

Much has been said concerning the role of museums in recent years, not least about their enormous educational potential. For children the experience of a museum visit can encourage the development of critical perception, and by presenting tangible evidence of the past enable them to form an acquaintance with previous generations and cultures in a way that the average textbook cannot hope to achieve.

While supervising a school party at Gladstone Pottery Museum, I was surprised to hear one ten year old (who had impressed me with her interest and enthusiasm) with the ingenuousness so attractive (and embarrassing!) in children, tell me bluntly that she hated history. Wondering whether this was a reflection upon my guided tour, I asked her if she had enjoyed walking around the Museum. 'Oh yes' was the reply, 'but that is *seeing* history, not *reading* history'. It is important that we as educators also realise this distinction. It is the emotional experience of a museum visit that leaves the most lasting impression on a child, and, properly nurtured, it can be utilised to the full back in the classroom.

For the fortunate minority this experience can develop as a natural process but for the majority of children there must be a catalyst or the museum visit risks degenerating into a meaningless day out. No matter how well displayed the museum exhibits, the effective mediator between child and resource is usually the teacher. If the teacher has neglected preliminary class preparation there is a danger of the children leaving the museum with a maze of visual impressions, the memory of which will become fragmented (rather like the memory of a dream) and with their cognitive faculties scarcely tapped. The corollary of this is sound initial preparation. Previous museum research has emphasised the need for closer co-operation between teaching and museum staff¹ as such a combination will result in the more effective use of museum resources.

With these thoughts in mind I conducted an empirical study at the Gladstone Pottery Museum which aimed at expanding existing knowledge of the teachers' concept of a museum visit. Is the visit viewed as purely recreational or as the focal point of relevant educational work? These were the questions that prompted the study.

Questionnaires were given to the teacher-in-charge supervising school parties and they were requested to complete the form and send it back to the Museum after their visit. The sample was selected at random, the qualification simply being whenever my other commitments allowed me time to be at the Museum. From March to August 1979 I received a total of 57 replies the contents of which I now propose to examine.

The questions asked were:

1. Did a member of your party meet a member of the Museum staff before your visit?
2. Did you have a guide?
3. Did you have an introductory talk?

Teachers and Museums: A study of teacher preparation and school visits to Gladstone Pottery Museum

4. Why did you visit the Museum? (please tick):
 - a. A day out
 - b. to complement relevant educational work
5. What preparation did the party do before the visit? (Please tick):
 - a. Discussion
 - b. Written work by pupils
 - c. Formal introduction by the teacher
 - d. Individual project work
 - e. Group project work
 - f. Other (please give details)
6. What subjects formed the basis of the work?
7. About how long was spent on preparation? (Please tick):
 - a. One lesson
 - b. Several lessons
8. Will the visit be followed by further work?
9. If yes, will this take the form of: (Please tick):
 - a. Discussion
 - b. Written work by pupils
 - c. Oral summary by the teacher
 - d. Individual project work
 - e. Group project work

10. If you lived locally would you feel it worthwhile to visit the Museum many times, seeing a little each time, rather than coming once and seeing everything?

11. Is a Museum primarily for the purpose of:

- a. Education
- b. Enjoyment
- c. Both

12. Has your party ever visited the Museum specifically to see a temporary exhibition?

Before a school party is brought to the Museum the organiser is sent a booking form which offers sensible advice on how to plan a visit. Among its recommendations is a preliminary visit (particularly for those living within a 25 mile radius of the site) to enable the teacher to familiarise himself/herself with the layout and possibilities of the site. The Centre Organiser will discuss arrangements with teachers taking this opportunity. No charge is made for a preliminary visit.

