

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

School Museums

BY WILLIAM WYNDHAM

being his Presidential Address at the Minehead Meeting, 23 June 1931

I HAVE determined to speak to you to-day about Museum teaching in this County and about our County Museums, omitting Bath (which is separate from the County educationally), for three reasons :

Firstly, that you have done me the honour to elect me as an Hon. Life Member some years ago, and as President in the present year, because of the interest which I have shown in the Museums and in Museum teaching in this County.

Secondly, that while I am interested in nearly all Museum subjects, I have devoted special attention to no one subject in particular, consequently, I might talk better about education in connection with Museums than about any one Museum subject.

Thirdly, that having been a member of eight Lecture Trusts for teaching County History and Archæology to seven Secondary Schools and to some of the pupils of the Elementary Schools of Taunton, Wells, Weston, and Yeovil for some ten years more or less, I have acquired from many people some little information about the teaching of Museum subjects.

I am not the first of your Presidents who has spoken to you on Museums and Education. Sir William Boyd Dawkins was, and Mr. Hobhouse still is a keen advocate of using our County Museum to more effect in education. Sir William Boyd Dawkins was very eager that it should be done. He urged

that we should get rid of duplicates and foreign specimens and re-arrange our collections to facilitate the giving of instruction to the children. I sincerely agree with his ideas in desiring that more instruction should be given to the young people of Somerset, but do not equally agree with him as to the method.

Our Museum is the County Museum, and as a County Museum should keep more specimens to record what has been found in this County than is necessary in the case of the other Somerset Museums.

Even granted that we did all that he suggested, we could not get all the children of the County to visit our Museum. Some places are too far away. It would be better to have minor local Museums in certain places for giving elementary instruction to as many children as possible.

Many of these local Museums already exist, such as those at Bridgwater, Bruton, Frome, Glastonbury, Wells, Weston-super-Mare and Yeovil.

After the teachers have discovered which of the pupils are really interested, small parties of the best of them might be brought to our Museum at Taunton or to the Museums at Bath and Bristol.

Now we will first of all deal with Museums. I was wondering the other day how one might define a Museum.

I think a Museum is either a collection or collections of exhibits to illustrate either wholly or partially such subjects as Geology, Archæology, History, Industry, Manufactures, Art and Biology.

A Museum may exhibit specimens of only a part of a subject, such as the Booth Museum at Brighton, which contains a collection of British Birds only.

The Wells Museum illustrates the Local Archæology. My Students' Museum at Yeovil, Archæology and History treated as the Story of England, especially Somerset. Our Museum at Taunton has several departments. But the number of departments is immaterial. Some of the best Museums have one department only. All Museums are limited in some way, either the number of groups of subjects illustrated, or the groups themselves, are limited. We limit our Archæology to Somerset, our birds to Somerset or at least British Birds, or at least we

wish to do so. That is quite right, our Museum is the Somerset County Museum.

Museums may be classified in several ways. But we will take the degree of importance. First of all the National Museums, then the major local Museums, such as the Museums of the larger towns as Manchester and Bristol, the Museums of the County Societies, and the better Museums of the smaller towns, such as the Salisbury and South Wilts Museum. Next the minor local Museums, and lastly, what I will term, the Student Museums, such as my Students' Museum at Yeovil, and the Museums of the Public and Secondary Schools, though more than a few of these would rank above some of the minor local Museums, yet they are not Public Museums in the ordinary way.

The different classes of Museums differ slightly in object. Taking our Somerset Museums. Our Museum exists not only to teach, but also to illustrate the Archæology, Flora, Fauna, etc., of the County, not to mention that our collections might be used for research, consequently our collections of exhibits in the various classes must be fuller than those of the other Museums in the County, which should be designed principally for local educational purposes.

While I am talking about our Museum, which ranks very honourably among British museums, and Mr. Gray is to be sincerely congratulated upon the excellent work which he has done, I think I should say that it would have been much better if we had supported him properly in his work. We have never found enough money to do that as we should. We have such fine collections that if they were properly exhibited, our Museum would rank yet higher still. Not only have we failed to provide the necessary accommodation, but we have only just begun to find him the skilled assistance which he requires.

