

Notes and News

MUSEUMS (*see* ANTIQUITY, March 1944, pp. 42-9)

Mr W. F. Grimes has clearly stated the case for a new policy on Museums, and it is to be hoped that the planners of our 'new world' will not overlook this item, the social importance of which has for so long been under-estimated. It is unfortunate that space is not available for him to expand his theme, and if he was so able, I am sure the points raised here would have been covered.

There is a need for several different types of museums with distinct functions, such as:—

National Museums for each convenient historic period, housing all types of material where students and research workers can survey the complete field either by actual specimen or by copy.

National Typographical Museums housing all the specimens of one particular implement, vessel, etc., irrespective of period or provenance, for students and research workers.

Regional Museums based on geographical areas, the history of which could be conveniently displayed, where, by careful selection and display of material and models, etc., the public could easily grasp the main historic developments in relation to the rest of the country. Combined with this could be a depository for material discovered in the area for students and research workers.

Local or Town Museums where the growth and development of the locality or town could be graphically displayed for the public and schoolchildren and space left for travelling displays arranged by the National Museums illustrating one particular subject. These could be continually circulating round the Regional and local museums where they would be on show for a month at a time.

Natural History Museums could be organized very much on the same pattern, but those portraying the local industry or craftsmanship require a greater regional or local concentration where the modern workers could derive pride in their trade or craft. But the great mistake of crowding all these different displays, Historic, Natural History, Scientific and Industrial into one building should be avoided.

Another point omitted by Mr Grimes is the function of the Museum Curator. It is a very regrettable feature of the present system that no place is found for the Archaeologist. Work in the field has now become a highly specialized job and should be quite distinct from that of mending, storing and displaying material in the museum. The Regional and National Museums should employ a staff of field workers trained in the latest archaeological technique, working in close co-operation with the Museum specialists. While their work will overlap at certain points, it is no longer possible for one person to fulfil both functions adequately, if our future excavation reports are to be as full as they should be.

In conclusion, Mr Grimes is to be congratulated on calling attention to these pressing needs; as he so rightly stresses, only very few people are interested in this aspect of post-war planning, but if those few are keen enough and vociferous enough, some attention may be paid to this urgent social need.

GRAHAM WEBSTER.

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As Mr Webster says, in the space available I could not deal with all the varied questions that arise in connexion with museum organization.

Most people would I think agree that several classes of museums are necessary. But just how many types we should have, or what their functions should be I would not like to try to set out in a short note. The first task of any central organization should be to carry out a survey which would assess needs in relation to both population and subject-interest. Existing museums would no doubt usually fit without difficulty into the resulting scheme, which should be developed as funds and personnel become available.

In formulating such plans common sense is as necessary as idealism. Financial and administrative factors are bound to set a limit on the number of museums. (And there are other cultural activities to be provided for.) I must confess, for instance, that I see no reason why historic, natural history and other subjects should not be combined in one regional or local museum. Most of our largest local museums are 'composite' museums, and some of them are first-rate. The point is surely that whatever subjects a museum illustrates should be properly organized and exhibited in themselves, with their points of contact brought out wherever possible. In fact, I would put it more strongly and say that in most cases such combinations are positively desirable—and implicit in what I have written on this subject. I would like to see each case considered on its merits without any attempt to establish set rules beforehand.

When Mr Webster talks of national museums 'for each convenient period' it seems to me that much must depend on what he means by 'periods'. It is a self-evident truth that history is a continuous process; and the whole trend of research is to show how complicated and interlocked our 'periods' are. My own view, for what it is worth, is that we need a National Museum of British Antiquities—or whatever the suitable title might be—carved out of the present British Museum, to include the necessary comparative European material. (The other divisions and re-arrangements of the British Museum which I, and I believe other people, would like to see need not concern me here). There should be a national folk collection; and industrial and scientific developments would continue to be dealt with by the Science Museum as at present, with the Victoria and Albert as our chief art museum. The last two must in the nature of things cover a wider field. In the case of the historical collections a certain degree of artificiality in the divisions will be unavoidable and there would obviously be some overlapping. But if this is what Mr Webster means by convenient periods I should agree with him.

The addition of specialized museums or collections to this nucleus might well be necessary. But I don't like the sound of typographical museums. Typographical series must be built up and studied within a cultural framework if they are to have real meaning. We can't set the specimen back in isolation on its pedestal again.

In my original article I could say practically nothing about museums and research. It is a very wide subject, involving not merely the functions of the museum itself, but also the training, qualifications and status of the museum-curator. Again I would urge that we should not allow our activities to be split up into separate compartments. We don't want our museums to continue to overcrowd their cases in a way which confuses the needs of the lay public with those of the research-worker and specialist. So too the day of the museum-curator who is only a research-worker is at an end; his true place is in some kind of research-organization.

