

RETROSPECT & PROSPECT 1975-1978

D.J.G. Griffin

In 1976 the Australian Museum was visited by more than 600 000 people, including 80 000 children in school classes; some 20 000 enquiries from the public were answered; the first stage of a new Mineral Gallery was opened; six temporary exhibitions were staged; a programme was initiated to send exhibitions to the outer suburbs of Sydney and a Museum Train to the country; a *Drop-in-after-school* education programme for local school children was started; some thirty research programmes were continued and more than sixty publications resulting from this research appeared. About 200 scientists and museologists from other parts of Australia and overseas visited to study the collections and consult with colleagues; the Museum's staff was involved with about forty professional, local, national and international societies and organisations, often taking a leading part.

The Australian Museum is recognised as one of the ten best natural history museums in the world in terms of the diversity and size of its collections, and the range of its scientific and educational activities. In the last ten years, as Strahan has pointed out in Chapter 9, an increasing amount of money has been obtained from granting agencies and to some extent from the commercial sector to support these activities. In 1976 some forty-five percent of total research expenditure was supported from outside the state government. In the last three years the Museum's success in obtaining funds from the Australian Research Grants Committee (which supports research on the basis of excellence) has been equivalent to that of a reasonably sized university department. (Between 1973 and 1975 it obtained eight percent of the total funds distributed for marine science to twenty organisations.) A report of the Australian Biological Resources Study in 1976 recognised the staff of the Australian Museum as the most highly qualified of any museum or herbarium in Australia. In the eight years to 1976 the rate of appointment of Museum staff to the prestigious 'research scientist' scale of the New South Wales Public Service has been much higher than in any other government agency. The rate of increase in visitors over the ten years to 1974 (seventy-eight percent) was much higher than that of other museums and galleries in Sydney; it is currently increasing at the annual rate of about sixteen percent, as high as that for national parks and higher than most other museums and galleries. Museums are usually thought of as dull places where very little happens; today these words can hardly be applied to the Australian Museum.

A number of threads run through the Museum's history: public support for the Museum; the contribution made by the Museum to the understanding of Australia's fauna and natural environment and pre-European culture; the various conflicts between the Board of Trustees, the director and the government. This chapter explores some of these themes and looks at some of the problems, and opportunities, of the future.

The Museum's founding very early in the history of the convict colony of New South Wales was almost certainly due to the fact that Alexander Macleay, the Colonial Secretary sent out in 1825, was an ardent (and prominent) naturalist.

PRESIDENTS, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

M.G. Pitman

1974-

DIRECTOR

D. J. G. Griffin

1976-

Early patronage of the Museum by Macleay and other prominent citizens continued through the 1850s when the staff of the Museum was small and close involvement of trustees with the affairs of the Museum was appropriate. In the 1860s and 1870s, the growth of the Museum and the strong personality of Gerard Krefft led to conflicts over the respective roles of the trustees and curator, culminating in Krefft's unauthorised dismissal—surely the worst blot on the Museum's history.

Although the Museum was founded shortly after European colonisation of Australia, it holds almost no specimens obtained before 1880. Why did representatives of much of the fauna, of the minerals and the ethnography of Australia *not* find their way into the collections in the early years? Some of the underlying causes do not relate solely to museums but pervade the whole history of Australia. Early Australia was, in effect, part of England, and dependence on England dominated life and attitudes into the 1900s. The struggle between the militia and goldminers in the 1850s was the culmination of conflicts between the maintenance of status by the English and a local claim for simple human dignity. After 1895 'Australians decided to remain British, believing that the Empire, like bourgeois society, would last forever . . . and began to draft a constitution which moored us all securely to the past', even though, as Gavin Souter has pointed out, 'the imperial and national sentiments of its people were relatively close to equilibrium'² when Australia technically became one nation in 1900. The attitude that final legal and constitutional authority for Australia resides in England persists even today. Time and again, moves for a more independent Australia have faded away. In that context it is only to be expected that the imperial or colonial attitude reflected in most other activities of the period would also influence scientific activities. There are, of course, other reasons. Much of the material obtained on early expeditions such as those of Sturt, Stuart, Mitchell, Grey and Leichhardt were sent 'home' to England. Many valuable specimens were retained in private collections. As late as the 1870s Krefft could rightly complain that individual trustees actively competed with the Museum for the best collections. In 1888 collections brought out from England, or gathered on many expeditions sponsored or organised by one or other of the Macleays, or obtained by private exchange, were given to the University of Sydney. The Macleay Museum was established—only to be neglected later by successive university administrations until the 1960s.