Understandably many of the organisers live too far away from the site to make this possible but the response of the local schools was particularly disappointing. (Although to give credit where credit is due many of the local schools who do come are regular visitors whose teachers are thoroughly acquainted with the layout and processes demonstrated at the Museum). 16 (28%) of the 57 organisers who responded had made a preliminary visit to the Museum to meet a member of staff specifically to plan for their proposed visit. Only 2 (3.5%) of these were local (defining local in this context as belonging to the Potteries and Newcastle-under-Lyme district), while 6 (10.5%) came from within the 25 mile radius defined by the Museum booking form as local. The eight (14%) other organisers had travelled from as far afield as Kenilworth, Sheffield, Sale, Alrewas, Colchester, Chester, Middlewich and Withensfield. These figures imply that it is not proximity of a site that is the deciding factor in encouraging a preliminary visit but motivation. The dedicated enthusiastic teacher is prepared to surmount all difficulties encountered to ensure the success of the visit.

Rather than make an initial visit to the Museum prior to the organised school tour, many teachers preferred to use the latter as a pilot visit, learning from problems encountered on this occasion when planning another visit. While acting in the capacity of guide for local schools I have had the opportunity to talk to teachers about their visit. Many regarded the extra time involved as an encroachment of school work on their private lives which they were not prepared to accept. Some preferred to encounter difficulties as a group, while others saw no need to acquaint themselves with the Museum before their visit.

40 (70%) school parties chose to have guided tours, while 9 (16%) preferred an introductory talk to set them on their way. It is significant that of a total of 57 parties only 8 (14%) chose to tour the Museum accompanied by either guide or talk.

These figures are significant because they imply that the majority of school organisers select a non-specific approach to the Museum.

The booking forms list four tours from which schools who require a guide are asked to select one itinerary. These are, The Basic Tour, a Social History of the Potteries, The Rise of the Staffordshire Potteries, and, Ways of Making and Decorating Pottery. Booking form information reveals that the majority of schools select a basic tour which substantiates the previous inference that teachers prefer a non-specific approach. These tours are not rigid but are intended to be flexible enough to accommodate the requirements of every visiting party. It is the policy of the guides to acquaint themselves with the requirements of the school before embarking on a tour. From my own experience I discovered that teachers requirements were very general and consisted usually of a request to leave the galleries until the end of the tour (and then only if time allowed). The distinction was between galleries and workshops rather than between specific aspects of the Museum such as child labour, Trade Unionism, etc.

Teachers were asked to give their reasons for requesting a guide. The three most popular were, that a new face stimulated interest; that the guides had a wealth of personal experience and an anecdotal approach which they themselves could not hope to equal; and, as the guides were familiar with the layout and contents of the Museum they could draw attention to particularly interesting exhibits and processes. As a guide I discovered that the majority of teachers were quite happy to relinquish their role as educators (although I do not equate this with the abandoning of responsibility of which only a minority are guilty) listening and watching with great interest and enthusiasm. On one occasion this enthusiasm resulted in one school party losing the clergyman who had accompanied them. He was discovered half an hour after the stipulated departure time engaged in animated conversation with one of the staff! The warrenlike layout of the Museum lends itself to incidents like this so organisers of school parties are particularly requested never to leave their charges unsupervised.

When asked if the organiser considered the purpose of the visit to be educational or recreational 47 (82.5%) selected the former, 6 (10.5%) believed the two were inextricable, while only 4 (7%) regarded the visit solely as a day out. The definition of educational proved to be extremely varied, my personal interpretation being that of a structured visit with specific directives. Many visits classified as educational by their organisers fell short of this expectation, the Museum experience itself being regarded as sufficiently educational not to warrant further interpretation.

The questionnaire information proved to be particularly instructive as regards insight into teaching methods and the timing of the Museum visit in relation to classwork. Figure 1 reproduces details of classwork prior to the visit.

Only one school had done no work at all. The most popular form of preparation proved to be class discussion with a formal introduction by the teacher. This could also involve some controlled written work but very little project work was undertaken at this stage. To their credit most teachers had spent several lessons on preparation although 19 (33%) of the schools had only spent one lesson (or less) introducing the visit.

After having seen the Museum the pattern of work altered (Figure 2) and written work came to the fore.

The teacher moved away from the dominant role with less schools having an oral summary than had an oral introduction. 9 (16%) schools intended doing no work at all which suggests that more schools viewed a Museum visit as the focal point of a section of school work rather than as an introduction to that work.

