

Editorial

SHIFTING TERRAIN

Since the last issue of *Te Ara - Journal of Museums Aotearoa*, the sector has borne the loss of the leader of its flagship museum and an Auckland Museum pioneer. Seddon Bennington was preparing to take Te Papa in new directions, when the Tararua ranges claimed him. Trevor Baylis, who has died aged 95, broke new ground on two fronts, instituting the applied arts as a serious collecting field in New Zealand museums and raising the standards of exhibition display. Their contributions to the professional scene are acknowledged in this issue

New Zealand's political landscape has also changed, and the implications of the National Government's policies are yet to be fully understood. However, the Government has already signalled a serious review of local authority legislation. There is much talk of prioritising 'core services'. While libraries may be among the 'chosen', there may not be good news for museums. This could prompt us to reconsider both collectively as a sector, and individually as institutions, how we express and demonstrate the many-faceted dimensions of value which we contribute to our communities locally and regionally.

TOURISM'S TURN?

The change of government also marks the end of an unprecedented period when cultural heritage sector interests were represented at the highest level within Cabinet, with Labour Prime Minister Helen Clark holding the Arts, Culture and Heritage portfolio. The new Minister, Chris Finlayson, is juggling other responsibilities as Attorney-General and Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations, and, while personally interested in our field, has many competing demands for his time and advocacy. However, as Prime Minister, John Key has taken on the Tourism portfolio, it has been interesting to note the Ministry of Culture and Heritage's renewed focus on cultural tourism.

The Rugby World Cup, the landmark event of 2011, is already on the radar. Pitching to the International Rugby Board as a nation of four million spectators, New Zealand has committed itself to a six week-long festival with rugby matches spread throughout the country. Part of the rationale for government investment in this sports festival is the concentrated influx of, hopefully, high-spending supporters, but the spin-offs for tourism should continue beyond 2011. New Zealand's offerings will be exposed through media coverage, but also through the equally powerful endorsements of 'word-of-mouth' from visitors who have enjoyed, not just the rugby, but also the people, the scenery and the culture.

KEEPING OUR EYE ON THE BALL

Having seen middle-aged couples in the distinctive red tops of British Lions' rugby fans in both Auckland Museum and Auckland Art Gallery during the 2005 Rugby Tour, I can see that there are opportunities for our sector. Knowing the characteristics and expectations of visitors enables museums and galleries to devise successful exhibitions and develop excellent programmes, services and facilities. A recent informant managing a visitor attraction on the South Island – not a museum – said that they had wished they had known in advance that the followers of the 2005 British Lions' Tour were going to be so interested and sophisticated. They would have better prepared their front-line staff to serve the international rugby fans.

UNDERSTANDING OUR VISITORS

Rather than just gathering numbers of visits, it is important to take the time to find out what current visitors enjoy about our museums and where their expectations were not met, whether through more formal surveying or even just occasional chats. This will help us improve the experience for those already visiting. Few museums have the resources to undertake their own research to find out who is visiting (or not), but it is likely that the Government's preparatory work for the Rugby World Cup will provide us with insights into how rugby tourists will want to spend their time between games as they travel around the venues.

Through its annual surveys, Museums Aotearoa has been encouraging its members to assist in acquiring solid data to support its understanding of sector trends and issues, and to arm itself with sound information for more effective advocacy. Some of the less burdensome data to collect – and which most museums already monitor – relates to visitation. This is an area which, while it does not represent the whole scope of the activities and responsibilities of museums, features most regularly in assessing how museums are faring, and is readily understood by external stakeholders such as local councils. Given the lack of consistency in the methods museums use to collect this information, Museums Aotearoa is exploring ways to develop some practical means to facilitate data collection, which can help individual institutions and also be readily aggregated to build a nation-wide picture and identify national or regional trends.

STAYCATIONS AND NAYCATIONS

Initiatives such as Tourism New Zealand's the Great Kiwi Invite campaign, which encourages New Zealanders to invite their overseas relatives, may result in more VFRs (Visiting Friends and Relatives) for domestic tourism. These are the tourists whose hosts steer them towards local visitor attractions, even accompanying them – this represents a market for our museums to target. Another tourism trend which may have benefits for our sector relates to the impact on New Zealanders of the economic recession. People may, from choice or necessity, stay close to home, so museums and galleries may notice an increase in domestic visitors. Where people are forgoing holiday trips altogether, they may use their vacation time to explore their own locality and encounter the museums on their doorsteps for the first time. A good chance perhaps to show off our heritage collections to our own communities, build our local fan base and demonstrate museums' value?

- Jane Legget, Editor

This second on-line issue of Te Ara-Journal of Museums Aotearoa has had a slower gestation than anticipated, and we thank authors and readers for their patience. Special thanks are due to Ashley Remer whose multi-skilled expertise has ensured that the contents all came together as planned and Alexander Hayden who managed the electoral aspects.