The earliest collections from Europe, Asia and Australia were located in England and Europe. Study of contemporary Australian specimens required reference to these collections and to the most recent scientific literature which, despite the setting up of the Subscription Library in Sydney in 1826, was extremely difficult to obtain in Australia. Thus, to send collections back to England was both logical and efficient. There was, moreover, a demand for these curiosities by influential British patrons. It must also be recognised that, from 1829 to 1860, there were only five years (1835-41) in which the Museum was administered by a competent naturalist: its possible contribution to science was thereby extremely limited. Not until the appointment of Krefft, and of the specialists recruited by Ramsay, could the Museum act as a truly responsible custodian of the natural and cultural heritage.

It remains to be asked how well the Australian Museum has contributed to increasing the understanding of Australia's natural environment and peoples. (This, after all, was previously and is still the fundamental role of natural history museums.) If the current knowledge of the diversity and evolution of Australia's fauna (terrestrial and aquatic) is used as a yardstick one might say that museums have not performed appropriately in Australia. It is only in the last two decades that we have come to have a reasonable knowledge of the terrestrial vertebrate fauna. The invertebrate



Desmond Griffin, director, 1976-

Staff of the Museum, 1977.



fauna is currently about thirty to seventy percent known, depending on the group in question. The study of terrestrial invertebrates, such as insects, spiders and other arthropods, remains a field with as vast horizons in Australia as anywhere else. The task of studying Australia's fauna has been made more difficult by the disinterest towards—even discouragement of—the study of taxonomy in Australian universities in the last half century. (Of the Museum's twenty-three scientific staff in 1976, only five were Australian-born and only three had undergone their entire university training in Australia.) The Australian Museum certainly played a major role in the early study of geology: the most prominent early geologist in Australia, W. B. Clarke, was the Museum's second secretary and later a trustee; Etheridge was both government palaeontologist and curator of the Museum. Until recently the Museum's contribution to anthropology has been small.

There is, however, a considerable record of achievement, even leaving aside the last ten years. This includes the contributions to the knowledge of Australia's insects by Musgrave and by Evans; of molluscs by Cox, Hedley, Iredale, Allan and McMichael; of crustaceans by Haswell, Whitelegge, McCullough, McNeill, Pope and Yaldwyn; of fishes by Ogilby, Waite, McCullough and Whitley; of the reptiles by Krefft, Kinghorn and Cogger; of birds by North, Ramsay and Keast; of mammals by Troughton; and of Aboriginal art by Etheridge and McCarthy. The Museum was a leader in general faunal surveys, commencing an investigation of Sydney Harbour in the 1870s and of Lord Howe Island in 1889. Expeditions were conducted throughout Australia, Antarctica, New Guinea and the Pacific. A public lecture series was begun in the 1860s, a scientific journal (the *Records of the Australian Museum*) in 1891, and a popular magazine (now *Australian Natural History*) in 1921. In recent times the Australian Museum, under Talbot's direction, was among the first natural history museums in Australia to strengthen its ecological work by the formation, in 1968, of a Department of Environmental Studies; in 1972 it established a special Conservation Section to take measures to conserve and restore its collections.

The director and trustees of the Australian Museum have seldom worked together successfully. The history of the Museum is cluttered with attempts to define their respective roles and, on occasions, with what can only be regarded as deliberate interference by the trustees in matters properly the responsibility of the director. At other times one perceives in the actions of certain directors a degree of overcaution hardly appropriate to the head of a major institution. With a small staff such conflicts and caution had severe effects on the advancement of the Museum; one is struck by the slowness of change in some areas of the Museum's responsibility over quite long periods.

Strahan has mentioned the conflicts within the trust in the 1870s and 1920s. Although on these occasions some of the trustees may be seen to have exceeded their responsibilities and frustrated the efforts of their colleagues and the director, it must be admitted that many activities—public education for instance—might have started earlier and developed more strongly if the trust and the director of the time had been more concerned to support the Museum than to protect their respective reputations and to plot against each other.

