



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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in that order of validity. Obviously a combination of all three is desirable.

Yours faithfully,

Adrian Oswald.

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THE ROLE OF THE AUCKLAND MUSEUM

IN THE COMMUNITY.

By V. F. Fisher

The object of this article is to present a brief statement of the work of the ethnological department of the Auckland Museum in the community. First a concise declaration of the aims and objects of a museum may place what is said later in its proper perspective. The major functions of a museum are;- to collect and to preserve; to classify, to study the collections and using the collections, to educate. Education, of course, includes the exhibition of material - the displays, special exhibitions - and many other facets of instruction as well. In particular we shall elaborate certain angles of the work, which are important for readers of the Newsletter, and merely mention other sides of the work which are no less important in any consideration of the total picture.

Obviously once collections have been acquired much time is devoted to the classification, sorting, recording, accessioning, processing and generally caring for the specimens. They must be stored according to some recognized plan, so that they are in good order, are readily accessible and can be located quickly when required. All this occupies much time and really is one of the continuing major tasks to which there is no end. At the present time the ethnological department possesses some 40,000 specimens, with a representative series displayed in the public galleries, while behind the scenes in the research room are many thousands carefully registered, tabulated and stored according to geographical regions. This material is not restricted to archaeological collections recovered from the soil, but includes ethnographical specimens obtained directly from the people who made and used the objects.

It is the policy of the Museum to specialise, firstly, on New Zealand and secondly on the Pacific area. For the remainder of the world a cross-section of material sufficient to give a hint of the culture of any area is attempted. Always, as there must be in any collection, there are gaps. Now let us scan some of the areas re-

presented in the collection. As indicated, the Maori collection takes pride of place and is exceedingly rich. The Polynesian collections are also rich, and include numerous rare items, but there are gaps due to the fact that the material culture of that area had been well exploited before Auckland Museum came into existence. Of special importance within Polynesia is the collection of stone implements from Pitcairn Island, including adzes, chisels, awls, grinding stones, sandstone files, and some stone fish hook material.

When we turn to Melanesia the general picture is even better, for it has been possible for the most part, to secure a good representative collection. Thus Papua, the Solomon Islands (especially Bougainville and Buka) the New Hebrides, Santa Cruz Islands, the Banks, Fiji, New Caledonia, New Britain, New Ireland and the Admiralty Group are all well represented. Some of the Polynesian outliers in Melanesia, such as Tikopia Rennell and Bellona provide a fair range of specimens. For Australian New Guinea the collections are good but for Indonesian New Guinea they are scanty. In Micronesia, except for the Gilbert Islands which is quite rich, the collections are sparse.

For Indonesia, there are very many gaps with a reasonable collection only from Borneo, or more strictly Sarawak, Africa, Australia, North America provide average coverage, while South America is poorly represented, as are India and most parts of Indo-China. Material from China consists mainly of ceramics and the Japanese collections are poor. There is a small, but valuable collection of pre-historic material from England, Denmark, the Swiss Lake dwellings, Egypt and parts of Asia Minor. Finally for good measure there are coins-including Greek and Roman - and the material associated with the European arts such as ceramics, glass, enamels, ivories, Victoriana and the English and colonial by-gones and historical specimens. It will be readily seen that this rich and diverse collection, all of which relates to man, provides display, study and comparative material the value of which cannot be assessed.

Obviously the significance and importance of this extensive accumulation of material is very much enhanced by the co-operation of the natural history departments which may be called on for help in the identification of zoological or botanical material. Of inestimable value is the Museum library, which in the areas of special interest, namely New Zealand and the Pacific, is exceptionally rich and comprehensive. To have under the same roof a reference library of such high quality is a tremendous asset to anyone studying the collections.

What duties in addition to those already enumerated fall within the scope of the department? Much time is occupied answering requests for information, identifying specimens, giving opinions on the genuineness or otherwise of objects, and preparing reading references on special topics. Assistance in these respects is offered to organized groups as well as to individuals. Frequently there are days when most of the time is occupied with enquiries, and this is surely a certain indication that the public is fully aware of the value of the Museum as a source of information. In short, the demands of the special student and the non-specialist must both be met. Continual requests

are received for the loan of material, to illustrate talks, for television programmes, and for use by a wide range of educational groups. Of recent years the pre-history department of the University of Auckland and lecturers of the Adult Education Centre have borrowed specimens. There is a persistent demand for talks, lectures and guided visits and this demand is met whenever possible.

Mention should be made of the work of the School Service and the Extension Service both of which make considerable use of material made available from the ethnological department. The School Service distributes travelling cases over a big network of schools which virtually covers the greater part of the Auckland provincial area. The Extension Service has some thirty-five travelling displays which are exhibited in the smaller centres.

In March 1960 the new building was opened, consequently it has been possible to organise the reserve collections in a satisfactory manner so that they are readily accessible. The potential of the department to effect a more decided impact on the community is certainly very great, but owing to lack of staff and finance it is not being fully exploited. The staff of the department for a lengthy period has consisted of an ethnologist, a part time recorder and some honorary assistance. An improvement in annual income would of course solve the staff problem, and this would lead to the community receiving more assistance from the Museum in a variety of ways.

The financial problem should be solved this year when a Bill will be placed before Parliament to provide for statutory contributions from Local Bodies in the greater part of the Auckland provincial area, based in part on the rateable capital value and with diminishing factors for distance from Auckland city, and in part on threepence per head of the population.

It is hoped, too, that the collections will be further enriched in the future, when, as the result of the activities of the Auckland University Archaeological Society material excavated will be added to the museum collection, after final studies have been completed. This is in line with recommendations made by Mr. J. Golson when he was responsible for pre-history and re-affirmed by his successors Mr. R. Green and Mr. W. Shawcross. In this way Auckland Museum will become the repository for highly important material, which will have complete and thorough documentation. This policy should prove beneficial to both University and Museum, because the University will not be troubled with storage and curatorial problems, whereas, with improved finances, the Museum will be in a position to undertake these duties effectively. It follows that the University in return will be accorded borrowing privileges to fit in with its teaching programme. The aggregation of the large quantity of material which will be excavated in the next decade or so, with the extensive collections already held by the Museum, will enable students at all levels to undertake comparative and other studies much more effectively. It is understood that there must be a considerable delay from the time any given material is excavated to the stage when it is handed over to the Museum, and the decision when to take such action must rest

with the University. All this heralds much closer co-operation which will be mutually beneficial and advantageous to a very high degree.

In conclusion, we would stress, that though throughout this article reference has been made to collections, specimens, material, the important fact which is always of paramount importance is that such material has been made by people, it has formed part of a culture, and always it must be thought of in such a light. This accent on people does not end here, for surely the true value of this material is only realised today, when it has value and meaning for the present generation, that is when it is interpreted. This may take the form of scientific study, of elucidating a school lesson, of firing the imagination, of assisting some practical person to make a better basket or exploit a new form. When any of these things have been achieved the material has fulfilled a purpose and the cultural life of the person or group has thereby been greatly enriched.

Site Recording Scheme

Auckland Filekeeper.

The new Auckland filekeeper is  
Mrs W. Spring-Rice,  
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