

ART GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc.)

AGMANZ NEWSLETTER, No.2. NOVEMBER, 1953.

EDITORIAL:

The appointment of an Hon. Editor to be responsible for the production of a Newsletter was authorised by the Agmanz Council at its last meeting. At least four issues per year are contemplated and it is our aim to provide Council news, short technical notes, personals, news or anything which will quicken interest in our work, knit members more closely together and in so doing contribute to the advancement of our profession. For this issue the response has been good but two numbers do not make a volume, so please send forward further material.

It is planned to reproduce one or two talks delivered at the last Agmanz Conference, the first of which by Mr. Turbott appears in this issue.

COUNCIL ACTIVITIES:

NATIONAL TRUST BILL.

The Council has taken a keen interest in the alternative proposals to introduce legislation to protect historic sites and monuments, Maori and European. The Council favours the approach in Mr. D. M. Rae's private bill that such legislation should take the form of a separate or ad hoc Act, and not be a mere section (as proposed by the Department of Lands) in a general Act consolidating reserves of all types.

MUSEUM SCHOOL SERVICE.

The Council is considering the possibility of the Association sponsoring an up-to-date account of the activities and accomplishments of the School Service in New Zealand museums.

MUSEUM STAFF - SALARIES AND STATUS.

A survey is being made of the status of museum staff and salaries received in relation to other institutions with a view to compiling a satisfactory salary scale. This report will on completion be communicated to the governing bodies of the various museums for their consideration. The sub-committee dealing with this problem is at present concerned with the four metropolitan museums but attention will shortly be turned to the smaller museums.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 1954.

The next biennial conference will be held in Wanganui in 1955, but it has been decided to spread the 1954 Annual General Meeting over two days and thus provide an opportunity for informal discussion among those present. This will be held in Wellington.

MUSEUM FINANCES.

A comprehensive report on the present finances of

New Zealand museums has been adopted by the council. This report will be of particular use in providing data and advice for the smaller museums on their problems of financial maintenance.

MUSEUM SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS.

(Talk at Agmanz Conference, 1953.)

Museum publications are commonly divided into the "popular" and the "scientific", and in introducing my subject I should like to examine briefly the nature of this distinction. Earlier discussions at this Conference have dwelt especially on the educational functions of the museum, and a quotation from Karl P. Schmidt's recent inspiring address on "The Function of the University Museum" * is perhaps appropriate at this stage to enable us to place the present subject in perspective: "The sharp division of museum collections into collections for study and collections for public exhibition and education was one of the most significant improvements in the organization of museums of natural history.... This dual nature of museum collections remains largely unknown to the general public. It has proved essential to the development of the quite distinct fields of research and public exhibition in the larger museum. Many persons envisage additions to the exhibition halls as the principal results of museum 'expeditions' and are astonished to learn that the vast numbers of specimens collected by museum staffs go mainly into the drawers of the research ranges and cabinets. Even the publications based upon these collections are only rarely brought to the attention of the general public, being technical and essentially directed only to the corps of fellow specialists engaged similarly in the description of nature. The study collections in any modern museum outnumber the specimens on exhibition in most groups by ten to one, a hundred to one, and even a thousand to one, as in plants and insects."

What are regarded as the scientific records of the museum are the usual periodical or periodic publications of the "Records" or "Bulletin" type. The former appear annually or quarterly, and the latter, consisting of lengthy monographs or descriptions of new species, etc., as often as the material is ready for publication. Well-known examples of the shorter type of periodic publication are (in the United States) the Novitates of the American Museum of Natural History and Fieldiana of the Chicago Natural History Museum; and it might be noted that there is a growing tendency amongst museums to favour this type of scientific record.

To return to the distinction between these scientific records and "popular" museum publications, I might suggest that relationship, between the scientific and popular publications of

* Karl P. Schmidt, "The Function of the University Museum" in The Museum News, May 15, 1952, pp. 5-8. (American Association of Museums publ.)

museums is closer than we tend to think. It should not be forgotten that a popular publication can, and often does, provide an up-to-date treatment of a subject not elsewhere available. In some cases a good deal of unrecorded material enters into a popular publication. And a genuinely popular publication may, without losing in popular appeal, provide an authoritative treatment of a subject and make a valuable contribution to knowledge. As an example I might mention the attractively produced and excellently illustrated "Museum Pictorial" of Denver Museum of Natural History, which is " - - - designed for articles of popular interest where more photographs are used than with reports of a technical nature. Life history studies of single species or groups of animals are especially suitable subjects". Titles included in this series are "Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses", "The Hawaiian Monk Seals" and "Nature Photography". A further example is the popular Canterbury Museum publication, "Pyramid Valley", by Roger Duff, to which reference has frequently been made in recent discussions of the extinction of moas and Notornis.

