. This early fervour, however, which also expressed itself in terms of all material being returned to its country of origin has now abated and it is usual now for the subject to be referred to as the return of cultural property to its country of origin. UNESCO has not therefore approached the matter through conventions and recommendations which member states would be invited to adopt within their own legal systems. Rather it is appealing to their moral responsibilities in the matter and has launched a campaign in order to influence the climate of world opinion to this end. This is being done mainly from the viewpoint that the new nations have been deprived of a means of establishing their cultural identity or in the words of Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the Director-General of UNESCO, who launched the first appeal in June 1978,

'the return of a work of art or record to the country which created it enables a people to recover part of its memory and identity.'

Later in the year of the Director-General's appeal, UNESCO approved the creation of an intergovernmental committee whose duty it would be to continue to promote the idea and to seek ways and means whereby material might be returned to its country of origin. To date it has met twice but has yet to be instrumental in effecting the return of material nor indeed has it considered any formal requests for this. This situation is unlikely to remain for much longer. The Committee has, however, spent considerable time in attempting to clarify some of the issues involved and these are well worthy of some consideration here.

We should commence with the notion of 'cultural property' in this context. Throughout its life UNESCO has used the term to mean the movable and immovable property relating to the cultural heritage and includes artistic, historical, archaeological and scientific material. While the intergovernmental committee is obviously only concerned with the movable cultural heritage, it is necessary to stress that its terms of reference does include all categories of material including ethnographic objects and documents as well as palaeontological, zoological, botanical and mineralogical specimens. Within this broad category of material, the Committee originally had a particular remit for material 'which has a fundamental significance from the point of view of the spiritual values and cultural heritage of a people' but because of difficulties of interpretation this has now been changed to 'property which was particularly representative of the cultural identity of a given nation.' It will be noted here that the Committee is concerned with 'particularly representative' material. UNESCO (1982) does not intend to empty museums of their collections. Notwithstanding this, the revised definition is also likely to present difficulties.

Then there is the use of the term 'country of origin' which the Committee has defined as 'the country with the traditional culture to which the object was related'. This too is likely to be found wanting. Consider the case of an artefact. Is its country of origin likely to be where it was made, the nationality of its maker, the last country to hold the object before its removal or, in the case of an archaeological item, the site of its discovery? Having regard to changing national boundaries during the course of history just what criteria are to be used in defining 'country of origin': take the case of Bangladesh which over the last forty years has been first part of India, then of Pakistan and now, of course, is an independent state. This is something that those of us living in an island country - whether large or small — do not fully appreciate. It does, however, begin to bring home the real meaning of the universal heritage of mankind.

Another matter, which has been discussed for some years, but has been of particular concern to the Committee has been the lack of information about the material held in the world's museums and for that matter the lack of material held by certain nations. Without such information it was difficult for requesting nations to justify their submissions and for the Committee to encourage holding nations to return cultural property. An inventory of the world's cultural heritage would, of course, be a mammoth, time-consuming and expensive exercise but the Committee has in mind the possibility of an international data bank which would at least hold information on material requested, returned or currently under negotiation.

Notwithstanding the scale of the problem of preparing inventories, a number of preliminary surveys have been undertaken in different countries, some through ICOM acting as an agent for UNESCO. Amongst the first were reviews of the national situation in Bangladesh, Mali and Western Samoa (ICOM, 1980 a, b, c). In Mali an experimental project involving the inventorying of cultural property held and in contemporary use in two selected regions of that country has been undertaken. Other countries have taken the initiative themselves. For example, Iraq and Sri Lanka have both produced lists of material from their countries held elsewhere. Ghana and Panama have reviewed the cultural property in their possession while the former has also undertaken a preliminary review of Ghanaian collections in the museums of the United Kingdom. ICOM has also been involved with UNESCO in a survey of the published sources of African cultural objects held outside that continent and an inventory of Pacific museums showing cultural property held by them from other islands in that area.

Indeed this region of the World has received considerable attention during the last few years. There is the recently published survey of Oceanic collections in the United Kingdom museums by Gathercole and Clarke (1979) on behalf of UNESCO. In addition there is the survey of Oceanic cultural property in New Zealand by M. Prendergrest which was supported by AGMANZ and the UNESCO National Commission here and a similar one in Australia by Bolton (1980) sponsored by the Australian National Commission for UNESCO. These will provide basic information about these collections to the countries concerned. From New Zealand also a world-wide survey of Maori material in museums has been made by David Simmons of the Auckland Museum.