The pattern is that of teacher-initiated, teacher-directed work prior to the visit, with individual enterprise being encouraged after the visit. From this evidence we can conclude that teachers do consider a Museum visit to be an educational resource even though the nature of the work is essentially unspecific. A knowledge of patterns of preparation could be an advantage to museums

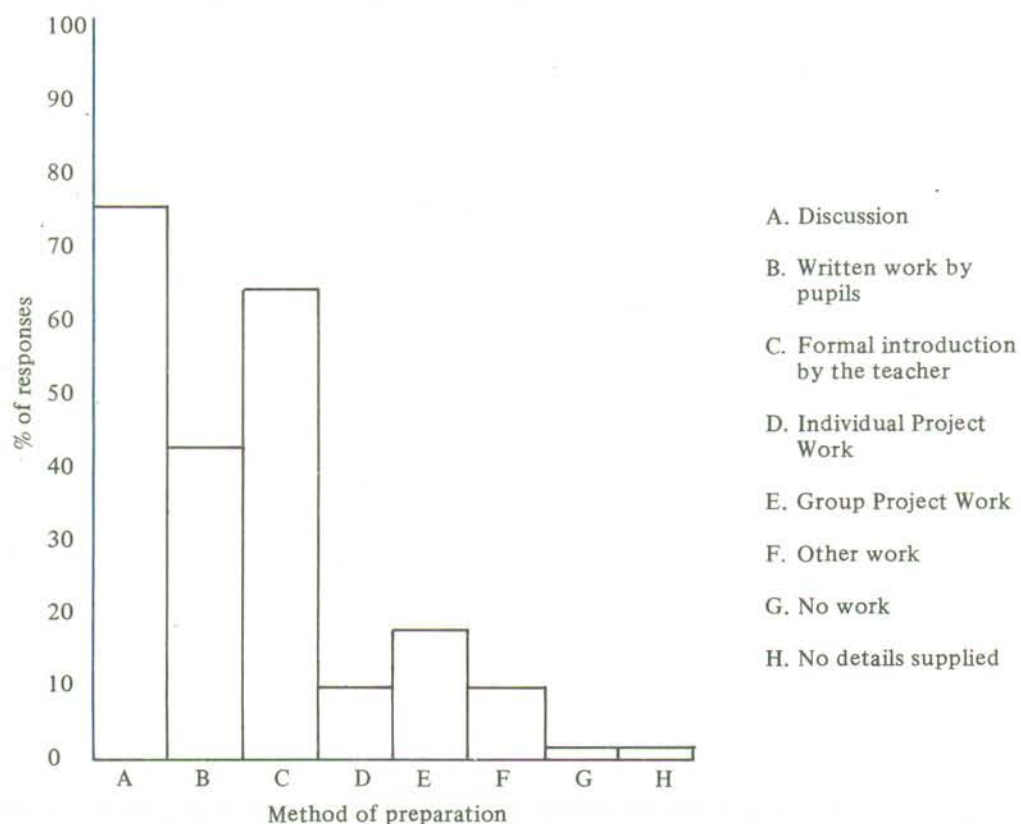
involved in the preparation of teaching material.

The questionnaires also afforded an opportunity to enumerate the subjects which had formed the basis of classroom preparation. These are detailed in Figure 3. The categories selected are not arbitrary but were compiled on the basis of booking form information at the Museum (1975-1978).

History proved to be the most popular subject, with environmental studies and pottery coming a close second. The two least popular were science (which included applied science) and industrial archaeology. These figures correlate with my research into booking form information at the Museum. The popular assumption is that Gladstone Pottery Museum attracts schools with an interest in pottery. While this is certainly true the nature of the site (housed in a nineteenth century potbank)² also serves to encourage schools whose principal interest is social history. When producing teaching material it is a definite advantage to have some indication of consumer demand. Gladstone Pottery Museum is currently attempting to appeal to all interests by providing and encouraging the use of social history teaching material in the schools.³

41 (72%) of the teachers who completed the questionnaire indicated that if they lived locally they would prefer to visit the Museum several times

Figure 1: Preparation for a Museum Visit



concentrating on one particular aspect each time instead of seeing the entire complex in one visit. In fact very few schools actually take advantage of this facility (these tickets cost 50p per child whereas entrance fees for one visit are 45p per child.⁴ They therefore offer extremely good value). I witnessed a visit of this kind by a local E.S.N. school who saw a different workshop each week. The approach and the subsequent results were excellent, the co-operation between teacher and Centre Organiser had a beneficial influence that was apparent in the work of the children.

