

Brilliant decade

1896-1906

This was a decade of brilliance unparalleled in the history of the South African Museum when it was the leading scientific institution in the country and when nearly every aspect of the modern Museum received the form in which it exists today. It was directed during this period by:

William Lutley Sclater M.A.	Director (1896-1906)
Louis Albert Péringuey	Assistant Director (1896-1906)

Trimen resigned at the end of 1895. During his previous absences Péringuey had acted as Curator quite adequately, despite his pre-occupation with *Phylloxera*. Lightfoot was a useful standby who could be relied upon to give excellent service in the office as well as in the field and laboratory. It would not therefore have been surprising if Péringuey had been appointed in Trimen's place, and there is some evidence to suggest that this was what was expected. Nevertheless the post was ordered to be advertised in Britain on 8 August 1895 even before Trimen's resignation became effective.

The Minute states that candidates for the post of Director were to have general museum experience with preference to those having special qualifications in Zoology. And here let it be noted that the principal officer was upgraded from 'Curator' to 'Director'. The advertisement seems to have been confined to Great Britain, for a London Committee was set up consisting of Sir William Flower, (Director, British Museum, Natural History), Professor Michael Foster (Cambridge), Professor Burdon Sanderson (Oxford) and Dr John Murray (Edinburgh), who were to shortlist candidates for the Trustees' consideration. Salary offered was to be £600 plus £100 house allowance.

The Trustees demanded a director from overseas. Both Gill and Muir had come from Britain, and would seem to have thought that there was no alternative but to have a British scientist. At this time South African science had scarcely started; and Dr Louis Leipoldt, who knew the Museum in the 'nineties, says that the only South African scientists who had received a thorough academic training at that time were Dr Hahn and Dr W.F. Purcell. In the same essay he speaks of

William Lutley Sclater,
Director of the South
African Museum,
1896-1906