Certainly the trust has contributed to the greater success that the Museum has enjoyed more recently. Perhaps a clearer definition, within the Museum Act, of the role of the trust may have helped. That some change was necessary was obvious from the draft report of the Legislative Council's Committee of Investigation in 1874 (see Chapter 4). Exactly 100 years after the chairman of that committee stated, 'these trustees are in a position of almost perfect irresponsibility', preparation of new legis-



Conferring of title of Director Emeritus upon Dr Evans by Professor Michael Pitman, chairman of the Australian Museum Trust. At the rear, Ronald Strahan, master of ceremonies.

lation defining more clearly the Museum's role and the trust's responsibility was under way. The result was the Australian Museum Trust Act 1975. In that legislation the objects and powers of the trust were clearly spelled out, the size of the trust was reduced, provision was made for trustees to retire every four years (in rotation) and the responsibility of the director, as secretary to the trust, was clarified.

The existence of a trust responsible for policy decisions is a feature typical of most museums. It is also found in many other organisations involved in cultural and recreational activities, both government and non-government. A trust is similar in many ways to the board of directors of a company. Originally, most museum trusts had responsibility for the entire management and control of the organisations, but in recent times the staff has been employed by the Public Service Board, or its equivalent, in England, Australia and New Zealand (but not always in the United States). This has certainly created greater financial stability and led to more equitable conditions of employment but in some cases the change has been followed by some confusion of responsibility for policy between the trust and the bureaucracy. It must be admitted that problems occur from time to time in any situation where a chief executive (in a museum, the director) reports, or is responsible, to a committee (the Board of Trustees). A hiatus is created by this situation and entry into no-man's land by one side may meet with resistance from the other. Where, as in museums, the organisation has a heavy public involvement, the committee may consider itself solely



The 'Wandervan', a mobile collection of resource materials from the Museum to serve handicapped or institutionalised children. The van was donated by the Bank of New South Wales in 1978.

The Museum Train, 1978. These two carriages contain a comprehensive natural history exhibit, a tutorial area, and living quarters for two education officers. The train, which is away from Sydney for months at a time, remains for several days at a small town and then moves on.

representative of the public that the organisation serves. It is a sad fact that many committees, including boards of trustees, are prepared to continue to deal with minor matters: they give little attention to the identification of long-term objectives, to the determination of the means of achieving those objectives and to the evaluation of the organisation's performance. (This was the situation in the 1870s when the trustees were especially concerned to run the Museum in minute detail and in the early 1950s when they declined to consider Evans' proposals.) In a museum, if financial allocations are so low that the quality of collections cannot be maintained or the educational responsibilities cannot be fulfilled, any number of committee or sub-committee meetings will not, in themselves, improve the situation. Even in bad times an entrepreneurial director with the support of the trust achieves results: a director prepared to accept the status quo does not, whatever the quality of the trust. Yet every organisation needs appraisal from time to time by someone or some body outside that organisation; perhaps committees such as trusts are just not the right group to make that appraisal or perhaps the problem has been approached the wrong way. As Townsend remarks in his entertaining book on business, 'top management (the Board of Directors) is supposed to be a tree-full of owls—hooting when management heads into the wrong part of the forest.'³ (Townsend comments that he is unpersuaded that boards even know where the forest is.)

The Museum has had a reasonable standing in government circles only since Evans commenced as director in 1954. Wallace Wurth, who as an inspector from the Public Service Board helped to prepare the 1929 report highlighting the 'over-staffing' of the Museum, was, after some initial hostility to Evans, his major supporter in the successful moves to obtain a new building. From the 1950s the Museum's increased scientific respectability was demonstrated by an involvement of Museum scientists in teaching courses at universities.

There have been many problems of staffing the Museum. Restraints and contractions due to depressions and wars are explicable but the extraordinarily slow growth in some areas is not: other institutions grew and thrived at the same time as the Museum stood still. The cadet system, introduced in 1907, was managed deliberately so as to not produce graduates: permission to finish courses was not given. As Strahan has pointed out in Chapter 7, the science trainee scheme, begun in 1947, had the reverse effect, leading to graduates being employed in mundane semi-clerical work. This situation was changed by Evans, whose efforts led to the recruitment of assistants to the curators. Despite further increases in scientific support staff during Talbot's term, the provision of an adequate number of such staff remains a major priority today.

