THE increasing interest now being shown in the possi-
bility of forming a national museum of aviation raises in
one’s mind the question as to whether we have museums at
all. There are various reasons why people go in for private
collections, but there is really only one essential reason for a
national collection, and that lies in its educational value.
Apart from the sentiment attached to historic relics, and the
privileage of owning unique national equipment on view
among the various fields of science, the greatest value in
preserving them lies in the education of future generations.

One suggestion put forward was that aviation and other means
of transportation should all be kept together. This would certainly
make a most useful exhibition from the educational point of
view, since it would enable all forms of transportation to be grouped
in chronological order. But for such a scheme a vast amount of
covered space, a system of heating and a number of experienced
machinists would be required. Any attempt to house a collection of
this kind without adequate protection against weather would merely result in the museum rapidly assuming the appearance of a scrap merchant’s yard, than one who has tried to keep a piece of machinery for sentimental reasons, whether it be a car or a bicycle, or an aeroplane, knows only too well how quickly metal rusts, wood gets wormy, fibres, cracks and paint peels off everything indiscriminately. If all historical forms of land transportation—bicycles, carriages, cars, locomotives and aeroplanes—were to be included the provision of suitable accommodation would indeed be a major undertaking.

There already exists the Science Museum, which houses the really epoch-making inventions. But there are many small collections of the individual forms already in existence—we are concerned here only with the forma-
tions of transportation. The need for aviation seems to be the most urgent single issue at present, and the idea has the advantage of being more moderate in its space requirements.

The Problem of Selection

But what should go into such a collection? With the ever-
present premium on museum space, and the knowledge of why
we form museums at all, we are given some direction as to what
should be preserved and what can be omitted. Clearly we must
preserve the various "milestones" in the evolution of aviation. Examples are the Wright biplane, the Blériot monoplane and the
Gloster-Whittle; but these are of such major importance that
they justify inclusion in the main Science Museum. We still have
the needs of individuals who want to know much more about
these important machines as have definite historical value; and in future plans it is intended to collect (or reconstruct if necessary) only aeroplanes within this category. The main emphasis has always been on aeroplanes which were built before 1918 and meticulous care has been taken to keep them exactly as they were, however attractive a modern modification might be. There are others in the Collection which justifies preservation and of which few, if any, are being
preserved. In this category, for instance, come an early Moth and a Shuttleworth, with a suitable site, weighing-up the relative merits of an expensive site
and making it available for public view at more frequent and
more regular times than those at present offering on the occasions of
aeromilitary gatherings and aviation displays. From the financial
regular times than those at present offering on the occasions of
aeronautical gatherings and aviation displays. From the financial
point of view the Trust has roughly balanced the "veteran account" by charging for displays, by having a large amount of
assistance freely given (particularly by pilots) and, not least, by
generous assistance from some aircraft firms who appreciate the
value of the work it does.

The intention is to carry on and expand the activities to cover the essential field of education, so far as is possible with the
limited resources. Aeroplanes have frequently been offered, but
the Trust have had to restrict the Collection strictly to such
machines as have definite historical value; and in future plans it is intended to collect (or reconstruct if necessary) only aeroplanes within this category. The main emphasis has always been on aeroplanes which were built before 1918 and meticulous care has been taken to keep them exactly as they were, however attractive a modern modification might be. There are others in the Collection which justifies preservation and of which few, if any, are being
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A NATIONAL MUSEUM of AIRCRAFT?

By A. Cdre. A. H. WHEELER, O.B.E.

NOBODY disputes the need for a move by some responsible
organization to ensure that notable aircraft are preserved for posterity,
or that the necessity is becoming increasingly urgent as time passes
and more of them automatically come into the "historic" category, yet
nobody finds their way to thematic exhibits, although the value
might be tackled is another matter, especially as a number of compli-
cating factors—financial considerations among them—are involved.
These aspects are discussed by the author; he is well qualified to do
so by reason of his association with the Shuttleworth Collection, whose
veteran aircraf.t is the centrepiece of a British Aviation Collection
On Friday July 20th, 1950, he wrote on display-flying the Sopwith Pup.