

A TOUR OF SELECTED BRITISH AND UNITED STATES
MUSEUMS; MAY TO SEPTEMBER, 1963.

Report by Ralph Riccalton, Assistant
Preparator, Canterbury Museum,
Christchurch, New Zealand. 14.10.63.

In submitting this report I welcome the opportunity of formally recording my thanks to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, London, whose far-sighted generosity made possible the system of grants administered by the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand.

I also wish to acknowledge my debt to the American Association of Museums who in cooperation with the Department of State arranged a superbly organised and generously hosted tour of the West Coast of the United States, which I was privileged to join as the New Zealand delegate of A.G.M.A.N.Z.

In no less measure I am grateful to the Canterbury Museum Trust Board for granting study leave and thus enabling me to enjoy the many opportunities offered, and I would hope that the account which follows will give some indication of the many benefits both direct and intangible which result from such an experience.

The tour began with a three day stopover in Honolulu to see the famous Bishop Museum which has many links with New Zealand and the Canterbury Museum including its 19th Century architecture. Much has been done in recent years to remodel galleries and the most recent displays deal effectively and well with local natural history and the rich Ethnological collections for which this Institution is famed. Associated with the Museum is a fine new Planetarium which, apart from other features, has a particularly effective system of ventilation in which cooled air is forced through small holes in the projection dome. This impressed as being the quietest and most comfortable means of planetarium ventilation encountered.

The Honolulu Academy of Arts with a series of galleries opening on to several appropriately landscaped garden courts was a perfect setting for a very fine collection of Oriental and European art. The American concept of an Art Museum housing paintings, sculpture, ceramics, furniture and fine quality artifacts struck me as being a much more meaningful and unified experience for the visitor than the somewhat rigid distinction between the graphic and applied arts so frequently applied in New Zealand.

After this most pleasant introduction to American Museums I continued my flight to San Diego where I was to join a 3 week tour for Foreign Museum Professionals arranged by the American Association of Museums in cooperation with the Department of State, and designed to include most of the Museums on the Pacific coast of three states, California, Oregon and Washington.

This was the first of such tours to which the New Zealand Art Galleries and Museums Association had been invited to send a delegate and it proved to be a most profitable and memorable experience since it brought together museum workers from twelve countries enabling us to share and exchange the many new ideas encountered during our time together. Delegates for the 1963 tour were:-

Miss V. Verhoogen (Belgium), H. Wagner (Switzerland) G. Koslov (USSR), T. Hamidi (Pakistan) G. Shogbola (Nigeria), R. Smithers (Southern Rhodesia), M. Chandra (India) H. Wakefield (Great Britain), H. Wolf (West Germany) B. Hallerdt (Sweden), Z. Zygulski (Poland), J. Muelle (Peru).

It is impossible in a report to do full justice to the many Museums and Galleries visited nor to acknowledge in detail the warm and generous hospitality, both public and private, which delegates enjoyed. If special reference is made to certain institutions it is because they exemplify ideas along the lines of my special interests, and it should not be inferred that other museums made no appeal. In fact I saw very few museums indeed which did not have some points of value to note and record.

San Diego, California.

The Museums of Natural History and Fine Arts and the Museum of Man share a fine site in Balboa Park, the three being housed in former 1915 Exposition buildings handsome externally but imposing certain interior restrictions which are presently being overcome by extensive remodelling. The Museum of Man has enhanced one ethnological gallery by installing a modified "Juke box" from which visitors can now select a recording of an authentic Indian dance or chant.

Also near San Diego are the Serra Museum, an appropriately styled Spanish colonial building housing relics of early settlement, and the Scripps Oceanographic Institute which maintains a public seawater aquarium of high quality. It was interesting to note that the Director was in the process of installing a deep sea diorama as he felt that this was necessary to give a balanced picture of ocean life to the visitor, despite the risks of juxtaposition with real-life exhibits.

Another famous aquarium was seen on the way to Los Angeles where the group stopped to visit Marineland, a commercial enterprise of great size and complexity where unusually large fish, together with seals dolphins and large whales could be studied at close quarters.

Los Angeles, California.

The Los Angeles County Museum has recently divided into separate museums of Natural Science and Art, but at the time of our visit these were still housed together in the original building. I was particularly impressed with the gallery illustrating the history of California by means of miniature dioramas, costumes, artifacts and larger relics such as the full size covered wagon. The careful selection of meaningful objects combined with the visual depth of dioramas seemed to me to be most successful in conveying a general picture of the early days of the State.