Now most of these surveys are concerned with objects already in museums and it might reasonably be assumed therefore that the preservation of this material is assured. Further, if one accepts the notion that we are concerned with the heritage of all mankind and that there is a case, which UNESCO (1982, p.63) readily accepts, for at least certain museums to actively promote the world heritage through their collections and displays, then I believe the question should at least be asked as to whether more attention should be paid to private sector buildings. It is, of course, very much easier to approach a governmental or public institution to seek the return of an item. But if we have dual objectives, promoting the world heritage and seeking to reassemble dispersed heritages to foster cultural identity, then the two can conflict if material is available in the private sector to meet these requirements.

Although it is not a matter of active concern to UNESCO at present two fairly recent papers, by Sharon Williams (1978) and Peter Canon-Brookes (1979), have suggested that collections representative of the world heritage should be formed by an independent third party which would then be available for circulation to public museums in different parts of the world. Williams has suggested that such a collection should be owned by the international community itself, an interesting concept which implies a new sort of property but not out of keeping with the nature of the material itself. But I have digressed slightly from the issue of the return of cultural property to its country of origin.

Besides some of the problems facing the Intergovernmental Committee there are of course a number of professional issues with which the curator will be confronted if the return of an item is sought from his museum. The curator, by the very nature of his training and work will inevitably give primacy to the continued preservation and security of the object, its accessibility for cultural and scientific purposes and its complete legal protection. Many items removed from their country of origin in fact owe their continued preservation to their removal; I do not need to say here that the effect of certain climatic

conditions on different materials can be dramatic and, unless there is technical support and expertise to prevent this, the return of certain items will seriously be questioned. Salah Stétié (1982), Chairman of the Intergovernmental Committee, does not refute the argument that the preservation of such material has resulted from its removal but suggests that, where colonial powers were involved, if they had provided the facilities and qualified personnel in the country of origin, the material could have been preserved and studied in its own context to the benefit of the country concerned.

Another matter of particular concern to the scholar and curator will be the maintenance of the integrity of collections of material, the sum of which may greatly exceed that of its individual parts in scientific terms. This may be an assemblage of material drawn from a number of sources, may represent the work of an individual or group of individuals, or may be a group of objects from an archaeological context. The return of one or two items could well make a scientific collection meaningless. There is, incidentally, a legal precedent to prevent the dismemberment of complete collections in the peace treaty of Riga, 1921 (Rollet-Andriane, 1979) but here we are on different ground.

Then there is the question of public accessibility. The Curator of a public museum might reasonably expect that material acquired for public display, if returned, would continue to be accessible in this way and for study. But the request for the return of an item may well not be for display purposes; indeed some items that are openly exhibited in Western museums have a religious significance that would totally preclude this in their country of origin.

Legal difficulties are also likely to present problems to the Curator and his governing body. Cultural property is not normal property as we saw earlier and in a number of Western countries material given for the public benefit is considered to be held in trust if not inalienable. But as Dr Ekpo Eyo, the Director-General of the Nigerian Museums and Monuments Commission, said on BBC television recently, 'laws are made for man; not man for the Law'. Is this a situation where a moral and cultural right has a more legitimate claim as Salah Stétié (1982, p.7) suggested?

One way in which the Western museums can contribute to promoting cultural identity and for that matter, furthering mutual understanding, is through the international exchange of cultural property. Indeed UNESCO passed a resolution on this in 1976. This idea was taken a stage further with the creation of the Museum Exchange Programme (MUSEP) which operated for a short time under the aegis of ICOM. Created as the result of discussions between the then Chairman of the UK National Committee of ICOM and the late Arnold Maremont who before his death, generously funded its inauguraton, its usefulness has regrettably waned through lack of funding. MUSEP did, however, achieve some useful work during its short life and it is to be hoped that it will be revived. For example, important information was gathered about the willingness of museums to undertake exchange programmes: some ninety percent of the 158 museums responding to a questionnaire survey indicated their interest in participating. A number of exchanges took place under its aegis, including an exchange of exhibitions between the Horniman Museum in London and Nigeria, and the loan of material from India to the Bremen Museum in exchange for technical training. In this way, without the need to transfer ownership, cultural property has been made accessible to other audiences in different parts of the world. Exchanges of this type will remain an important element of co-operation between the world's museums.