The Australian Museum's future success will depend a great deal on how it grapples with the same problems and opportunities that it faced in the past: its image in the community, its involvement in scientific and educational matters of importance to the community and the way in which it manages itself.

Museums exist to perform three functions—to collect, to conduct research using those collections, and to educate using the collections and the results of research. Conservation, the sum of those activities that contribute to the extension of the life of objects and retains them in the best possible condition for study and display, concerns both cultural and biological items collected by museums. The items in the collection cannot be displayed (and their value for research is diminished) if they are falling apart or their colours have faded. So far as natural history museums are concerned, it is only recently that the problems of conserving the collections have been recognised. Unlike the situation concerning items of metal or stone, knowledge of the processes

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

KANGAROOS

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

ING

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

MANAGING PARKS & RESERVES

PLANS OF MANAGEMENT



WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Wildlife management may be regarded as having at its aim, the maintenance of each species of native animal now existing in a viable population in the habitat in which each now exists. This aim is directed to almost entirely exemplified at present by a system of national parks and nature reserves. Wildlife protection and management is principally a state matter, except in the A.C.T. and the Northern Territory where it is under the control of the Australian Government. The Australian Government also organizes expeditions and thereby controls all international trade in native fauna. The aims and activities of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in N.S.W. are an example of Australian wildlife management practice and problems.



leading to breakdown of wood or feathers or other material of biological origin, of which anthropological artifacts are composed, is very poor. Research on such processes is an urgency. Identification of those items of most importance and in most danger must be a high priority: it is not enough to recognise that they were previously crowded together in unsuitable atmospheric conditions and to provide better storage conditions for already damaged items of immense value. The commencement of a training course for conservators at the Canberra College of Advanced Education in 1978 may help to overcome these problems in Australia if museums make positions available to which the graduates can be appointed.

Problems of the use of collections for research are almost as great. Registering and cataloguing items in a collection is extremely time-consuming; in the Australian Museum staff costs exceeding \$200 000 are incurred each year on this activity. Writing in a register and typing information on cards and labels is so time-consuming that little can be done to revise the system for older material in the collections and the system is wholly inadequate for efficient retrieval of information about geographic distribution and other attributes of the specimens. A computerised system would allow rapid access to the information and cost about one-tenth of the present system per catalogued item. Confusion about the essential purposes of computer-based data banks and mistakes by other organisations have brought opposition to the use of computers in some quarters. Nevertheless, it is likely that, unless the use of computers is introduced for collections about which information is frequently required, these will be of little value for many studies of the Australian fauna.

The conduct of research in museums poses continuing difficulties. To continue the appropriate balance of long-term and short-term programmes will require, at least in respect of the latter, better project planning and management as in other research institutions. Other problems such as salary structure and promotional opportunities are perhaps more persistent. The (Coombs) Royal Commission into the Australian Public Service⁴ has highlighted some of these problems as they occur in the public sector. Museums will probably continue to have difficulties in convincing the employing authority that recruitment of the best possible people, rather than of those who simply could do the job, is fundamentally important. Further, it may be too much to hope that the existence of a huge backlog of work in curating collections (so that the items will be available to the scientific community beyond the Museum) will come to be regarded as of at least equal importance to a backlog of clerical work and so justify the appointment of more staff. Staff at each level might then be able to work more effectively in regard to their training and skills and the purposes for which they are employed.

