DSPACE

https://dspace.org/

Editorial

1953

Bernard Price Institute for Palaeontological Research

http://hdl.handle.net10539/14662

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

EDITORIAL

This is the first number of a new publication devoted to palaeontological work which, with the approval of the Council of the University of the Witwatersrand, will be produced by the Bernard Price Institute for Palaeontological Research. It is appropriate to place on record some of the salient points in the history of this Institute and to pay tribute to the generosity and sympathy for scientific research displayed by its founder, the late Dr. Bernard Price.

After attending a lecture by the late Dr. R. Broom in June, 1944, Dr. Price had discussions with Broom and the late Dr. Van der Horst — then Professor of Zoology in the University — regarding ways and means of "putting the collection of fossils on a proper organised basis." Professors R. A. Dart, T. W. Gevers, and C. van Riet Lowe collaborated with Broom and Van der Horst in preparing a memorandum on the subject, and proposed the employment of a collector "to salvage and store valuable material that would otherwise be lost" as a first step, with ultimate adequate provision for the study of such material by competent scientists and the adequate exhibition of the specimens publicly "in a proper museum."

This memorandum was submitted to Dr. Price, and officially endorsed by the Principal of the University in April 1945. The Principal pointed out that, although the proposal was initially a modest one, he felt confident that the endeavour might ultimately grow into an Institute of Palaeontological Research that would be of great benefit to the University and would lead to important results in the advancement of knowledge.

On receipt of the Principal's letter, Dr. Price agreed to donate to the University a sum of £2,000 as a separate fund for the purpose envisaged in the memorandum, which sum he estimated would be sufficient to cover expenses for the first two years of operation, and stated that his further support would be dependent on his estimation of the results shown during the trial period of two years. He stipulated that the work should be controlled by a Committee consisting of the signatories of the 1944 Memorandum, who would submit periodic reports in order to keep him in touch with the work and its results. Professor van der Horst became the first Chairman of the Committee of Control.

Late in 1945, on his discharge from the South African Armed Forces, Mr. James Kitching was appointed to a post of Technical Assistant and immediately began to collect fossil reptiles for the Institute from the Karroo beds, a task for which he, and his two brothers, had already displayed a remarkable aptitude and enthusiasm. At the same time, the Committee subvented collecting work at Makapan by a student at the University (now Dr. P. V. Tobias) and a colleague on condition that the material obtained was added to the Committee's collection.

To house the collections and to enable them to be properly prepared, a

large ex-military hutment was made available to the Committee by the University at the end of 1945. A year later (towards the end of 1946) Dr. Price, who had visited the Makapan Caves, announced to the Committee that he would finance the continuation of the work and would double his donation, making it £2,000 per annum, in order to provide for systematic exploration of the Cave of Hearths at Makapan. The University Senate recommended, and the University Council approved, that the project be given a more permanent character by naming it "The Bernard Price Foundation for Palaeontological Research" and that its administration be placed in the hands of a joint committee of Council and Senate, including Dr. Price. The Committee was therefore constituted of Professors van der Horst (Chairman), Dart, Gevers, Shaw, and van Riet Lowe, Dr. Broom (all nominated by Senate), Dr. Bernard Price, Dr. Raikes (ex officio) and Mr. F. G. Hill (all nominated by Council). In October, 1947, Dr. S. H. Haughton was added to the Committee by the University Council.

From the time of his appointment to the death of Dr. Price in July, 1948, Mr. Kitching spent in all 28 months collecting in the field, half of them in the Karroo and half in the Makapan Valley area. For a year or more, his brothers B. J. and S. C. Kitching were also employed as collectors. A very considerable amount of material was thereby accumulated, some of which would otherwise have been lost. Preparation of the material was carried on as fast as circumstances permitted, and a number of descriptive papers were published in various scientific periodicals.

The death of Dr. Price revealed that he had willed a share of his estate as a bequest to the Foundation, a share which amounted to £49,200. In accordance with a request contained in his will, the University Council resolved to reconstitute the Foundation as "The Bernard Price Institute for Palaeontological Research" and to place the control of this Institute in the hands of a Board which should function as a Committee of the University Council. The Board was formed of the members of the previous Committee, with Mr. B. W. Price (Dr. Price's son) added in place of his late father. The Board was formally constituted on February 25th, 1949.

In the latter half of 1949, the Board appointed Dr. A. S. Brink to an approved permanent post of Research Officer in Palaeontology and Mr. J. W. Kitching to an approved permanent post of Grade I Laboratory Technician. Mr. M. J. Toerien occupied temporarily a post of Research Assistant. In order that the scientific work of the Institute should be properly supervised the Board appointed Professor van der Horst as Honorary Director in February, 1951, in addition to his position as the Board's Chairman.

Professor van der Horst, however, died on October 10th of that year. His advice and counsel had been largely responsible for the beginning of Dr. Price's donations to palaeontological studies, and his wise guidance of the operations of the early collecting expeditions subsidised by Dr. Price was undoubtedly one of the major factors which led to the generous bequest on which the Institute was founded.

The University Council requested Professor Gevers to assume temporarily the posts rendered vacant by Professor van der Horst's untimely death; but, at his request, Council subsequently appointed him as Chairman of the Board

and made Dr. S. H. Haughton Honorary Scientific Director of the Institute.

The acquisition of palaeontological material, both by institutional collecting and by exchange, proceeded so rapidly that the accommodation originally allotted became far too small. Towards the end of 1952, therefore, the University made available two large hutments which had formed part of the School of Dentistry. One of these has become primarily an exhibition hall, with subsidiary office accommodation; the other is a store and preparation building.

In another section of this volume will be found a list of papers that have been published on material belonging to the Institute. It will be seen that these have been distributed among a number of scientific periodicals, whose producers have, by the very fact of publication, subvented in part the work of the Institute. Deeming that publication of research work carried out on its material is an essential part of the contribution that the Institute has to make to the advancement of palaeontological knowledge, the Board decided to combine papers concerning Institute material into a periodic publication of its own, to be known as "Palaeontologia Africana." The present is the first issue of this periodical.