The California Museum of Science and Industry was the first of several Science museums seen in the United States, all of which are notable for the high finish of their installation and the number of "push button" exhibits. These in turn require a large initial outlay, (which is often met by commercial sponsors) and constant maintenance by a staff of electricians and technicians.

One afternoon was spent at Disneyland which, like Marineland, is another commercial enterprise from which much can be learnt, particularly in fields of crowd management and the maintenance of facilities; despite the huge numbers which visit the site every week there are no obvious signs of wear and tear and the large grounds are kept remarkably free from litter.

The Henry E. Huntington Library and Museum is one of several private foundations which maintain grounds and galleries to which the public are admitted. On the day of our visit there were large crowds and the place is obviously very popular despite (or perhaps because of) the highly specialised nature of the collections reflecting the personal interests of the donor. It was a great thrill to see so many famous British Paintings including "The Blue Boy" and "Finkie".

Another private collection seen en route to Santa Barbara was the John Paul Getty Museum which is less freely available to the public since the building is also a private home. A small but fine quality collection, this is in sharp contrast to the huge and heterogeneous mass of objects housed at San Simeon the former home of William Randolph Hearst which is a quite fantastic building strategically situated on a commanding site with magnificent views in every direction.

En route to San Francisco, all delegates were most interested to see the Pacific Grove Museum which with its staff of two, modest building and limited income was close to many of our own institutions. Due to the hard work and enthusiasm of the staff this museum compared more than favourably with others of larger size.
San Francisco, California.

The California Academy of Science was the first Museum visited which had a full scale cafeteria though most museums have some facilities for public refreshment ranging from self-service mechanical dispensers to the spacious and beautiful dining hall at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A standard fitment seemed to be automatic water coolers which I found from my own experience to be most refreshing to the weary visitor.

Two visits were made to the de Young Memorial Museum which apart from many fine paintings, sculpture and metalwork and several reconstructed period rooms was notable for the educational programme carried out. Large numbers of school children visit the Museum for organised lessons and at the time of our visit a special exhibition of local children's art was attracting large crowds. This museum is experimenting with programmes of adult education and a seminar was held to report developments to date. Another seminar of a more

specialised nature was held at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art where a lively group of college students gave their differing views on "Pop" art.

Also in the field of education was the opportunity provided for delegates to attend a rehearsal of a television programme utilizing museum staff and materials, one of a series which had proved to have a high popularity rating.

The nearby city of Oakland has three museums at present separately administered which are scheduled to be amalgamated and housed in a striking new complex designed by a leading firm of architects. The building and some of the concepts involved are arousing much interest among other United States and continental Museums.

Portland, Oregon.

The Art Museum has a fine collection of North West Indian material which is imaginatively displayed, as well as representative material from other cultures, while the Oregon Historical Society, at present waiting for new housing, has acquired a meaningful series of documents and bygoners. The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry with a lively programme of direct participation by grade and high school pupils and several sponsored installations also impressed with its vitality, as did the famous Oregon Zoo.

Seattle, Washington.

The American Association of Museums' tour culminated in Seattle with the 58th Annual Meeting held on 3 days which provided many seminars and lectures plus the opportunity of meeting members with similar interests from most areas of the United States. Visits were also made to the Seattle Art Museum with its justly famous Oriental collections, and the striking Science building at the site of the World Fair which impressed with the clever use of synchronised sound effects and projections.

Denver, Colorado.

The first stage of the private sector of the tour was at Denver where the Museum has a justly famous series of life-zone habitat displays. Here I enjoyed the kind hospitality of Dr. and Mrs. A.M. Bailey who also arranged for me to visit the original sites of several of the local habitat displays in the company of Mr. Robert Niedrach who is in charge of all exhibition work.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

My hosts in this city were Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Nelson who with their son had visited the Canterbury Museum in 1956. The staff of the Milwaukee Public Museum were in the process of transferring from the old building into a magnificent new building erected by the city at a cost of 7½ million dollars. While one could not claim that this generous support of their institution by the citizens of Milwaukee was typical, it is certainly indicative of the wide interest taken in most American Museums by the local community.

Chicago, Illinois.