Natural history museums have traditionally conducted research on classification of animals (and sometimes, plants). These studies have led to broader evolutionary studies with field work now involving more than mere collecting. Staff of the Australian Museum have conducted ecological, behavioural and physiological studies which reveal important information about the processes and factors leading to the existence of particular species in particular habitats. The knowledge gained, as well as the collections, have recently been frequently used in biological surveys and, activities of more doubtful value, environmental impact statements. Because such studies may be done on contract for a fee, some museums, including the Australian Museum, have jumped into them with both feet. The gain has sometimes been marginal—a

great deal of time spent in getting knowledge of little long-term consequence and a fee insufficient to cover the labour necessary to incorporate the vast number of specimens into the collections of the Museum. Despite this some people have maintained that museums should devote a significantly larger proportion of their resources to environmental surveys. It has become clear that our present skills in identification and knowledge of the evolution and distribution of our fauna is inadequate. There is an undeniable need for the Australian Museum to continue its statutory task of increasing understanding of the diversity of organisms and of improving its skills in identification. Such knowledge, which can only be accumulated through long-term studies, will contribute information to environmental planning. The Australian Museum (like other natural history museums) is in a special position to continue this work.

There is very little doubt that with increasing concern about the needs of *different* sections of the community the Australian Museum will have to be more active in catering for the diverse requirements of that community—people of different social attitudes, ethnic backgrounds and of different ages. The report *Museums in Australia 1975*⁵ has pointed out the extraordinary opportunities that museums have for education—all age groups can be educated in the one place. Unfortunately, the result of such a broad approach has been the satisfaction of few because the information and objects are pitched at some average level in terms of age and educational background. A more diverse approach is needed. If museums are to maintain the interest of most of the population they will have to do something for the local population as well as for those far away. The Museum's 'Drop-in-After-School' programme is an attempt to cater for the former, usually ignored by museums. These programmes, advertised locally, have involved children in a wide range of activities including casting fossils in plaster, modelling, making pots and reassembling broken ones as an archaeologist would, making string, carving masks in polyurethane foam, making shadow puppets, woodblock printing, finding animals in a vacant lot, carving soapstone and so on. Children and parents have been jointly responsible with Museum staff in evaluating the success of these activities: local children are finding that museums are neither forbidding nor boring and their parents are being convinced of the educational value of museums.

Although a survey of Canadian museums⁶ showed that people were prepared to travel long distances to visit museums, the fact remains that in the increasingly urbanised Australian situation a decreasing proportion of the community is visiting the centres of cities even as close as twenty kilometres away—people are looking to places nearer their homes. Preliminary surveys of the Australian Museum's 'public' supports this view. Activities such as the 'drop-in' programme, outer urban exhibitions and Museum Train may appear to be nothing more than flying the flag, and pursued solely for public relations purposes. They are not; they are based on the recognition that people in the community have different needs. Attempts to meet these various requirements will be a principal concern of the Australian Museum over the next few years.

It is already realised that *simply* looking after children in school classes is an inappropriate task for the Museum if for no other reason than, if attempted, about ten times the present staff and a transport system far more efficient than a city the size of Sydney could manage would be required. The only practical alternative to extraordinary increases in the number of teaching staff on the Museum's establishment is to involve teachers with museums during their training. Teachers bringing children to the Museum might then guide the children through the exhibitions instead of



Opening of the Geological Exhibition, August 1976. Left to right: John Evans (director, 1954-66), Desmond Griffin (director, 1976-), Frank Talbot (director, 1966-75).

going shopping or sitting in the park while the children race noisily through the galleries learning nothing.

