

Two hundred new cities were built between 1926 and 1939, in conformity with the changing character and distribution of the population and the development of the country's eastern areas. Yet, despite all this progress, it proved impossible to bridge the gap between population growth and housing; housing construction lagged behind the rate of industrialization, and the urban population increased at an exceptionally rapid rate. Further, much of the pre-revolutionary housing proved to be beyond repair and had to be scrapped, thus slowing down the net growth of the total housing fund.

The war-time destruction of housing amounting to some 30 per cent of the total amount of urban housing, and the extensive and frequently complete destruction of rural housing proved a serious setback. The over-fulfilment of the total urban housing programme of the post-war Five-Year Plan has, however, more than offset the tremendous losses and led to a far-reaching, even revolutionary, modernization of the building industry (especially in the application of express and even-flow methods of erecting houses), which should make it possible to step up housing construction in subsequent five-year plans to a marked extent. The pace of the country's house-building has been appreciably increased by the financial and material assistance accorded to individual house-building by the authorities.

In the present stringent housing situation, the Government has controlled the distribution of available housing resources, taking into consideration the priority claims of ex-servicemen, the dependants of war casualties and invalids, the partisans and their families. The relationship between work (type, quantity and quality) and the allocation of limited housing resources, already recognized before the War, has now been further strengthened; it is possible to ensure that the housing requirements of such key workers as the miners are promptly met. Special housing facilities also are provided to meet the needs of workers who settle in newly developed regions. Housing is thus regarded as one of the instruments for increasing the productivity of labour and building up permanent staffs in industry.

## MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION

### ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN OXFORD

THE fifty-eighth conference of the Museums Association was held at Oxford during July 21-25 under the presidency of Mr. S. D. Cleveland, director of the City Art Gallery, Manchester, and was attended by more than three hundred and fifty delegates from both national and provincial museums. This was the third occasion on which the Association has visited Oxford, the previous time being in 1919.

In his presidential address, on "The Inevitability of Museums", Mr. Cleveland stated that it is necessary to correct a prevailing misconception by which museums are regarded as educational institutions only. It is true, he said, that education must be an integral part of their work; but it should take its place with the other functions of collection, conservation, interpretation, research and service to the community.

Dr. H. J. Plenderleith, keeper of the Research Laboratory at the British Museum, in a paper on "Fakes and Forgeries", described his subject as a very

human study in which the man of science can help the scholar. In fact, the intimate co-operation of these two is essential, and there must be complete sympathy with each other's aims and methods. He enumerated some of the physical and chemical methods used at the British Museum, and spoke of the difficulties encountered when it is necessary to form an opinion without even marking the object.

Sir Philip Hendy, director of the National Gallery, stressed that the primary function of museums and art galleries is to be a Temple of the Muses and that no secondary function should be allowed in any way to interfere. Museums are guardians of a high standard of quality. He spoke in favour of the production of good reproductions of first-class paintings and pleaded for a more liberal interpretation of the function of art galleries.

In a session of a rather more domestic nature, the story of museums in Oxford was told by the five directors concerned. In all the papers, and in the subsequent discussion, it was apparent that the pendulum is swinging once again with regard to the amount of material that should be displayed in museums. From showing everything, the general tendency a few years ago was to show almost nothing. Now a compromise has been made, and it is realized that the arrangement as seen in the windows of the departmental stores is not the ideal prototype for museum cases. The apathy of the University of Oxford towards its museums was commented upon by several speakers, and the hope expressed that one result of the conference on the part of the University would be an increased interest in the value of its great collections. The hope was also expressed that the City of Oxford would consider the establishment of a museum to illustrate its own history.

Speaking on "Changing Fashions in Museum Teaching", Mr. Peter Floud, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, emphasized the value of making use of the galleries in addition to the children's rooms which are now established in so many museums. There is a distinct danger that museum work may become simply an extra-mural function of the school. He also dealt with the three-dimensional didactic displays which produce indirect museum teaching, and illustrated his remarks with actual examples of exhibition work. Dr. C. H. V. Sutherland, of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, said that there is a real public interest in numismatics and that museums should make every effort to satisfy this. He agreed that there are few trained numismatists in Great Britain, and stated that a British association of the various numismatic societies would probably be formed in the near future. He hoped that the Museums Association would co-operate in this matter. Mr. J. W. Y. Higgs, of the Museum of English Life, Reading, described this new museum of English rural life and stated how, as a nation, England is deeply conscious of its rural history.

At the annual general meeting of the Association, held during the conference, a protest was made against the cuts in Treasury grants to national museums and art galleries. The Association decided to send to the Chancellor of the Exchequer a resolution deploring the cuts as "gravely endangering the safety of the national treasures and curtailing the educational, æsthetic and scientific facilities provided".

Dr. F. J. North, of the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, was elected president for the Conference in 1953, which will be held in York during June 22-26.