I should like to make a few remarks about these other Somerset Museums. All of them should be definitely arranged to facilitate education, and the exhibits properly ticketed and labelled. Some of them are very good as far as they go, but even they could be very considerably improved and developed. And some are in need of very great improvement. Now, we should not by any means aim at uniformity in these local

Museums—and differences between them will arise quite naturally, and such differences will be all to the good, and should be encouraged and not frowned upon as unconventional. But one point in which they must all agree is that all the exhibits should be local or at least British. It matters little whether they have one department or more than one. If they have more than one, the departments should be in separate rooms. And they should be careful not to have an excess of specimens (duplicates would be worse), for numbers confuse the eye. There should be no foreign things, curios, or monstrosities. Such things are not educative, and are moreover, distracting. No unwanted specimen should be received from anybody. Some people send their rubbish to the Museum when spring-cleaning. How very necessary these local Museums will be educationally was foreshadowed by Mr. Howard at the opening of the Lecture Hall at Taunton. He said that from their point of view the use of Museums by the Schools was likely to increase rather than decrease in the future, and that when the school age was raised to 15, the museums would be very useful for teaching the unacademically-minded child, who was sick of books. The child would learn how progress went on by means of invention. How the British workmen of the past could give a good finish to things without the aid of machinery. How simple forms could be produced from Nature, without going through an Art school. That those who spent their lives in schools regarded the Museum as part of the training in the education of the future. Mr. Howard's opinions certainly show that I am not premature in urging the improvement of the Museums.

It may interest you to learn that the Trustees of the Lecture Trust at Yeovil are hoping to make the Students' Museum what it ought to be, to help in the education of the Yeovil schools, and that what I am urging other Somerset Museums to do, we are trying to bring about in our little Museum there.

Now we come to the Museum teaching for the Secondary Schools. To illustrate this I will take Yeovil School. I might equally well have taken any other boys' or girls' school which is having such lectures in spite of the fact that the lectures vary from school to school. The senior boys are

having six lectures yearly in a three years' course. First year, Old Stone Age to the Romans in Britain. Second year,—The Saxons to the Battle of Bosworth. Third year,—The Tudors to James II (1686).

The younger boys are having four lectures annually on various historical subjects. Upon one day in each year a party of boys is sent to places of interest. Latterly the headmaster has chosen to send them to Stonehenge, Old Sarum and Salisbury one year, for the next a party goes to Cleeve Abbey, Dunster Church and Castle, and the third year they go to Wells, Wookey Hole and Glastonbury. But he is free to send them elsewhere, as long as the object of the visit is according to the Trust Deed.

In addition to this the history master sometimes takes his class in the Students' Museum, illustrating his teaching with the specimens in the Museum, and this might be imitated with advantage elsewhere.

The teaching of English and French, as well as the teaching of History would benefit by a Museum of History and Archæology. You can read neither *Dickens* nor *Scott* nor most other contemporary English or French authors without coming across the mention of bygones, such as flint and steel, snuffers, etc., and as the pupils have mostly never seen flint and steel or snuffers, it is more directly instructive to be able to produce such things for them to see.

In the last sixty years scientific development has been so rapid that things of every-day use from the time of the Romans and earlier to when Dickens wrote have since become bygones. And it is a fact that the boys of a hundred years ago would have found it easier to have understood the things of every-day use in ancient Rome than the boys to-day would those which were used only 100–150 years ago in Somerset.

My Lecture Trusts for the Elementary Schools are giving five or six lectures to children in their last year at school on History or Archæology, and in some cases are sending the children for a visit to some place of historical interest. For instance, the Elementary Trust for Taunton have on several years taken a party of children to Cleeve Abbey.

This teaching on Museum subjects is not the only teaching

of its kind taking place in the County to-day. H.M. inspectors have been encouraging the National School Teachers to teach their children the story of the parish, its buildings and natural history.

I suppose the result of all this will be that we shall have some Museums where now there are none. Minehead with its Secondary School and visitors may want one.

If Minehead does, what departments should its Museum have? The natural history of Exmoor and the seashore; the local botany; the local geology; the local history and archæology? Well, it will have something to choose from. Up to 1832 Minehead used to return a member to Parliament. This should be commemorated in a Minehead Museum. Whatever form it takes, I think some day Minehead will have its Museum.