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LION LIES DOWN WITH LAMB

Bizarre Effects at Dominion Museum

ONE of the amenities which New Zealanders—and more particularly Wellingtonians—have had to do without since the early stages of the Pacific war is the Dominion Museum. The armed forces needed space in the building for administrative work, and that made the building a defence area and therefore closed to the general public. It will still be some time before the Museum returns to normal, but *The Listener* was curious to see what it looked like while the effects of national emergency still remained, so we paid a visit the other day to the Director, Dr. W. R. B. Oliver.

The Director, like one of the war's displaced persons, was hard to find. We walked through a maze of closely stacked show-cases, peeped behind a curtain of scrim, and there he was, tucked away at his desk, in a corner. For nearly four years, he has had to use a make-shift office and every time he lifts his eyes he looks straight into the face of a huge sunfish. And if you know what an O.S. model in sunfish styles is like, you will sympathise with Dr. Oliver.

He explained to us that the Air Department, which is still using the ground floor of the Museum, had agreed to release the lecture hall and two of the rooms almost immediately; but there had been no announcement yet about the other occupied zones being liberated. And when that day comes, it will take the staff from six months to a year to get things back to normal.

With Dr. Oliver as guide, we walked round the building, and he pointed out exhibits which no member of the public has seen since June, 1942, when the offices, library and lecture-hall, work-rooms and carpenter's shop—almost all the ground floor space—were taken over.

Blast-proof Strong Room

"It was a pretty big shift," he said. "But we were given every assistance. The Army lent us 30 soldiers for a fortnight."

We asked if any exhibits of exceptional value were sent out of Wellington for extra security.

"No, everything was kept here," said the Director. "A lot of the material was moved to the upper galleries; but irreplaceable treasures, like Maori relics, ancient books and pictures, and documents of historical importance, were stored in the big strong-room. With concrete walls 12 inches thick, we thought it would be blast-proof if any enemy bombs came our way."

"You and your staff were entirely segregated from the forces?"

"Oh yes; their area was out of bounds to us."

"Was any damage done in moving the exhibits—all that glass in the show-cases and the delicate stands for mounting specimens?"

"Practically none, except to a very

little glass—and that was quite unavoidable. Some of our show-cases had to be sawn in half to get them through the doors. Others, with huge plate-glass windows, presented a problem, but someone had a brainwave. Scrim was put under them and they were slid along the linoleum."

Building Fully Protected

Every precaution was taken by the occupying forces to prevent any damage to the interior of the building. Dr. Oliver said. The marble pillars were covered with wall-board and fixed show-cases were protected with wooden screens. In the big hall, all electric bulbs and shades were removed so that the black-out would be effective.

Pre-war visitors would not recognise the Museum as it is to-day. Stuffed animals are curiously assorted. The lion lies down in perfect amity with the lamb. The Maori House is a store-room for a mass of tip-up seats from the lecture hall; one of the giant Maori war-canoes is a cradle for lighting apparatus, and alongside it lie Island spears in bundles, awaiting re-classification.

Scattered here and there, but still more or less in classified sections, are seals, flying-foxes, cormorants and owls. Birds, beasts and beetles, moths and mummies rest temporarily in unaccustomed beds. And carefully stored away are the series of study specimens which far outnumber the exhibits usually seen by the public.

Where Corals Lie

Bones of moas and specimens of coral lie on the floor, labelled and awaiting re-assembly. The family Ostreidae (shells to the layman) is billeted along with evacuated birds of paradise and age-old pieces of pottery; a Campbell Islands crab stretches out its pincers towards a spiny ant-eater.

One of the biggest tasks was storing books which, in the rush and bustle of wartime, were bundled up in convenient parcels and dumped in piles. These have been reclassified and arranged for return to their rightful places when the space is available.

There is something of a lesson to be learned from the timeless tranquillity of Neith (or Net), priestess of the Egyptian god, Khem. Her embalmed remains, quite untroubled by the EPS men and their feverish activity, have lain for a few more years in their case, sharing a corner, for the time being, with wooden water-pipes from 1810 London. Not far away a model of Captain Cook's Endeavour tacks merrily towards a sea of porcelain vases.

All through this period of upheaval, the Museum staff has carried on its work. Its members made corners for themselves where they continued their researches, their preparation and preservation of birds, beasts and fish. They now look forward (or do they) to the enormous task of replacing everything and once again presenting a fully-equipped and properly laid out Museum to students and the curious public.