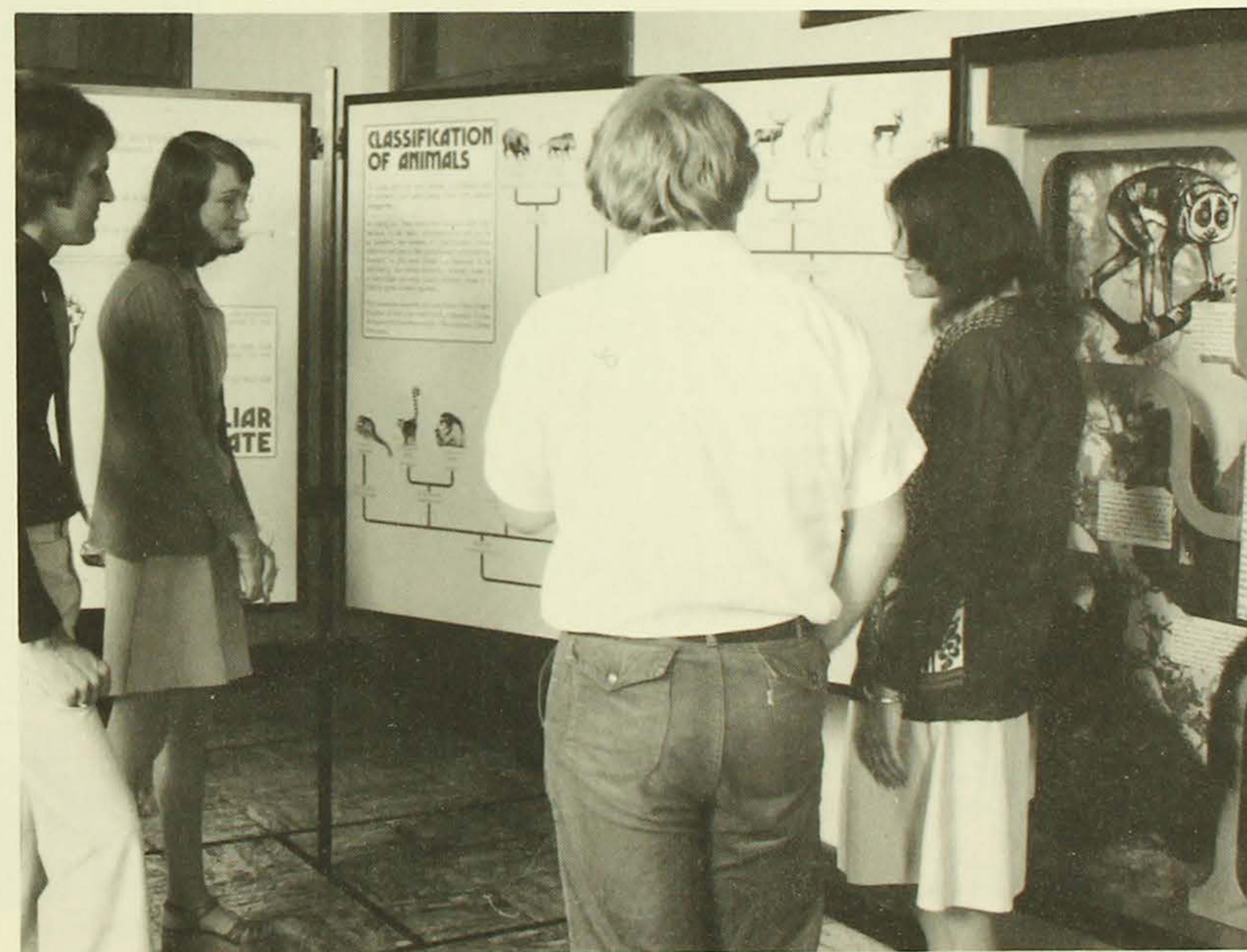
How do we judge whether a museum is succeeding in its activities? Usually, the basis of the judgement is the number of visitors: the most successful museum is obviously the one with the most visitors. To the extent that museum exhibitions simply entertain, such a criterion *may* be an indicator of success of the *public activities* of a museum. But the fact that public consumption of a product is significantly influenced by its presentation to the potential consumer through advertising and publicity is ignored by such a view. That view also bypasses the fact that weather plays a large part in determining numbers of visitors: museums are still places that one visits when it is raining. (The more rainy days a city has each year the more museum visits there are.) But this attitude (visitors = success) pays no attention to more important factors and leads to some very time-consuming and expensive approaches to success. Further, the public activities of a museum, even if successful, fulfil only *part* of the museum's responsibilities. The exhibition activities *cannot* be carried forward without the maintenance of collections and conduct of research, activities of fundamental importance to the museum's exhibitions programmes as well as of importance in their own right. Few museums have attempted to determine whether the visitors to their exhibitions have found what they came for—whether they have been entertained or educated. Schettel⁷, who has analysed the educational effectiveness of a number of exhibitions, finds that many casual viewers learn almost nothing from their experience. He makes the point that teaching exhibits must have explicitly stated objectives—specifically *what* does one want *whom* to do, know or feel *after* seeing the exhibit that they could not do, know or feel *before*. Sometimes, such questions are not asked. Teams of designers are brought in and asked to put up an exhibition for which the curator has given no brief. Perhaps as an alternative to evaluating educational value, museums have tended to incorporate electronic gimmickry—simple computers or audio-visual equipment—into their exhibits. In Schettel's view these devices are no better and no worse than other methods of interpretation—they are simply *different* methods. This is really a comment on how audio-visual equipment is sometimes used badly rather

than on the equipment itself; appropriately used, it can significantly enhance the visitor's experience.