Every teacher believed that a Museum visit should combine education and enjoyment. No school party had ever been prompted to visit specifically to see a temporary exhibition which indicated that it was the Museum in general that formed the main attraction. Gladstone Pottery Museum has an exhibition on Trade Unionism in the Potteries (Brother Potters) which could have provided an interesting approach to the rest of the Museum. As the staff is presently planning a social history gallery it would be a useful experiment to encourage teachers to approach the Museum from a different angle.

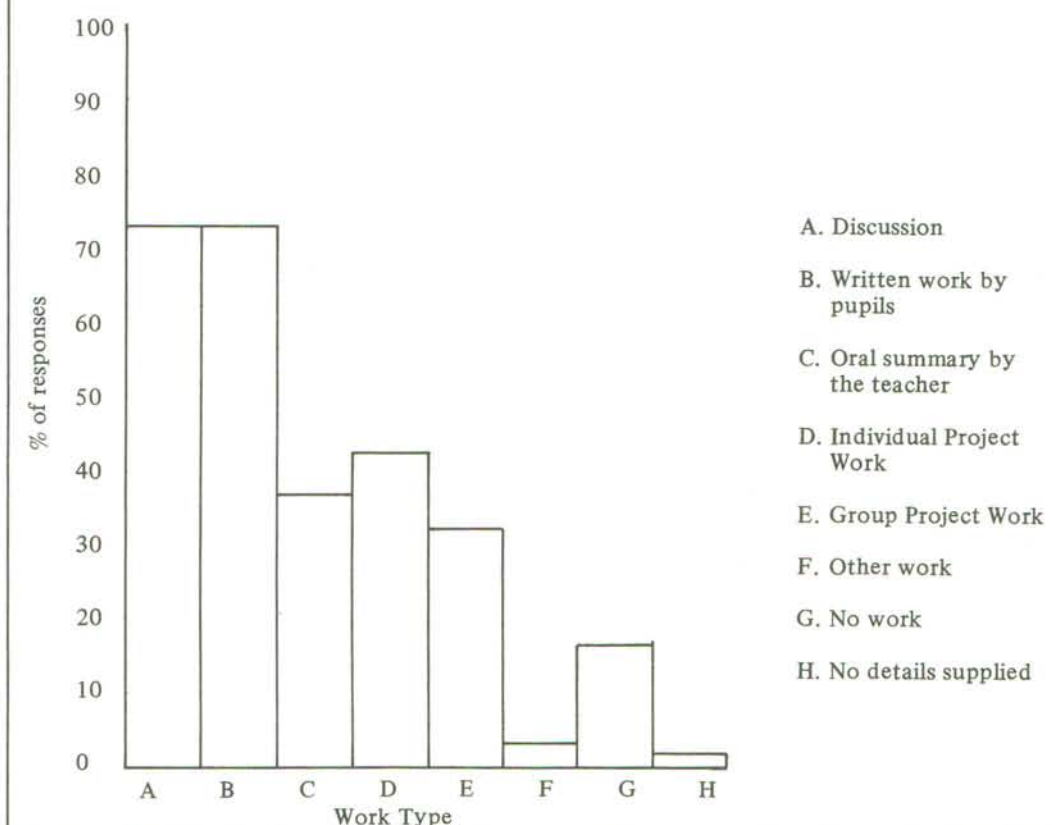
During the course of this survey I became concerned about the paucity of visits from

local schools, particularly in the Potteries and Newcastle-under-Lyme area. One explanation of this was given by a visiting teacher who had been employed in Wolverhampton before accepting his present appointment in a Stoke-on-Trent school. Fired with enthusiasm he had attempted to establish pottery lessons in a school whose catchment area included a number of potbanks. Parents, whose livelihood was the pottery industry, complained that they sent their children to school to be educated, not to learn a trade!