An issue already much debated at the first session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee was whether a fund might be created to facilitate the return of cultural property. Although Nigeria has recently been buying material on the open market, for many countries this is not possible. An example from Bangladesh will indicate some of the problems. Some six years ago a unique sixteenth century illustrated manuscript appeared on the market in Britain and was offered by the dealer to the Dacca Museum at a reduced price. The price, however, represented the then total annual budget of the Museum for three years and clearly the Museum was unable to make the purchase. Rather nearer home, as Keith Thomson (1978) has pointed out, the New Zealand government's special grant for the purchase of Maori artefacts soon found itself stretched when a major collection comes on the market, like that of the British Collector Hooper, because of the high prices fetched by many of the items. The idea of a fund, however, was not just to assist with purchases — over which there were fears that its existence might inflate prices — but also to facilitate the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee's work in undertaking studies, providing technical assistance and possibly assisting in the return operations and generally promoting its work. To date no separate fund for this purpose has been created.

I think I have said enough to indicate that the issue of the return of cultural property to its country of origin is an extremely complex one. It is likely to be exercising the minds of governments, curators, lawyers and the general public for many years to come. In taking this action, however, UNESCO is seeking to establish in the new nations representative collections of their own cultural heritage, a heritage and identity which has often been a cohesive factor in their information. In a sense it is doing no more than developing a policy which it has held for many years: the fostering of national cultural identity through a nation's heritage and the promotion of a better understanding between peoples through that heritage. With these principles few of us could quarrel.

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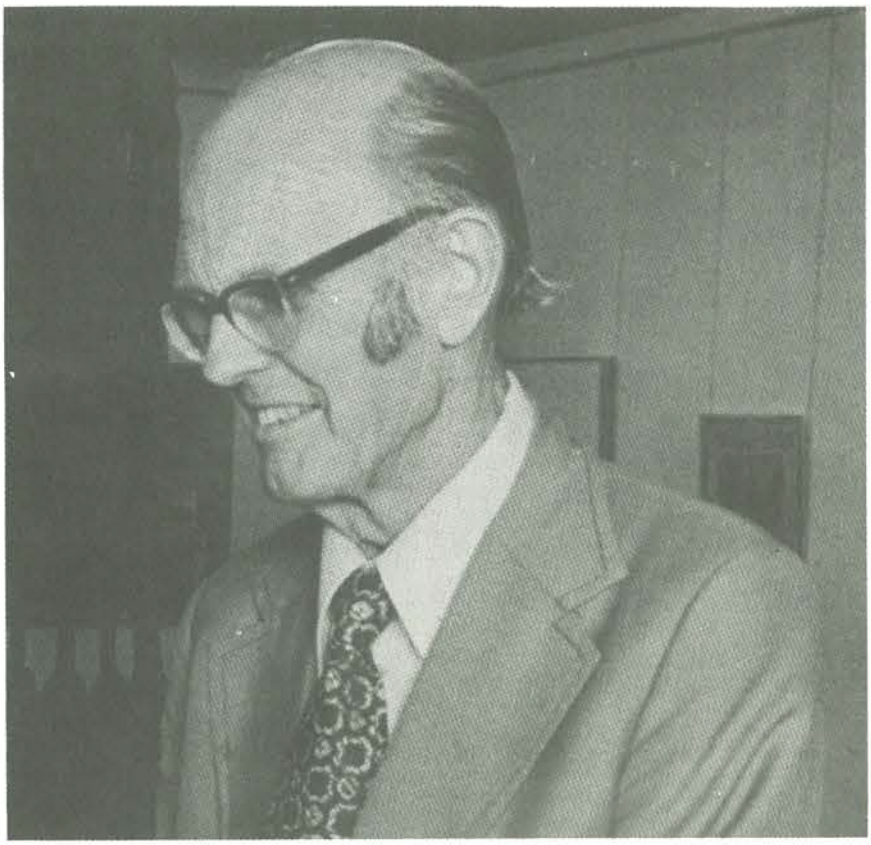


The late Ronald Norris O'Reilly.

Obituary
Ronald Norris O'Reilly (9-10-1914/10-7-82)

It is with great sadness that many of our members record the sudden death of Ron O'Reilly in Wellington on 10 July of this year.