The involvement of trained education staff within museums is a relatively recent practice. Perhaps through their efforts knowledge of the effectiveness of exhibitions will be improved. Exhibitions will certainly have to be more challenging than in the past; few people would want to see the same things that they learned about at school presented in almost the same way. Many museums now use different approaches. Exhibitions are more than just rows of insects or fish or birds or simple habitat groups (dioramas). Instead, animals are placed in their ecological context or looked at together from the point of view of some function—locomotion or vision or temperature regulation or water balance. In some museums glass cases no longer enclose all the exhibits: just as impassable trenches have replaced cages in some zoos, some museum exhibits are open, able to be touched, and so provide a feature of special interest particularly to the blind and to children.

In art museums, and increasingly in other museums, the race for visitors has taken the form of importing huge exhibitions of extraordinarily rare items such as paintings and artifacts from other countries. Enormous numbers of people queue for hours to see such exhibitions (and many are happy to do so!). Recently, when the Tutankhamen treasures were shown at the National Gallery in Washington DC, it took up to nine hours to get into the exhibition. In Roy Strong's⁸ terms, museums have become 'show business'.

'Man, A Peculiar Primate', the first of the Museum's travelling Outer Urban Exhibitions.



The Australian Museum Trust,
1977. Standing, left to right:
Professor D. J. Anderson, Mr K.
H. Cousins, Mr K. R. Rozzoli, Mr
J. S. Proud, D. J. G. Griffin
(director and secretary to the
trust).
Seated: Mr R. Richard (deputy
president), Mrs C. Serventy,
Professor M. G. Pitman
(president), Professor Leonie J.
Kramer, Dr J. T. Baker. (absent
— Emeritus Professor A. H.
Voisey).



Natural history museums face continuing problems in constructing exhibitions. To the extent that they require rather large numbers of people for their construction the costs of exhibitions can be expected to rise rapidly. The response of governments to high labour costs has been the imposition of severe limits on the number of people to be employed. In the Australian Museum, the number of staff engaged in design and construction of exhibitions was, until very recently, more appropriate to the old attitude that an exhibition once constructed was good for decades, even for the life of the building itself. The present number of staff is inadequate for a policy of limiting the life of semi-permanent exhibitions to less than ten years. The shorter life of each exhibition allows the Museum to set its message in a current context using new approaches and techniques and to display more of its collections; even an active policy of temporary exhibitions (with a life of one to three months), an approach which is significantly more expensive than semi-permanent exhibitions in terms of cost per visitor, does not give enough scope for bringing forward topical or different subjects and attitudes. Unless adequate recognition is given to these facts, museum displays will continue to be typical of old museums—out of date as well as dusty.

Lastly there are the problems of management. When museums were small the director was the sole technical expert—he (seldom she) made the public statement on a new fish or an important aspect of evolution. Running organisations of more than a hundred people requires skills of management that are not always rapidly acquired by persons trained as scientists or educationalists. The approaches required

are radically different from those that used to suffice. In the future much will depend on the way in which financial resources are handled. During recent tight economic circumstances there have been many suggestions on how a museum might cut costs: by ceasing the hiring of outside consultants; by disposing of temporary staff; or by closing some galleries. It is always easier to see how to reduce expenditure than it is to single out those few programmes likely to be outstanding successes and judge the level of support necessary. The successful museums are likely to be those that take the latter course—in Townsend's terms they will be the ones that focus on opportunities rather than on problems. If the Australian Museum succeeds it will still be in the face of a shortage of money, even if it increases its revenue by expansion of its selling activities, by obtaining funds from business, by licensing the production of replicas of the items in its collections, or just by getting more money from the government.