Visits were made to the Chicago Art Institute and the Museum of Natural History both of which enjoy large permanent buildings and rich collections. Of particular interest are the famous Hoffman bronzes of Racial types and the new Ethnological gallery covering the Pacific area. In common with all larger American Museums the Chicago Museum of Natural History seems to be faced with a large programme of remodelling and renovation of exhibits which have been serving the public for twenty or thirty years, and this is very demanding of finance and staff time especially when coupled with new exhibition projects.

The Chicago Museum of Natural Science and Industry with hundreds of young visitors was certainly a most lively museum of this type with many working models, tape recordings, projected films and other devices to stimulate and intrigue. Here again, as in Los Angeles and Portland, much of the expense of designing and installing individual sections was met by commercial and industrial sponsors.

Cincinnati, Ohio.

Notable for an Art Museum which has a highly selective collection more particularly in the applied arts, and the Taft Museum, the original residence of the family now open to the public and most carefully furnished and maintained.

Ottawa.

A brief two day visit provided an opportunity to see the fine National Art Gallery which was holding a special exhibition of Eskimo stone sculpture, and to drive to the recently established Upper Canada Village, some miles out of the city. Here a number of authentic 18 - 19th Century houses and public buildings have been carefully set up as a typical farming community of the colonial period, and furnished with painstaking care and detail. Local residents are employed to demonstrate rural skills and cottage handicrafts and specially bred animals in adjoining paddocks allow visitors to see the type of stock kept by farmers of the period. At the time of my visit the roads and paths were muddy from a recent shower and this circumstance made the illusion of stepping back into history almost uncannily effective.

Toronto, Ontario.

Returning through Toronto provided an opportunity to see the Royal Ontario Museum with its extensive collection of Chinese Art, and new Geology Hall incorporating many original and striking features in display technique.

New York

Many of the Galleries in the Natural History Museum are at present being remodelled and I was most interested to hear of plans for a new Pacific Hall since this is to include a New Zealand section.

In the Hall of Man much clever work has been done with anatomical diagrams etched on perspex and there is a fine series of reconstructed heads of fossil man built up from casts of skull fragments.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is justly famous for the range and quality of its collections which must surely satisfy every interest. During my visit I was privileged to see something of the activities of the Costume Institute which in addition to maintaining attractive public displays also provides bona fide students with facilities to examine authentic historical garments in private study rooms.

Opportunity was also taken while in New York to visit the Guggenheim Museum, The Cloisters, The Frick Collection, The Jewish Museum, and the New York City Museum.

London.

When visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum I had the privilege of meeting the Director, Sir Trenchard Cox (who at that time was also the President of the British Museums Association) and a member of his staff, Mr. Hugh Wakefield who had been with me on the A.A.M. State Department tour. Several of the V and A galleries were currently undergoing re-arrangement and to judge by the recently completed Costume Gallery the results should prove most attractive.

It is not possible to do more than mention the British Museum, National Gallery, London Museum and Kensington Palace, and the many other Museums of London, but like others before me I was greatly moved and thrilled to actually stand before great treasures of Art and History long familiar from books and illustrations.

A most pleasant duty while in London was to call at the offices of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to convey in person my thanks and appreciation for the many wonderful opportunities made possible by the Foundation's generous grant. In the absence of Mr. Thornton on business I was received by Miss Hyams, Mr. Mills and Mr. Rye who made me most welcome.

Paris.

On arrival in Paris I was pleased to meet Mr. Gordon White, another Gulbenkian grantee, and together we attended several meetings of International consultative committees of I.C.O.M.

Apart from this official business we also managed in the time available to see most of the Paris Museums including the Louvre, the Museums of Man, Decorative Arts, the Sea, National Monuments, Oriental Arts, Science and the Petite Palace.

London.

Returning to London for a few days prior to attending the British Museums Conference in New Castle upon Tyne I took the opportunity to visit several of the smaller outlying museums, and to call at the Natural History Museum where I met Miss Edwards the Chief Display Officer who kindly introduced me to other members of the staff including Mr. R.H. Harris who was doing some interesting experimental work with the technique of "freeze-drying" animal and vegetable specimens. This was following the line of work being done at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. which I was to visit at a later stage of my journey.

Before leaving London I saw the Commonwealth Institute which is a "new" Museum in many senses of the word. Only recently established on a new site this modern architectural complex has exploited to the full original ideas in colour, layout and lighting. The result is not to everyone's taste but on the whole I found it stimulating and attractive.

New Castle upon Tyne

Travelling via Leicester provided an opportunity to visit the Art Gallery and Museum and also to see the several historic houses which the City Corporation has taken over and administers as branch museums dealing with local civil, military and industrial history.