Very much a late-comer in the straight museological sense, Ron O'Reilly's total absorption in the art museum field upon his retirement from the position of the New Zealand Library School in 1974, reflected his life-long involvement and interest in contemporary New Zealand and indigenous art.

Personally I remember with affection my initial encounters with Ron O'Reilly while completing my own thesis research on the work of Colin McCahon and Toss Woollaston in 1970-71. Given Ron's life-long interest in the work of those two artists, and in particular that of McCahon with his audacious exhibiting of that artist's work in the Lower Hutt Municipal Library during the late forties, it was inevitable that his recollections and the works in his own collection needed to be consulted by myself as a young and eager graduate. Many a convivial coffee-filled evening was passed in his smallish Grafton Road, Wellington home, among the vast collection of paintings, African sculpture, annotated manuscripts and photographs.

Following my own thesis efforts in 1971, Ron O'Reilly contributed his own knowledge to the authoritative introduction to the *Colin McCahon Survey Exhibition* catalogue (ACAG) in 1972. With these events and the subsequent publications and exhibitions of *M. T. Woollaston: Works 1933-73* and the *McCahon 'Religious' Works 1946-52* by the Manawatu Art Gallery and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's *McCahon's "Necessary Protection"* under Ron O'Reilly's directorship, an ongoing interrelationship was confirmed.

Few of the younger museum staff who became acquainted with Ron O'Reilly's contribution in the museum world during his brief but effective directorship of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery from 1975 to 1979 will have learned of the comprehensive career already encompassed by him prior to that directorship. For if any characteristic, apart from his at times frustrating meticulousness stood out, it was his humility, a humility which evidenced itself perhaps most markedly when he, as elder and mentor to me in my graduate days, asked me as a young novice director in 1974 whether he should apply for the directorship of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. I am convinced that this humility founded on a deep and broad knowledge provided the successful basis for his most recent work, alas interrupted by his sudden death, the exhibition *Maori Art in Transition.*

After obtaining his M.A. in philosophy at Otago University in 1941 Ron O'Reilly was part-time lecturer at the University from 1941-45.

In 1946 he obtained his New Zealand Library School Diploma and was soon installed as the organising librarian of the Country Library Service from 1947 to 1951 including 20 months secondment to the Lower Hutt Municipal Library where he staged a major McCahon painting exhibition. During 1948-49 he was seconded to the Health Department to reorganise its library. In 1950 he spent eight months assisting Professor Miriam Tompkins of Columbia University on a survey of public libraries in New Zealand and four months in 1950-51 surveying and reporting on library services in prisons for the Justice Department. From 1951 til 1968 he was the Christchurch City Librarian during which period he spent two academic years on secondment as Visiting Professor at the Institute of Librarianship, University of Ibadan in