The Australian Museum will have to look more to the conservation of its collections and the use of the collections for research and education, perhaps relating acquisition policies more to the extent to which the collections are used and to the nature of the research carried out. Educational and exhibition programmes will have to be pursued more vigorously and with somewhat less regard to specific financial appropriations. More risks will have to be taken and better evaluation procedures need to be used to determine performance. The contribution by the Museum will have to exceed the sum of the individual contributions of each member of staff. This can only be achieved by co-operation, encouragement and pursuit of success for the Museum. It is fair to say that the continuance of the museum concept as we know it, in competition with 'Open Air Museums', 'Museums of Living History', 'Science Centres', and places that simply display objects, will depend upon museums continuing to demonstrate that they are worthwhile. The Australian Museum will have to demonstrate its capabilities in conducting research and maintaining collections more obviously in the face of increasing intrusions into similar fields by biological, anthropological and geological survey organisations, national parks services, fisheries departments and universities. There will need to be a greater degree of care by governments in preventing unwarranted increases in the number of the (inevitable) committees established grandly to co-ordinate and control. There are already encouraging signs that the bureaucracy is changing its role to one of supporting the achievement of results rather than adherence to out-of-date rules and regulations.

Public conceptions of and attitudes towards museums still pose problems: visiting museums is generally regarded as a somewhat minor leisure activity. This has led to the attitude on the part of the government that museums may be ranked low among the community's priorities. Yet more museums are formed. Universities still attempt to maintain collections (and in some cases they do so better than the larger and older state museums); other government agencies also build up collections. In 1977, several 'museums' have opened in Sydney: the Victoria Barracks Museum of military history, the Ampol museum of history (a display centre and public relations exercise) and the New South Wales Police Museum. The National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.) is expanding further into the museum field with collections of costumes and the building of an art gallery. Meanwhile older museums, with enormous potential but great problems, are relatively neglected. Perhaps some help might be forthcoming from the commercial sector which has already supported some art museum activities. In the face of explosive inflation and bureaucratic meddling, changing public attitudes and political perfidies, the Australian Museum will undoubtedly continue to exist: but at what level?

Left: Mrs Dawson, blind since birth, examines a wedge-tailed eagle in the Museum, 1977. Mrs Dawson visited the Museum as a young girl and is one of the children seen in the photograph on p. 70.





The Museum's retail shop in its second location at the southern end of the west wing, 1977.



Above: Formal dinner in the south wing to celebrate the sesquicentenary of the Museum.

In mid-1976 the Australian Museum Trust adopted a corporate plan for the Museum's development over the next ten years. Priorities for the first three years were clearly spelled out. Scientific and educational programmes were to be strengthened. More attention was to be paid to public relations; more space was to be sought in the form of a new building. Those activities that the Museum had been involved in for 150 years were reiterated and the goals that it had pursued were defined. Over the next ten months the Museum received publicity in the media about its new plans. To some people it appeared that the Museum had at last recognised its role and begun to make a contribution. Yet others thought that the Museum had lost sight of its important scientific role: a great deal of attention was being given to public activities such as travelling exhibits, education programmes for children. Others realised that the value of the Museum's contribution to the community's scientific and educational needs and cultural life had already been established and that now it was being recognised more widely.

In the planning for the sesquicentenary celebrations it was recognised that the occasion of the anniversary would present a unique opportunity for the Museum to convey to the community the value of its contribution and to obtain support from the commercial sector and from government; it was agreed that special attention should be paid to achieving support for a new building. On 25 March 1977 a major oil company agreed to sponsor the sesquicentenary activities.

On 28 March 1977 an editorial in *The Australian* stated 'the public taste has to be developed . . . The quality of a nation's culture is an indication of its individualism and its capacity to create and contribute.' On 30 March the Premier of New South Wales, Neville Wran, described the Australian Museum as 'a vigorous, living, imaginative, creative part of our continuing civilization and our growing, changing culture . . . an institution which serves the future by preserving the past'.

Below: Some Museum attendants, 1977. Front, left to right: D. Hodges, W. Wason (security supervisor), J. Lewis (chief attendant). Rear (in nineteenth century uniform which was worn by some attendants throughout 1977): S. Folke, K. Graham, M. Neligan.





The Arid Zone Gallery, opened 1977.



The sesquicentenary flag flies outside the oldest part of the building. Similar flags were flown for several months along Park and William streets, drawing public attention to the Museum's celebration.

Staff dinner to celebrate the sesquicentenary.