A popular museum journal may also be used to make known advances in research, news of which might be delayed for several years until the technical papers are completed. Such information on new discoveries and techniques may be of value to others working in distinct branches of science.

Conversely, museum scientific contributions may prove, if not exactly popular, to have a wide appeal. Examples that come to mind are the early Dominion Museum bulletins and monographs by Elsdon Best on the Maori and, I understand, the recent bulletin by Oliver on the moas. Even publications necessarily of a more technical nature, at least on certain subjects, tend to be swallowed at a gulp by an unexpectedly large public.

Certain technical aspects of the publication of museum scientific records may be mentioned briefly. As regards distribution, Miss Evans mentioned in an earlier discussion the exchange value to museums of their scientific publications. The editor of our Auckland Museum publications, Mr. Powell, has raised the following points: Firstly, he prefers a single annual issue of the "Records" type; or else occasional papers, not divided serially according to subjects (e.g. entomology, ethnology), but collated into an annual volume. This applies more especially to New Zealand where research produced in each subject is variable and intermittent. A second point made by Mr. Powell is that, where only an annual volume is published, the demand for issues of a particular number may be met by publishing additional reprints which can be made available by the institution. This has been initiated recently by the Museum, and will enable stocks of the annual issue to be conserved.

As regards editing, the importance should be stressed of close co-operation between the editor, and the printer and, if possible, the block-maker: much depends upon the technical knowledge of an editor in these aspects if a high publication standard

is to be maintained.

Finally, we might ask the question: what is expected from museum scientific publications in subject matter and the fields to be covered?

I would mention first that museum workers do not publish only in museum journals. Most members of museum staffs publish widely upon various aspects of their special subjects, and it is, of course, a fine point of judgment to decide on the most appropriate medium for publication.

But the stress in museum scientific publications is likely to be upon taxonomic studies in biology, and perhaps, although this is open for comment from the anthropologists present, upon archaeology in anthropology: that is, upon the classification of the material in the museum collections.

Every museum worker realises the need for research upon the collections in his charge. With so much important material scattered all over the world in museums both large and small, it is perhaps time that the mere cataloguing and illustrating of more of our material should be given attention as a field for museum publications.

But an effort is urgently needed also to intensify specialist research on museum material, and here I would like again to quote from Dr. Schmidt's address. His remarks apply especially to museum workers in biological science. He says: "It seems to me axiomatic that a knowledge of the diversity of form and structure to be found within the animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms is an essential foundation for all further studies in biology and geology. It is easy for those working on the superstructure to forget the foundations, and this is precisely what has happened in Biology. A skyscraper must have vast foundations, almost as deep or as extensive within the ground as the superstructure; and the sciences of biology and geology require, and will always depend on, their descriptive foundations. We must therefore remind the geneticists and embryologists, the physiologists and ecologists, the students of behaviour and the theoretical geologists, that the descriptive systematics of animals and plants and minerals form the foundation of these several sciences. We must remind them further that the foundations are an integral part of the structure; and that no structure and no foundation can be maintained without constant upkeep and repair.

Description and classification, Natural History in common parlance, compose not only the foundations but much of the lower and less ornate part of the structure of science. In part they provide the necessary basis, in their lists and catalogs of the living and mineral productions of the world, for all other growth of more specialized sciences. The catalog of species may seem as dull, as reading matter, as the dictionary; but

dictionaries retain their usefulness, and we could not do without the even duller telephone directories. It is the essential nature of the systematic lists that they are useful to the widest range of non-systematists, and even to non-scientists. Actually the lists of animal and plant names, when presented in the framework of their classification, afford a shorthand description of natural phenomena that compares favorably with the so-called laws of any of the sciences.

Most important of all is the observation that our colleagues of the sciences at the forefront of research left the descriptive sciences of classification and morphology only half finished, before going on to their supposedly greener or more productive pastures. It is the defect of books that they give an impression of finality that is too often false. Every museum zoologist and botanist knows how much remains to be done in describing new species and still more in improving the classification of the known ones."

I might add a brief note on the authorship of museum scientific publications - the most generally accepted criterion is that the research shall in all cases be based upon the museum's material. Contributions can thus be accepted both from the museum's own staff, and from the research workers of other institutions.

E. G. TURBOTT,
Auckland Museum.

MUSEUM NEWS:

SOUTHLAND MUSEUM.

This museum plans to concentrate on a comprehensive Maori and natural history collection of the Southland area with a special wing devoted to material of early pioneer historical interest. A diorama illustrating the Notornis is under construction by the taxidermist Mr. Walker and Dr. Orbell, the discoverer of Notornis. A marked improvement in the exhibition halls has been the installation of a heating system.

NELSON MUSEUM.

The Nelson Museum which has records relating to its origin dating back to 1841 also aims at building up collections illustrating the Maori life, natural history and early history of the Nelson Province. Recently a number of new exhibits have been added.