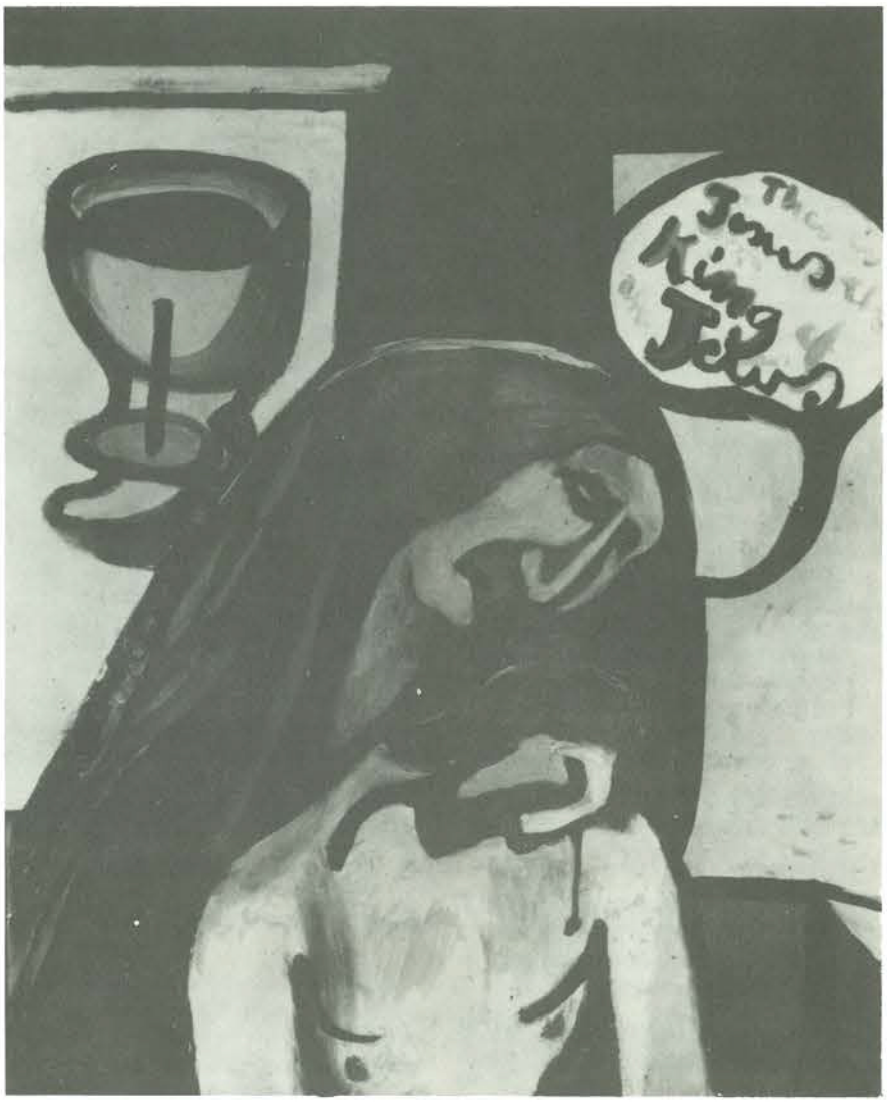
Nigeria.

In 1968 he was appointed as director and lecturer in administration at the New Zealand Library School, a position from which he retired in 1974.

Many of us as younger generation colleagues will remember him as an ally during some of the more tempestuous AGMANZ conferences of the recent past as well as a fervent supporter of the newly established New Zealand Art Gallery Directors' Council for which he scripted and completed a thorough professional ethics document.

As friends and colleagues we pay our tribute and lend our support and convey our sympathies to the constant and supportive companion of his latter years, Ronnie his widow.

Luit Bieringa



Colin McCahon "King of the Jews" 1947 painting gifted by R. N. O'Reilly and the artist to the National Art Gallery.

Of Floods, Fans & Freeze Driers

Rosemary Entwisle
Assistant Curator of Pictures, Hocken Library

A fire during late December 1981 in the Psychology Department of the University of Otago so alerted the staff to the dangers of housing combustible in a wooden building that they sought alternative storage. A lecturer in the department was provided with an internal room in a concrete building. She transferred about fifty books and some papers and photographs there before the Christmas holiday break. The heating was turned off for the four week holiday. A fault in an overhead water pipe caused flooding in the room. When the flood was discovered on the 4th or 5th of January, the damaged books, papers and photographs were moved to another room by a custodian but it was not for another three or four days that the lecturer learned of the damage. She immediately alerted the Hocken Library, for one of its staff members is the convenor of the University Library's then untried Disaster Preparedness Committee. This was at 4 o'clock on a Friday afternoon.

The books and papers were sodden or damp, mouldy, their pages could not be separated, and they had swollen from sitting in water for an unknown length of time and from being stacked for a number of days. The papers were mostly student exercises that required marking for the new term. The photographs, slides and books were those that the lecturer required during the holidays for organising the year's lectures. Very few of the books were monetarily valuable or replacement copies not readily available. These things influenced the approach to the remedial work to be undertaken. The over-riding consideration was that the books be returned to a usable condition only, in as short a time as possible, and that the student papers did not require a useful life of more than a few months.

Rosemary Entwisle's valuable documentation goes on to describe a detailed salvage operation along with warnings and suggestions; in all a practical application of Tony Clarke's Disaster Preparedness workshop recorded in Agmanz News Vol. 12 No 2.

It was an editorial decision not to include the whole article, but if your institution would like a copy for your file please contact the secretary, Ms Judy Turner.

Book News

Display Technology for Small Museums

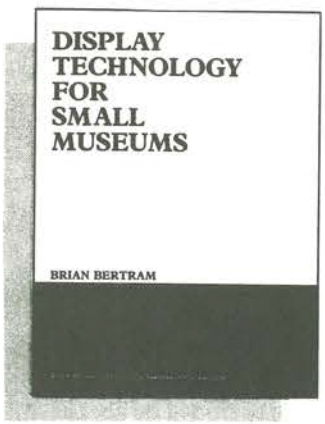
Written by BRIAN BERTRAM, Former Chief of Exhibitions at The Australian Museum this indispensable aid to small museums is now available.