In order to investigate this further I posted 50 questionnaires to local schools (selected at random from an education directory) which were addressed to the headmaster. 26 (52%) questionnaires were completed and returned. The questions included requests for details of visits to local and non-local museums within the last two years and invited comments on the educational potential and facilities of local museums.

Of the 26 replies, 19 (73%) schools had visited Gladstone Pottery Museum, 19 (73%) had visited other local museums, and only 2 (8%) had not visited any local museum. 16 (61.5%) of these schools had also 'made visits to museums outside the area'. (Ironbridge proved to be the most popular

Figure 2: Classwork after a Museum Visit



but other museums listed were the London Science Museum; York Museums; Crich Tramway Museum; Sudbury Hall; Tower of London; Styal Mill; Salford Industrial Museum; Buxton Museum; Sheffield Museum; Imperial War Museum; Acton Scott Working Farm Museum; Birmingham Museum of Science and Industry; Manchester Museum (Egyptian antiquities); Warwick Castle and the Shakespeare Trust, Stratford). These replies are encouraging as they reveal a definite interest in the use of museums in connection with school work, and are representative of a wide range of interests. Although the Gladstone Pottery Museum attracted a high percentage of visits, response to the resources of local museums was disappointing. Local museum visits, like those of more distant museums, were classified as an opportunity for a day out that would enliven an existing school project rather than a natural extension of that work.

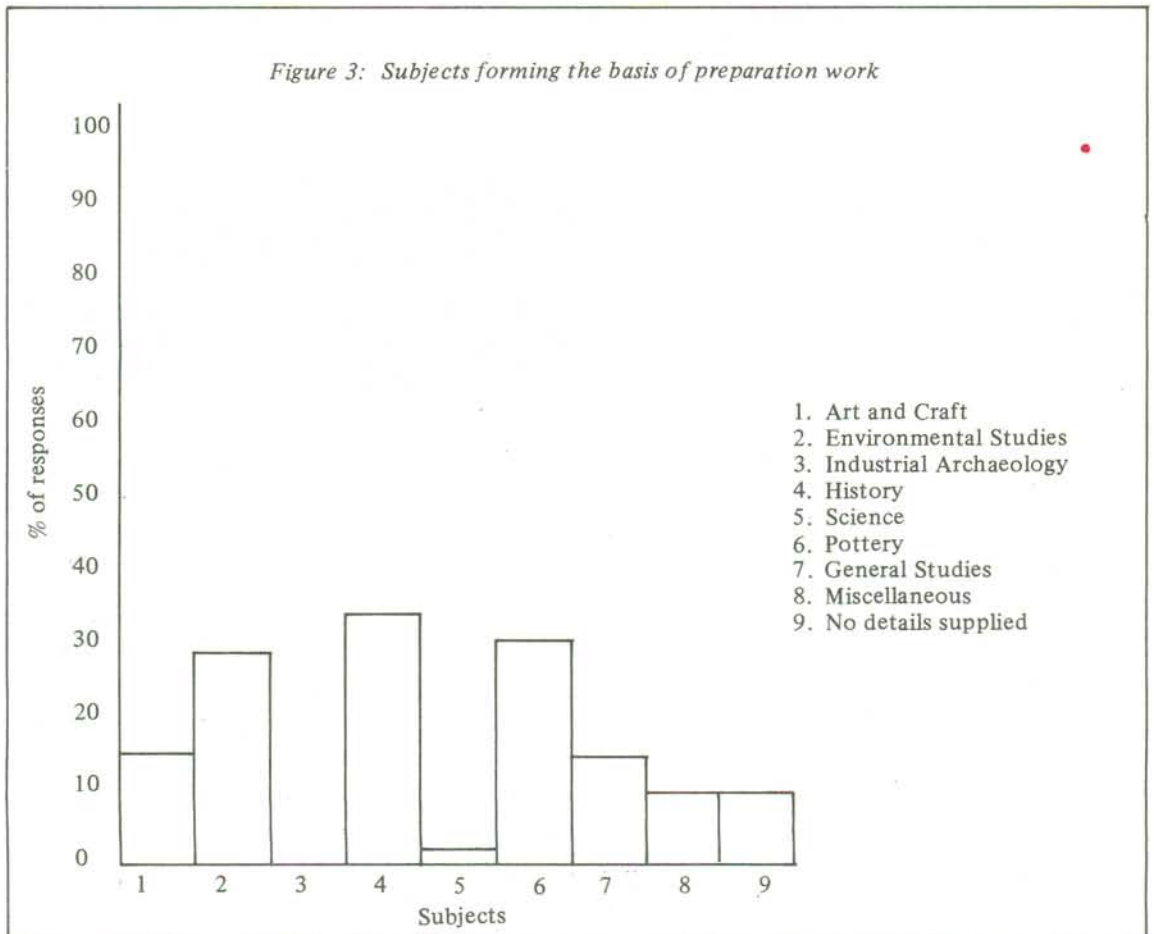
Schools were asked to explain why they did not take advantage of local museum facilities. Reasons which occurred most frequently were difficulties of timetabling and financial considerations; a situation which the education cuts are likely to aggravate. Other reasons cited were, ignorance of the facilities offered by some of the museums listed; insufficient