The British Museums Association's annual four day conference met at the University Physics building while most of the delegates were housed at a University hostel with a bus shuttle service to and from meetings twice a day. The most significant topic discussed at the meeting was the recent government report on British Museums which favoured the establishment of a number of regional councils which would give practical assistance to small museums with limited staff and resources.

As an observer I was also impressed by the large number of local body members who attended as delegates and who obviously had a very real interest in the affairs of the Association.

At the end of the conference delegates had a choice of three excursions one of which was to the Roman wall. This was the one I chose and it proved intensely interesting as we had a splendid guide in the person of Professor I.A. Richmond (Professor of Roman Archaeology, Oxford) whose informed commentary made this famous and historic site come vividly to life.

Returning to London via Durham, York, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Coventry, enabled me to see something of Museum development in each of these cities.

The University of Durham has the Gulbenkian Museum, a fine modern building attached to the school of Oriental Studies and housing a rich collection of jades and ceramics, while at York I saw the famed "street" a distant prototype of our own Colonists Gallery display.

The Corporation of Leeds maintains "Temple Newsam" an especially fine old mansion which is beautifully kept as a public museum and houses a collection of paintings and furniture of appropriate periods. The same pattern had been followed in Manchester where a former private residence now houses a museum of costume.

The Art Galleries of Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham possess many fine paintings long familiar from reproductions and the sight of the original was always an exciting experience.

Apart from its famous Cathedral Coventry also has a modern museum which has very wisely been kept regional in theme and tells the story of the countryside, the city, and local industries.

London.

The few days spend in London before returning to the United States gave a last opportunity of visiting places of special interest in and around London including the Queen Gallery adjoining Buckingham Palace where a choice and representative selection from the treasures of the Royal collection are on public view in an attractively designed room.

Other pieces from the Royal collections were seen on visits to Hampton Court and Windsor Castle, each of which in its own way provides a fascinating glimpse of history.

A one day excursion to Brighton enabled me to see the Regency Exhibition then being staged at the Royal Pavilion. This had been arranged with great skill and taste and the charm of the whole effect was emphasized by the soft music drifting through the state apartments from a source in the music room.

Boston Massachusetts

Boston is a city with a natural pride in its early history, and this interest in the formative years of European settlement shows itself not only in the many historic buildings which are carefully preserved and maintained but also in the Museum of Fine Arts which has several + + + + + furnished early American rooms in addition to much fine silver and glass from the Colonial period.

Nearby in the town of Cambridge there are several specialised museums associated with Harvard University including the Botanical Museum which features the famous collection of glass flowers and plants. The beauty and accuracy of these models has made them justifiably famous and large numbers of visitors pay the small admission charge which is made for this section of the museum. I would imagine that in terms of attendance figures this would be one of the most successful botanical displays in the world.

New York, N.Y.

A brief return visit to New York made it possible to spend more time at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Natural History Museum as well as seeing the New York Museum (specialising in the history of the city) and the Jewish Museum (liturgical silver and contemporary paintings).

I also enjoyed a tour of the United Nations building which houses some fine art pieces presented by various member States and also provides a tasteful illustration of some of the best Scandinavian interior decoration to be seen outside of those countries.

Philadelphia

The Museum of Art with a large and varied collection of high quality material is notable for the care with which suitable settings have been provided for objects of different periods and cultures. Incorporated into the building are a Japanese Tea House

and garden, a Chinese Temple and Palace Hall, an early Hindu Temple court, together with Gothic, Elizabethan and later period rooms making up a fascinating historical sequence.

Philadelphia also enjoys a fine University Museum which houses the fruits of many major Archaeological expeditions including some superb pieces from ancient Ur which can only be matched by those in the British Museum.

Washington D.C.

Washington with its many museums and National monuments presents something of a challenge to those whose time is limited and I found myself hard put to cover the list I had made out. However with the kind assistance of Dr. D. Squires I saw much of the detailed planning now underway in the Smithsonian Museum which houses a vast collection in several separate buildings and found much of great interest including a large model of a whale in fibre glass, a fine mineral gallery, and recently completed biological Halls. In addition two members of the staff were engaged full time on research with freeze-drying equipment and had produced some very satisfying results with reptiles, amphibians, birds and small mammals. The Smithsonian has a large staff but with such a big programme ahead including the installation of exhibits in the new Museum of Science and Technology they are working to a tight schedule.