Composed of three major parts DISPLAY TECHNOLOGY FOR SMALL MUSEUMS discusses in detail display theory, fixture construction methods and installation techniques. Conservation considerations in display are also discussed.

Fully illustrated with black and white photographs and line drawings DISPLAY TECHNOLOGY FOR SMALL MUSEUMS is a must for all those seeking practical information on Museum display techniques. (Wholesale price for Bona Fide booksellers $6.00 per copy postage not included).

Eighty-two pages, 210 x 280 mm, soft cover ISBN 0959 6832.

For further information please write to:
TO Chairman of Pubications,
c/- Department of Museum Studies
Sydney University,
110 Darlington Road,
DARLINGTON NSW 2008
Phone (02) 519 7041



Museums And The Law

The American Association for State and Local History launches this month a new multi-volume series on management practices for directors of museums and historical agencies. The first volume in the series is entitled MUSEUMS AND THE LAW, by Marilyn Phelan, J.D.; clothbound reference edition/287 pages/$21.00 (SD) or $15.75 to members of the ASSLH.

The book, written by Dr. Marilyn Phelan, professor of law at Texas Tech University, interprets the law for museums as it relates to *Organisational Structure, Museums and the IRS, Rights of Artists in Their Works, Museum Acquisitions, Employee Relations,* and *Duties of Museum Directors and Trustees.*

The AASLH Management Series will be a multi-year effort to provide the nation's historical agencies and museums with sound management practices. Other volumes planned for the series include: PUBLIC LONG-RANGE PLANNING, PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT, and THE ROLE THE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR. Museum directors and administrators are encouraged to place their names on standing order to receive all volumes in the series as they are published.

For further information, write to:
American Association
for State and
Local History
708 Berry Road
Nashville, Tennessee 37204
615/383-5991

Notices

CAUTION

Members may be approached from time to time by the producers of New Zealand films for the use of artefacts. It is important for curators and directors to establish the credentials of the film makers or producers with the New Zealand Film Commission — Chairman: Mr W. N. Sheat, P.O. Box 110546, Wellington. And, when the Film Commission has indicated the reliability of the film makers, clear loan conditions should be established with regard to artefacts before valuable items are loaned out. Obviously it is advisable to loan reproduction material only in most circumstances. Film-making is a hurlyburly business and caution should be exercised in responding to approaches for loans.

TOURING NETWORK

The first conference of Arts Centre Directors took place at the Square Edge Arts Centre in Palmerston North on 5, 6 and 7 June 1982.

One of the important issues to come out of the conference was the setting up of a 'touring network'. This will enable artists to be offered a number of concerts, exhibitions etc., rather than a one off.

As an organisation with a major influence on touring artists through New Zealand, I have been requested by the conference to inform you of its existence and how information can be fed into it.

Information should be forwarded to the Arts Centre giving full details of the artists, availability, performance fees etc.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Ray Sleeman
Director

Postal address:
PO Box 845
Christchurch
New Zealand

OTIRA GORGE

I am writing concerning two paintings of Otira Gorge by W. G. Baker which have been brought to the attention of the Minister for the Arts by Mr M Connelly MP.

Currently, the paintings are being held in the Masterpiece Fine Art Gallery in Hobart, Tasmania where they will eventually be sold. It is

possible that provincial galleries may be interested in the painting and the publication of details of this sale in your newsletter would be helpful.

The two paintings are a matching pair, the outside measurement approximately 6'6" x 4'6". The paintings are of good quality and there is no sign of them having been damaged or repaired.

The price the owner is asking is about $A3,500 for each painting.

Your help with this matter would be very much appreciated.

Kathleen Quirke
for Secretary for Internal Affairs

CHANGE OF NAME FOR THE WELLINGTON CULTURAL CONSERVATORS

The group previously known as the Wellington Cultural Conservators has recently become an incorporated society, and in the process has changed its name to The Society for Cultural Conservation (Inc.), Wellington.