But it would be unwise, and bad for museum and public alike, to deny the museum-curator opportunities for field-work, including excavation. Surely one of the great weaknesses of the present museum position is the absence of outdoor contacts with a subject the whole essence of which is out-of-doors. It is true, as Mr Webster says, that

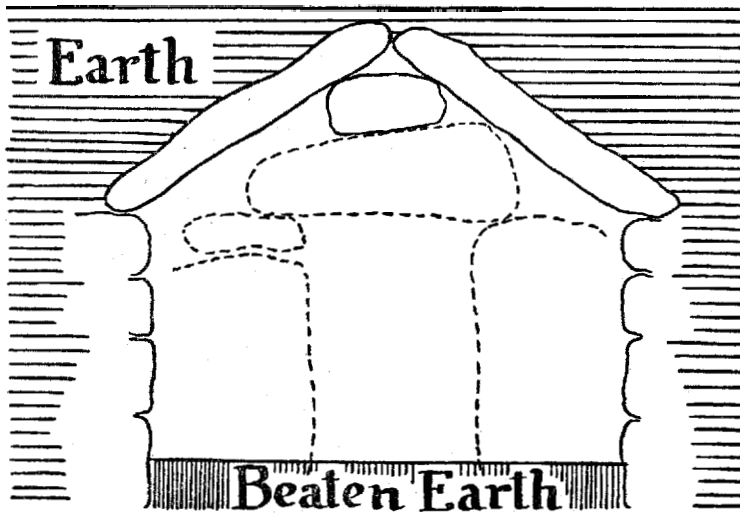


Fig. I

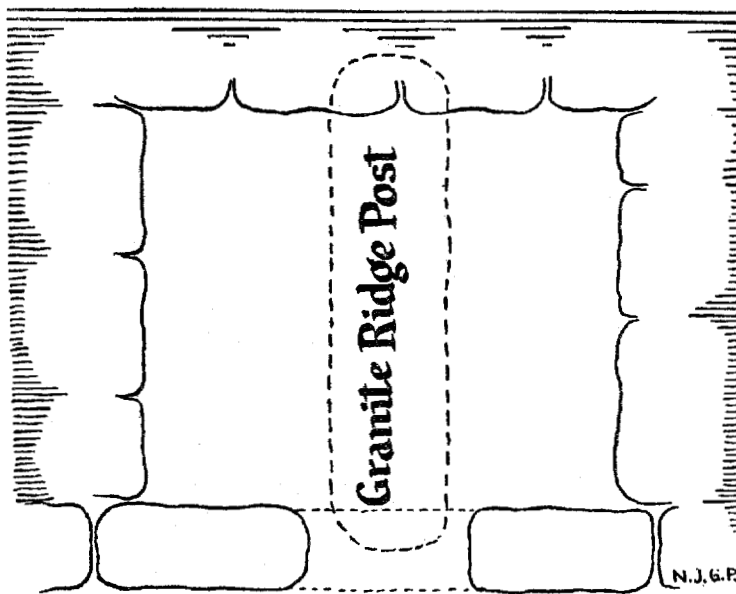


Fig. II



GOOSE-HOUSE AT LITTLEJOHNS, NEAR ST. AUSTELL (*see p. 208*)

(i) cross-section. (ii) ground plan

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field-work is a specialized job ; but the curator should know something about it and take his share in it, just as any excavator worthy of the name should know something—and the more the better—of the treatment and care of the material which ultimately becomes museum specimens. (To my mind one of the great dangers that confronts us is this excessive specialization. I may be wrong, but there seems to be a growth in the number of people who can apparently excavate with only the vaguest understanding of what they find, or of how to deal with it once found ; sometimes even with little grasp of the general problems of the period to which their site belongs.)

It seems to me that here too the difference is not in kind, but in degree. The museum-curator must be first of all a museum-man. He can't therefore tackle large-scale excavations involving him in prolonged absences from his museum or in long periods of work on their results. But there is field—and excavation—work of a more limited kind, on small sites or specific problems, that he can and should do, as in some places he already does. How bigger undertakings should be dealt with is a question that belongs in the first place to the wider field of archaeological organization, involving as it does such important questions as the sums of money available for archaeological research and the sources from which they are derived.

W. F. GRIMES.

GOOSE-HOUSES (PLATE)

At Littlejohns, on the north-western flank of Hensbarrow in mid-Cornwall, is a small group of three ancient goose-houses. One has been largely destroyed with the removal of a Cornish 'hedge' in which it was built. The rest are intact. Both are built into a granite hedge,* which consists of a double wall of granite or 'moorstone' boulders, with a filling of earth. The hedges are themselves probably of a very considerable age, though it is possible that the goose-houses were let into a hedge already built.

The larger of the two is at the side of the narrow lane leading to the small upland croft of Littlejohns. The entrance, 14 inches by 20, is built of two granite side-posts, with a lintel. The compartment within is walled with small granite blocks, and measures 2 feet 10 inches deep and 3 feet 3 inches wide. The roof consists of a single transverse monolith, on which are laid granite slabs, thus forming a ridge roof of very gentle slope. The whole has been earthed over to a depth of at least a foot. The wall is thickened on its inner side by the addition of a bank of earth to contain the compartment. The floor is of beaten earth. The side-posts have plug-holes, so that a door was probably hung.

The second is smaller, only 24 inches by 20 in ground plan, but is in all respects similar. It lies in the corner of a small paddock of some 30 feet by 24. The granite posts alone remain of the third. I was told that there is another and similar goose-house in the upland parish of St. Wenn, to the north. Others have been observed in the Land's End district, usually contrived in a thickened hedge, and roofed with granite slabs. They have occasionally been found excavated in soft, decomposed granite, and even in the crumbling rubble drift of the 'head'.

It may not be too fanciful to link these humble structures with the prehistoric passage-graves and fogous of West Cornwall, which they resemble, somewhat in plan and construction.

N. J. G. POUNDS.

* See O. G. S. Crawford, on 'The Work of Giants', *ANTIQUITY*, x, 162-74.



GOOSE-HOUSE AT CARNA-QUIDDEN, CORNWALL
Ph. O. G. S. Crawford

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