Through the good offices of my Washington hosts I was able to join a special tour of the White House and see something of the recent changes in decor and furnishings which have occasioned much favourable comment.

Visits were also made to the Freer and National Galleries of Art, and the Capitol and National Archives.

Before leaving Washington I had the pleasure of meeting again Mr. Patterson and Mr. Hammond of the American Association of Museums together with other members of the National Headquarters staff.

Williamsburg, Virginia.

Much has been written about the fine work of restoration and reconstruction at Colonial Williamsburg and I was eager to see this famous 18th Century town for myself. The orientation centre with introductory displays and twin theatres screening a specially produced film provides visitors with a brief outline of the scope and purpose of the restoration, and to someone like myself whose knowledge of early American history is distinctly patchy this was a most useful and informative introduction.

Apart from the many houses and public buildings all faithfully furnished and maintained in perfect condition, visitors may see the Rockefeller Folk Art Museum which is quite a gem among small specialised museums, since each of the rooms has an unobtrusive decor particularly suited to the paintings and objects displayed.

Oakridge, Tennessee

After some difficulty with flights because of unsettled weather I arrived in Oakridge where the Atomic Energy Commission maintains the American Museum of Atomic Energy. The Director Dr. H. Byck explained that much of the Museum's work is carried out by means of trained lecturers who between them visit most States during the course of a year, giving lectures and demonstrations at High Schools, Community Centres and State and County Fairs. These talks are supplemented by specially prepared displays which are set up by the lecturer, or carried as a more permanent and extensive exhibition in large vans which become in effect moveable display halls. Two or three members of the team of lecturers are usually stationed at the Atomic Energy Museum where they are available to give conducted tours to groups of visitors. At the time of my visit the display department were busy with plans for the Atomic Energy Commission's pavilion at the New York World Fair 1964 and had built a most intriguing scale model incorporating many original ideas.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Museum of Natural History at Louisiana State University maintains several display galleries which while they are designed for teaching purposes, still draw large numbers of the public who obviously enjoy the regional, ecological dioramas which form the bulk of the exhibits. The University also maintains a suite of period rooms and these also serve the dual purpose of teaching material and public recreation.

Houston, Texas.

The Art Museum in addition to a lively series of special exhibitions planned to interest children, houses a fully accredited Art School where students can work towards a University degree in Fine Arts. If one may use the term this seemed to me to be an example of cultural symbiosis since both gallery and school were obviously flourishing.

Flagstaff, Arizona.

The Museum of Northern Arizona was of interest on several counts being privately endowed with no claim on State or Municipal funds, supporting many research activities with the emphasis on field work, and having an attractive series of displays illustrating the natural history and ethnology and archaeology of the region. Two other rather more specialised regional museums were seen during a memorable visit to Grand Canyon. These were maintained by the Park Authority and

portrayed something of the Geological and human history of this truly spectacular sight. During my time in Flagstaff I was the guest of Mr. W. Breed who some years previously had studied in New Zealand under a Fulbright scholarship. As the grateful recipient of so much private and official hospitality it was comforting to know that New Zealand does provide study facilities for some visiting students, and one would hope that additional schemes might be developed in the future so that more Museum professionals might have the opportunity of visiting the Pacific area.

Returning home via Los Angeles and Honolulu I had to face the difficult task of evaluating (rather too suddenly) the multitude of impressions and experiences gained during five months of travel.

The greater part of what I saw more than lived up to my expectations, there were few disappointments though occasionally I found that skilful photography can present a not altogether truthful picture of galleries and buildings which is not substantiated by personal inspection.

There seems to be a universality of problems amongst museums which is encouraging in a negative way, for at least we know that we suffer in good company, and it is salutary to find that increased incomes and larger staffs do not of themselves remove all difficulties.

Looking back on so much of interest it does seem that the most important aspect of the tour was the opportunity it provided to see New Zealand Museums and Galleries in perspective, and to relate our own endeavours to the work of others. This is of necessity a personal experience which cannot be undergone vicariously though the increased vision which one hopes would follow will I trust contribute to the general good.

This report, originally submitted to the Canterbury Museum Trust Board, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, and the American Association of Museums, is now issued as an appendix to Newsletter 17 in the hope that it may prove of general interest to members.

Anyone who may desire more detailed information on any of the topics mentioned is invited to write to the author
C/- Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.