There were several reasons for this: a) it was likely that the initials W.C.C. would be confused with those of other groups, and b) the name was felt to be a little too parochial for a group which is branching out and establishing co-operative links throughout New Zealand.

A change in name does not, however, mean a change in operation: the group continues to grow, the Emergency Conservation Unit is ready and able to help and advise when the next disaster strikes, and the Bulk Purchasing Scheme continues to supply a variety of archival materials normally unavailable in smaller quantities.

Any enquiries or correspondence can be sent to:
The Society for Cultural Conservation Inc.
C/- The National Museum
Private Bag
Wellington

WATCH OUT!

I would be grateful if you would publish a warning in the AGMANZ News about a person calling himself Mr W. J. Stewart who is going around posing as the compiler of histories of Rugby Clubs and either ordering photographs which aren't paid for or borrowing photos that aren't returned.

We have suffered from the former and are led to believe that Whangarei may have suffered the latter. If anyone comes across him we would, of course, like to know, especially his address if one can be obtained.

Warner Haldane
P.O. Box 716, Gisborne,
New Zealand.
Telephone 83-832.

SO — BEWARE

Cautionary Curatorial Anecdote.
We have heard a salutary story from one of the Council members, who wishes to remain anonymous. He recently borrowed a bomb from another museum for display in a travelling exhibition; but when this device — a perfectly ordinary one-kilogram incendiary from the Second World War, thousands of which were dropped all over the country causing considerable damage in the process — arrived, it was discovered to be live. He naturally then called on the local bomb disposal unit, who said that in the absence of absolute documentation there was no way of knowing whether the bomb had been defused or not and in no circumstances would they be prepared to open it up to find out. So they took the bomb away together with a number of similar items from the other museum's collection and, as it were, deaccessioned them. Permanently.

Not wishing to repeat the embarrassing experience of having to destroy part of somebody else's collection without even having time to ask permission, . he contacted the Imperial War Museum to find out what they do when faced with a bomb. They, not surprisingly, have a policy for dealing with any kind of explosive or possibly explosive device. People often come to them proudly clutching a bomb that may have been sitting on the mantlepiece for forty-odd years, but unless there is sound documentation to say that said keepsake has been defused or unless it is obviously inert — eg sectioned — they will not allow it in the building; in fact they tell the prospective donor to remove it forthwith and advise them to go to the local police bomb disposal unit. It is, says our councillor sadly, commoner than one might think for potentially dangerous devices to be toted casually round the country — so beware.

Extract from Museums Bulletin 21 No. 10 Jan. 1982.

POSITIONS WANTED

Dear Sir,

I have recently obtained a Master of Arts (Honours) in Art History from the University of Auckland and am now seeking a position where my knowledge of art may be utilised. It has been suggested that I write to you detailing my qualifications for insertion in the September issue of AGMANZ News.

Details are as follows:
Name: John William Frank Cattell.
AGE: 24 years.
ADDRESS: 'Midway" Darfield, R.D. Canterbury.
QUALIFICATIONS: B.A. (Canterbury University) in Art History and Geography. Completed in 1979. M.A. (Honours) University of Auckland, completed in 1982. M.A. papers passed; N.Z. Art, American Art 1945 to present, Art Historiography, and a special topic dealing with European artists' visions of the Maori. I have also taught a U.E. Art History night class at a High School in Auckland.

STOLEN ARTWORKS

SIR PETER BUCK MEMORIAL RECOVERY TRUST

On or about 6 June 1982, the tomb of Sir Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) was entered and the following items stolen: Three feather cloaks and a greenstone patu (hand club).

The community has formed the Sir Peter Buck Memorial Recovery Trust whose objective is to offer a reward for the return of, or for information leading to the recovery of the items described.

Members of the Trust include Urenui community organisations, other interested bodies and local people.

PO Box 52, Urenui
Taranaki, New Zealand

MADONNA AND CHILD

This painting is missing from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. The medium is oil on canvas, measuring 60 x 45 cm and is an unframed work. It is/was possibly taken or disposed of between 1978 and early 1982. It has not been attributed, and is probably a copy or a pastiche in the late 16th century Italian style.

If you have any information relating to this painting please contact Mr Frank Dickinson, Director, Dunedin Public Art Gallery. P.O. Box 566.

