

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

AGMANZ NEWSLETTER, No. 6. DECEMBER, 1956.



EDITORIAL:

With the passing of the Fellowship rules and the announcement of the first twelve fellows Agmanz has made another step forward in its endeavours to raise the professional status of those engaged in art gallery and museum work. A perusal of the list of fellows reveals the interesting fact that amongst the names there is a taxidermist, several directors, an assistant director, an education officer, members of scientific staff and it also includes some who have served on Agmanz Council in various capacities. Thus many different categories of museum workers are represented. It is hoped that the Fellowship will not only improve professional status but will increase the pride which all engaged in museum work should feel in their chosen profession.

BIENNIAL CONFERENCE:

Council plans to hold the fourth biennial conference at the Dominion Museum, Wellington, from April 9 -11, 1957. The three earlier conferences of the Association have already established a tradition for pleasant, profitable and stimulating experiences that serve to enthuse members to more purposeful work not alone for their own institution, but in the interests of Agmanz generally.

A preliminary circular is being despatched to all members and you are asked to forward any suggestions, ideas or topics for consideration to the Hon. Secretary, Dr. R. Cooper, immediately. This will materially assist Council to arrange a good programme. So chat it over with your colleagues and then secure pen and paper and forward your ideas. Please remember that it is possible to arrange discussions on any topic for small groups of four or five if required.

It may be possible to secure 10 per cent concession if sufficient numbers travel by train. This concession, if granted, would be available for the wives and children of members and delegates.

HONORARY MEMBERS:

As a tribute to the good services rendered to the museum movement in New Zealand by the following gentlemen, Agmanz at the last Annual Meeting elected all three Honorary Members of the Association:-

Mr. John Barr.

Dr. W.R.B. Oliver.

Dr. H. D. Skinner.

Those honoured richly deserve this recognition, and the good wishes and congratulations of members are extended to them.

AGMANZ FELLOWSHIPS:

At the Annual General Meeting held in April the Fellowship rules were approved. So Council at a meeting held in Wellington on 30th August, 1956, appointed the first twelve Fellows. The names of those honoured by the bestowal of a Fellowship are:-

Dr. G. Archey	Mr. V. F. Fisher	Mr. R. A. Scobie
Mr. L. D. Bestall	Dr. C. A. Fleming	Dr. H. D. Skinner
Dr. R. Duff	Mr. C. J. Lindsay	Mrs. O. M. Turbott
Dr. R. A. Falla	Dr. A.W.B. Powell	Mr. E.G. Turbott

Recipients are entitled to use the letters FMANZ.

All members of the Association will wish to extend their heartiest congratulations to the Fellows who have received the award, which is the hallmark of museum experience and competence.

NEWS FROM MR. L. D. BESTALL:

(While travelling abroad, Mr. L. D. Bestall, Hawke's Bay Museum, sent two letters to the Editor, giving an account of his experiences and impressions. The bulk of the matter is reproduced here.)

London, July 22nd, 1956.

"Helena Hull tells me you wrote for some news for the Newsletter and in any case I feel that as New Zealand representative of ICOM, I should report to you on the conference. I have seen over fifty museums and art galleries since leaving New Zealand.

I have attended two conferences lasting about a fortnight in all, both have been of a very novel peripatetic type, both rather exhausting physically and mentally and both amounting to a very profound experience or rather series of profound experiences.

The British Museums Association conference opened in London on the 26th June, with its Annual Meeting. Sir Phillip Hendy was elected president and in his dissertation he referred to the immense growth of public interest in art and quoted the sales turnover in reproductions at the National Gallery as approx. £35,000 per annum. That gallery by the way has recently reopened a group of six rooms. They are sealed off so that they can be air conditioned, they have been entirely renovated, each in its own colour scheme, a new and excellent lighting system installed and all the pictures have been cleaned. Even directors from U.S.A. consider there is nothing anywhere to compare with it.

On that night about 320 of us crossed to Amsterdam, my wife and I included as representing the Hawke's Bay Museum. Here we were put to work immediately and did not see our hotel until late afternoon. The Dutch Association ran its conference with us - the whole in English and there must have been well over 400 of us all told. We travelled in eight huge buses (the Dutch mainly in their own cars) and visited Rotterdam, the Hague, Utrecht, Otterlo, Arnhem, Leiden, besides Amsterdam itself. Everywhere we visited museums of an extraordinarily high order both in contents and in

"museography. In fact I have no hesitation in saying, and American friends support this, that there is no need for us to study in the U.S.A. with all its dollar hurdles. Museum craft is now at its highest pitch in Holland.

In each town we were entertained by the municipality and on the first evening the Dutch Government received us in the Ryksmuseum. This was entirely thrown open to us and the main item was of course the enormous concentration of Rembrandt paintings to honour his tercentenary. This alone, seen in the company of people all deeply interested and with the 'tripper' excluded was an experience as profound as to be almost a spiritual one. Later we saw the complementary exhibition of Rembrandt drawings and etchings in Rotterdam.