staff to allow for adequate supervision of educational visits; the attraction of stately homes whose approach is more commercialised; transport problems; irrelevance of local museums to the content of school curriculum; and the limited potential of local sites.

Comments were also invited on education services of local museums. Schools which pleaded ignorance of museum facilities suggested better publicity. There were complaints of poor discounts to school parties; lack of contact with local schools; a paucity of worksheets and suggestions for school activities; and lack of emphasis on social history as well as the history of pottery.

Local museums publicise their facilities as well as limited finances will allow but it was apparent that it was not always reaching its destination. To remedy this I would suggest the establishment of an information service possibly based at the teachers' centres or central museums that would collect information on museums (theme, educational facilities, etc.) as well as offering advice on the practicalities of a school visit (transport, teacher:pupil ratios, insurance, etc.). It is my belief that a centre like this would certainly be useful although that is not to imply that it would

Figure 3: Subjects forming the basis of preparation work



be in constant demand. It would be interesting to evaluate the response to such a facility.

To encourage schools to make more use of their local museums I would recommend establishing small exhibitions in schools. In addition to information on educational facilities, examples of work completed by children who have already visited the museum could be included to stimulate ideas. Museums already organise teachers' courses but these appeal to the motivated teacher who is prepared to make the effort to go to the museum. Somehow we must appeal to teachers in their own environment – in the schools.

It would be of great value if museum education staff could go into schools to acquaint teaching staff with the educational potential and facilities of their museum. Unfortunately inadequate staffing and finance prevents this approach at the present time. I can only conclude that although teachers are using museums in conjunction with school work the museum environment is still a vastly under-used educational resource whose potential many teachers have not yet realised.

References

1. *Pterodactyls and Old Lace* (Museums in education). Evans/Methuen Educational, 1972.
Museums in Education, Department of Education and Science, Survey 12, London, H.M.S.O., 1971.
2. 'Potbank' is the local term for a pottery factory.
3. A booklet has just been produced in conjunction with the Museum on *Education and the Pottery Industry in the Nineteenth Century* which approaches the Museum from a different angle.
4. Prices correct at the time of going to press.

PUBLISHERS ANNOUNCEMENT

The price of *Studies in Design Education Craft and Technology* was last raised in mid 1976. Since then every other publication, large and small, has increased in price often frequently and substantially. The enthusiastic support of our readers leading to increased circulation and advertising has allowed us to maintain our price. Alas, three annual increases in postage and more frequent rises in printing costs make a modest rise from £2.50 to £3.00 inevitable.

As readers will see from the order form, we are still maintaining a reduction for Banker's Order payments. We hope you will understand and accept the situation.