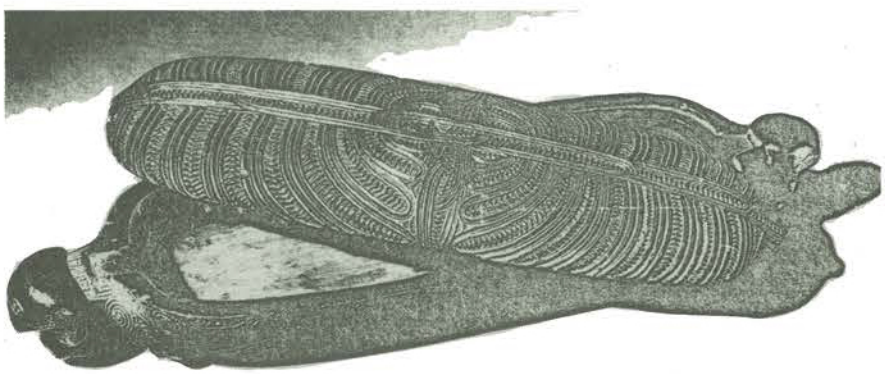
Madonna and Child

THEFT

The theft from display of a valuable **waka huia** *at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery on 2 June has recently been drawn to my attention. In the event of this item surfacing in New Zealand may I, through your columns, alert the profession to the following description provided by Museum Director D. R. Gregg.*

"M2847 — **waka huia** *— a Maori treasure box, wooden, approx. 33cm long by 9cm high by 10cm wide. The bottom is carved with several large spirals, the spaces between being intricately carved. It appears to have been varnished and is a shiny reddish brown in colour. The top bears a design divided into 4 panels, very similar to the top in the photo (enclosed). It is not varnished, being dark brown in colour. Two crude human heads, triangular in shape and with rudimentary features, form the handles. They are also reddish brown and shiny. A reddish string forms a loop between these two handles. This object was acquired by the museum in about 1895."*

If approached with this item, please phone Steve Edson of Waikato Art Museum in the first instance.



Treasure Box

Permanent Storage

Textiles

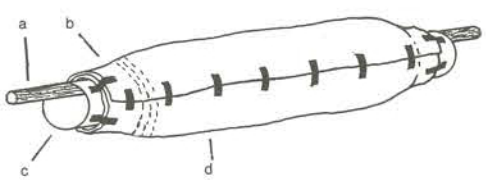
In the case of storing fragile costumes — it is often safer to store in acid free boxes rather than in a hanging position.

Any folds which occur must be softened by rolls of tissue paper to avoid any fabric fatigue. Sleeves can have some tissue paper rolls inserted to also avoid creases.

Do not attempt to store more than one garment in a box — any crushing must be avoided.

If garments are in good strong condition, they may be hung in wardrobes on padded coathangers to similate shoulders and so spread the weight beyond the shoulder seam. These may have unsealed polythene dry cleaning shields to protect them from any dust.

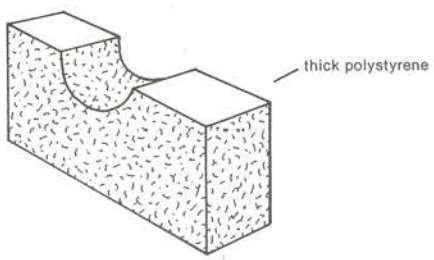
The length of roll should allow at least 150 mm to be exposed at each end when the textile is in place.
Tape the outer barrier layer which has sandwiched all the others between it — being of the largest dimension.

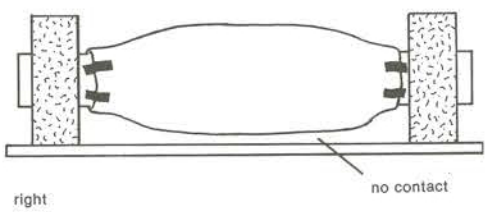


a. carrying or hanging storage rod. Thick dowel or metal pipe
b. wrapping layers of tissue and barrier paper or acid free material, e.g. cotton
c. core of p.v.c. or cardboard
d. textile inside wraps

This method should also be used when packing unstretched canvas/paintings — also for crating with the polystryrene 'forma' cut to fit the crate ends.

Prepare before hand two shapes which will hold the rolled textile off the horizontal surface, i.e. suspend it — not crush.





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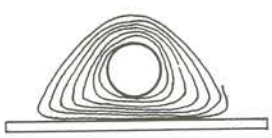

wrong

THE ART GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND

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