Of the many superb museums there were several in new and excellent buildings - Boymans in Rotterdam and the Town Museum in the Hague, for instance. Even more superlative are the KRÖLLER MULLER Art Museum at Otterlo - set in a great park and culminating in a huge sculpture hall with one great wall of glass facing into a wood in which are also set sculpture, and the Open Air Museum (Folklore). near Arnhem.

The Annual Dinner was held in Utrecht and the speeches were of a very high order. In proposing the health of the Dutch Museums our Sir Phillip Hendy said 'This is a quite unnecessary toast. I have never seen such a collection of healthy museums anywhere and they are propagating too. I understand in the past ten years 86 new ones have been opened and this is a better yearly average than my pussy cat at home can show.'

On the 30th June, the Conference closed and about 100 of us went on to Switzerland for the ICOM Conference. Will write again about that."

London,
July 25. 1956.

"Continuing the account of the Conference. I went on with a considerable contingent from Amsterdam by the 'Lorelei Express' up the Rhine to Basle where the ICOM Conference with representatives from 47 countries was duly launched in the Art Museum (Kunsthaus) in Basle. We spent three full days here with an all day excursion by special train to Bern, then on by seven huge buses (about 400 of us) to Schaffhausen and to Zurich where we spent two days - then another day by special train to Geneva with a six hour stay at Neuchatel and one full day at Geneva, making eight days in all. While the pace was a little less hot than it was in Holland, yet the long travel days when we 'worked' on the way yet finished up in a fresh town, meant we had all our gear with us and as it was hot had to wear rather too much clothing.

The Conference had five major addresses which were open to the public. For the rest there were shuttle services of buses so

"that we could visit all museums in the locality and many private collectors threw open their houses to us. One of these, Oskar Reinhardt in Winterthur, was a revelation in what one wealthy man can do. In each town, as in Holland, we were tendered generous hospitality - in Schaffhausen we took picnic lunch on a Rhine steamer while she cruised up river, in Basle we dined in the cellars of the 17th century 'Blaueshaus' and in Zurich we were entertained in groups to dinner in the eight trade guildhalls. But the most novel feature and what was intended to be the main work consisted of 'working groups' meeting simultaneously in the various museums. In all I think there were about 90 of them. As an instance a very modern museum at Neuchatel has an 'automatic guide' (in reality a tape record) a group of 25 or so attended this. The local man gave a five minute talk and demonstration and then the meeting questioned and criticised - in this case no one was in favour.

It was more than worth the time, money and trouble to see the museums - many almost as good as Holland, the collections, and to meet the people. There is much more to tell when I come home. One bad thing - the full reports of the last Conference in '53 are not yet published I was told so this one will be a long time - this is a serious weakness in my opinion.

Regards,

LEO D. BESTALL.

NOTES ON AN INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION, RELATING TO THE PROBLEMS OF LETTERING IN MUSEUM DISPLAYS: (Delivered at Agmanz Conference, 1955.) Three types of contemporary lettering, 3" high, suitable for display headings in cases were first shown and discussed.

It is always a problem to decide when planning a case, whether to have a colourful background with superimposed light lettering, which produces an attractive "draw" case, or to be more conservative and do the reverse, using dark and possibly more legible lettering on a light background.

There are several ways of overcoming this problem, as I hope the illustrative samples of lettering pointed out.

The first set, using two tones of the popular terracotta, contained a heading "South Sea Dwellings," illustrated in two ways.

- (1) Light terracotta lettering on a deeper coloured background, and
- (2) Deep terracotta lettering on a light coloured background.

When the audience was asked for their opinion on comparative attractiveness, "luring" ability and legibility, the replies were many and varied. The general opinion was that (1) was more attractive, especially when seen from a distance, as most museum case headings are, and clearly legible without a dazzling effect, and that (2) viewed at close range was possibly easier to read, if more nondescript.

The second set, using the same comparative idea, contained the wording "Canadian Canoes" in two tones of green. The contrasting shades here were much greater with interesting results. In both samples the lettering was more difficult to read, and a slight dazzling effect was noticed with the light lettering on dark background.

In the third set, a direct contrast was used, navy and ice blue. The word "Ceramics" being script lettered in ice blue on the navy background. This it was generally agreed, produced a definite dazzle to the eye, making the letters run into one another, whereas the reverse sample proved dull and uninteresting.

Conclusions from this section were:-

For case headings, light lettering on a darker background produces a colourful, more attractive display, providing the colour contrast is not too great.

A short verse of poetry, lettered in three different ways, was the next discussed.

- In (a) The poem was lettered in pale blue on an aqua green background.
- {b) Aqua green lettering on a pale blue background, and
- (c) White lettering on an aqua green background.

Here again, an animated discussion took place. (c) was dealt with briefly as having a marked dazzling effect, but (a) and (b) were debated at length. The conclusion was (a) took the honours as being the most attractive, but (b) was easier to read quickly.

