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THE
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City and County Borough of Belfast

**Report of the Committee
of Belfast Museums and
Art Gallery**

For Year Ending 31st March 1952

BELFAST MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERY
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

APRIL 1951—MARCH 1952

To the Council of the City and County Borough of Belfast.

It is with pleasure that your Committee submit their annual report on the work done and progress made in the Museum and Art Gallery during the year ending 31st March, 1952.

Some changes in the personnel of the Committee have occurred since the last Report, Aldermen Robert Pierce, J.P. and Andrew Scott, J.P., and Councillors Herbert Jefferson, J.P., M.A., Ph.D. and John Williamson retiring to undertake service with other Committees. Councillors S. R. Bell, A. H. Duff, J.P., R. T. Hastings, J.P., and John Wilkinson replaced the retiring members.

From May until September the Festival of Britain played a prominent part in the life of the community, with Museums and Art Galleries throughout the country contributing their cultural quota. Calls were made upon our resources for Festival activities of many kinds. To the South Bank Exhibition in London the Committee lent the bicycle ridden by J. B. Dunlop, who invented the pneumatic tyre in Belfast; to the Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead, two oil paintings and a watercolour, all by P. Wilson Steer, O.M., and to the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, a pen and ink drawing of Chester Town Hall, by W. H. Lynn, of Belfast, who was architect of the building.

At home the Festival took several distinct forms—the Farm and Factory Exhibition at Castlereagh, the Northern Ireland Festival of the Arts, and the many provincial exhibitions organised by local bodies. To these the Museum and Art Gallery made its contribution, not the least part of which was by providing advice, information and practical aid.

To the Farm and Factory Exhibition specimens of textiles and pottery were lent for the main display, and to the Ulster Cottage many agricultural implements and transport items, together with interior furnishings.

The Festival of the Arts in Northern Ireland had been accepted by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (N.I.) as its responsibility, while certain cultural interests which lay outside the categories of Drama, Music and Art were organised by a special sub-Committee of the parent Festival body, under the chairmanship of the Countess of Antrim. Since your Director was a member of this sub-Committee as well as of both the Board and Standing Committee of C.E.M.A., and the Art Keeper was Chairman of the C.E.M.A. Art Committee, the Museum and Art Gallery was involved in the organisational work of the Festival of the Arts at all levels and in many fields.

The Libraries, Museums and Art Committee's own contribution was in the arrangement of the Loan Exhibition of the Paintings of Sir John Lavery, R.A., Belfast's most famous painter. For this, works were borrowed from the Imperial War Museum, the Glasgow Art Gallery, the Dublin Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, and the Queen's University,



Belfast ; also from the artist's grand-daughters and his former secretary, as well as from the Dowager Marchioness of Londonderry, D.B.E. The exhibition was open from 3rd May, until 30th June, 1951.

On the same day an exhibition of Ulster Books and Manuscripts was opened in the Art Gallery, this being another contribution sponsored by your Committee, and organised by the City Librarian on behalf of Lady Antrim's sub-Committee. For this the Museum and Art Gallery made available a series of portraits and topographical pictures, together with a number of display cases.

The simultaneous opening of these exhibitions on 3rd May provided occasion for the inauguration of the Northern Ireland Festival of the Arts, by The Rt. Hon. Dame Dehra Parker, D.B.E., M.P., President of C.E.M.A., before a representative company.

During the summer the Art Gallery also housed an exhibition of Contemporary Scottish Painting, and the Festival Exhibition of Contemporary Ulster Art, the latter enabling a wide and carefully selected range of local work to be seen by visitors during the July holiday period. Details regarding these will be found in the appropriate section, page 4.

To C.E.M.A. was lent a group of 24 oil paintings drawn from our main collections and not then on exhibition. These were shown in the Guildhall, Londonderry, from 28th June to 7th July, and proved something of an event in the artistic life of the Maiden City.

Insect models and other relevant material were lent at various times to the Belfast Public Health Department, to the Co. Down Health Authority and to the Fermanagh Health Exhibition ; while historical portraits and prints were lent to the local organising committee of the Hillsborough Exhibition.

At the conclusion of the Festival the model of the layout and buildings of the Castlereagh Farm and Factory Exhibition was presented to the Museum by the Ministry of Commerce (N.I.).

Notwithstanding distractions from routine caused by the Festival activities, steady progress was made in a layout of new exhibits, with their completion in time to serve as type examples of display during the Annual Conference of the Museums Association held in the City from 18th—22nd June, under the Presidency of Mr. S. D. Cleveland, Director of Manchester City Art Gallery. Among papers given was one by your Director on "The Museum and Art Gallery Movement in Northern Ireland," in which special reference was made to the display methods practised in Belfast. The subsequent publication of this paper in *The Museums Journal* was followed by individual papers connected with the exhibits, written by Messrs. J. H. Hewitt, C. D. Deane and G. B. Thompson, the respective Keepers in Art, Natural History and Antiquities. (*Frontispiece.*)

Almost 300 delegates attended the Museums Association Conference and were hospitably received by Government, City and University. Throughout, the Chairman of the Libraries, Museums and Art Committee (Councillor J. W. Lindsay, J.P.) and the Deputy Chairman (Councillor J. P. Tougher) took a prominent part in the proceedings.

A progress report of each Division is given by respective Keepers, see pages 5-8.