Mr. C. J. Lindsay of the Dominion Museum recently spent a week in the Museum offering practical help in a variety of ways.

WANGANUI MUSEUM.

The most notable advance in recent months has been the construction of a small lecture hall in the basement which is used not only by members and the public, but also by visiting groups of school children. A movie projector has been

installed and visiting lecturers have been invited to speak to Museum members.

SARGEANT ART GALLERY.

The Gallery has undergone renovation throughout and consequently the setting for the pictures, always attractive, will be considerably enhanced.

HAWKE'S BAY ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM.

Building extensions are in progress and it is hoped to occupy the new block early in 1954. This block will comprise a large exhibition room which will probably house Maori and Polynesian material, while accommodation will be available below stairs for the Royal Society, natural history displays, and a new project in the form of an Art School.

A craft exhibition held during September, to which exhibitors from all over New Zealand contributed, was very successful and included samples of pottery, woodcarving, needlework, weaving, book-binding, printed textiles and other craft forms.

CANTERBURY MUSEUM.

Building Plans. A new wing is planned for the Museum as the Canterbury Centennial Memorial. The completion of this wing will almost double the floor space of the present building and provide 7 new display galleries, a lecture hall, School Service accommodation, workshops and a series of storerooms for the research and reserve collections and rooms for the staff. Of an estimated cost of £140,000 approximately £100,000 is in hand for the building and the assurance of a building permit will enable construction to be commenced in the near future after completion of the working plans.

New Displays. A new unit featuring moas and other extinct birds has now been completed. The main feature is three mounted skeletons Dinornis maximus, (Giant Moa), Anomalopteryx didiformis (Bush Moa) and Euryapteryx gravis (main moa hunted by moa-hunters). Accessory panels show the story of the Pyramid Valley Moa Swamp illustrated by whole plate coloured transparencies, moa crop stones, feathers, tracheal rings etc., and a number of skeletons of extinct birds (swan, goose, crow, Aptornis, eagle etc.).

The construction of the unit follows that of earlier displays in that extensive use has been made of hardboard coupled with simple joinery to provide a low cost housing of simple but attractive appearance.

DOMINION MUSEUM.

The first of a projected series of large habitat groups has recently been finished in the Dominion Museum. Measuring 11 feet across the front, the case has been built between two of the pillars in the Ornithology wing and shows a model of Megalapteryx didinus (the "slender moa"), a weka, two kakapo and a

kiwi against the background of a limestone bluff near Lake Te Anau. Also incorporated in the case are copies of a number of snares and lures of the moa-hunter period scattered around an old camp fire, and a few cave drawings have also been included.

Monthly film screenings have proved popular with the public and the coverage has been of varied character.

After renovating and replacing school travelling cases, a ten day exhibition for the general public was staged in the main hall.

In order to undertake the important task of repairing and relashing the Maori canoes on display, Mr. Charles Tuarau has prepared by hand 450 yards of cordage for lashing the top-strakes and thwarts into position.

AUCKLAND MUSEUM.

Activities of recent months have included the Cheeseman Memorial Flower Show, a series of eight Sunday Afternoon Lectures and an exhibition of rock drawings and paintings. Of special interest was the setting up of the sail on the Tikopian canoe, and the relashing of the outrigger, feats of craftsmanship ably performed by four Tikopian men who were visiting Auckland on the Melanesian Mission steamer "Southern Cross".

PERSONALS:

Dr. H. D. Skinner retired from the Directorship of the Otago Museum in January 1953, but agreed to continue as Relieving Director in the meantime. Dr. Skinner has been connected with the Museum for thirty-five years and since 1937 has held the position of Director. Throughout this long period he has given outstanding service. All members will be pleased to learn that in recognition of his contribution to the development of the Museum, the Council of the University of Otago has honoured Dr. Skinner by conferring on him the status of Director Emeritus.

Following a two year course of study at Washington University, St. Louis, Mo., where he completed his Ph.D., Dr. R. C. Cooper has now returned to continue his duties as botanist at the Auckland Museum. At St. Louis, Dr. Cooper was also attached to the Missouri Botanic Garden and later spent a short period at Kew Gardens and the British Museum (Natural History).

Miss Joan Harding is joining the staff of Otago Museum as Exhibition Officer. At one time Curator of the County Museum, Warwick, Miss Harding was more recently on the staff of the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria and has published a number of papers on archaeology.

Recently appointed taxidermist at the Auckland Museum, Mr. P. J. O'Brien enjoys a wide and varied experience in his special skill gained in New Zealand, Californian and Victorian

Museums.

Mr. Gordon White, who has served on the modelling and display staff of the Dominion Museum for over three years, has resigned in order to gain overseas experience in modelling techniques.

Auckland Institute and Museum,
P. O. Box 9027,
Newmarket,
AUCKLAND, S.E.1.

V. F. FISHER,
Hon. Editor.