When a mass of small lettering is assembled, as in the individual descriptive museum label, legibility and easy reading rather than appearance, has to be considered. For a short notice or label of say 15-20 words I would use (a), but with the longer museum label, (which we meet with all too frequently,) of 70 - 100 words, attractiveness takes a back seat in favour of quick easy reading. Various examples of this were shown in portable museum school cases, which are studied at close quarters by school children of various ages. In both of the cases, colourful backgrounds were used, but the smaller descriptive labels were lettered in the irregular shapes, and glued onto the background. Thus the light card formed a colour pattern in itself when viewed from a distance.

Methods of making quick colourful labels for small museums with inadequate technical staff, or for temporary labels in the larger museums were also demonstrated.

On a lime green base, a label of the same colour but typewritten in red upper case letters was shown, also - as a contrast, using orange as the base for the case, and the label a bright warm yellow, typewritten in red (the red appears to tone in when typewritten on the yellow paper) but in small lower case letters this time, were discussed.

The lower case label proved much easier to read, and the contrasting label a decorative asset if the objects in the case were few, the reverse applying if the exhibits were many. As the concluding thought, all labels, whether for museum or school cases, should harmonise with, yet not overshadow the central exhibit.

NADIA FITCHETT,
Dominion Museum

MUSEUM WEEK:

At the suggestion of Unesco museums in more than forty five countries celebrated museum week from October 6th. to October 14th, 1956. In New Zealand Agmanz encouraged members to make a contribution and wherever possible this was done. The President prepared a special talk on "The Museum in the Community" which was broadcasted on the national link up on Sunday evening, September 30th. A reporter from the Broadcasting Service interviewed the President, and a brief commentary of the interview was published in the New Zealand Listener on October 5th. 1956.

Most of our museums are fully aware of the necessity of keeping the museum before the public and as a general rule publicity is well done. In the long run it is the day by day work which registers and builds up goodwill in the community, but something extra is warranted on occasions, in order to reach out and gain the interest of a wider public.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

The following officers were elected at the Annual General Meeting:-

President: Mr. V. F. Fisher.
Vice-Presidents: Messrs. L. D. Bestall and M. J. Smart.
Hon. Secretary: Dr. R. C. Cooper.
Hon. Treasurer: Mr. E. G. Turbott.
Council: Drs. G. Archey, R. Duff, R. A. Falla, and
R. R. Forster; Messrs. R. K. Dell and L.
Lockerbie.

IMPROVED SALARY GRANTED EDUCATION OFFICERS:

Following representations made over a period, and as the result of deputations from Council to the Minister of Education, the Education Department has given approval to a revised salary schedule for Education Officers which is a marked improvement on the previous scale.

REVIEW:

The Libraries, Museums and Art Galleries Year Book 1954-1955.

This issue supplants the edition published in 1948. It covers lists of professional organizations, associations, and institutions in the British Isles and overseas. Dr. W. E. Swinton, Honorary Editor of "The Museum Journal" has a thoughtful article on "Museums in Britain". He offers useful remarks on small museums, stresses the value and importance of collections and reminds readers

of the human factor in the following quote, "Museum problems, are, however, not all of collections or of mansions in which to place them. There are countless questions of recruitment, education and above all, of the appreciation of professional men and women."

The main purpose of the book is to provide information concerning libraries and museums, and the Advisory Editor, Mr. L. R. McColvin and his associates are to be congratulated on the production of a work, which will prove invaluable for this purpose.

NEW MEMBERS:

We welcome the following new members:

Mrs. Lucy Watson Smith, Mr. P.A. Tomory, Director, Auckland Art Gallery and Mr. E. Owen, Auckland Museum.

PERSONALS:

Mr. L. D. Bestall has spent some months in England and Europe visiting art galleries and museums. He represented the Association at the ICOM Conference at Basle, Switzerland, and attended the Museums Association Conference in London.

At the invitation of the Chinese Government, Dr. R. S. Duff travelled for a few weeks in China, inspecting a number of museums.

Our former secretary, Dr. R. R. Forster, is spending a period at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, U.S.A., continuing his research work on the Arachnida.

All members will be pleased at the announcement of the New Zealand University Senate, that an Honorary Doctorate in Science has been conferred on A.W.B. Powell, Assistant Director of the Auckland Museum. Dr. Powell received this high honour in recognition of his researches into the mollusca of New Zealand extending over more than thirty years.

Miss B. A. Holloway of the Dominion Museum, has received a Fulbright grant, and is now engaged in research on Coleoptera at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard.

Miss J. R. Harding, who served as exhibitions officer at the Otago Museum, has resigned from the Association having accepted a position in South Africa.

Mr. E. M. Feather, formerly education officer at the Auckland Art Gallery, has resigned in order to undertake specialist work with the Auckland Education Board.

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V. F. FISHER,
Hon. Editor